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**Humanity, Hybridism and Liminality in  
Tommaso Landolfi  
(1939-1950)**

**by**

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Finally, I am especially grateful to my father, who watches over me and is with me at every step; and to my mother, my unquestionable role model – and the most voracious reader I have ever met.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. Parts of the materials in Chapter 3 were presented at various academic conferences and reworked into an article entitled 'Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno*: A Gothic Counter-Narrative of the Italian Civil War', which is currently under review with *Italian Culture*.

## Abstract

This thesis analyzes the three texts forming the so-called ‘Fantastic trilogy’ by Tommaso Landolfi: *La pietra lunare* (1939), *Racconto d'autunno* (1947) and *Cancroregina* (1950), in the light of the cultural and historical environment in which they were produced. I argue that these novellas incorporate and obliquely problematize specific tensions of the period running from Racial Laws (1938) and the Pact of Steel (1939) to post-war reconstruction. Building on recent scholarship on the subversive role of the Fantastic, the study provides a more comprehensive view of Landolfi’s early production and challenges accepted views on his Fantastic as exclusively ironical, intellectual and free-play.

This thesis also investigates the sources through which Landolfi delineates this oblique form of socio-political critique. Whereas scholarship in the past has widely recognized that Landolfi draws inspiration from nineteenth-century French, Russian and German classics in the genre of Gothic and Fantastic fiction, this contribution draws attention to the way Landolfi negotiates this traditional repertoire through input from both Italy’s ‘high’ literary tradition (Dante, Leopardi, Manzoni, D’Annunzio), Italian folklore and other non-literary sources (i.e. occultism and psychiatry).

This thesis considers Landolfi’s work from fresh angles, applying recent Anglophone theoretical frameworks (including theories on post-humanism, on the subversive role of the Fantastic and political readings of Gothic fiction) to his writing and probing his portrayals of dynamics and tensions that continue to challenge us today. Additionally, it makes use of the anthropological notion of ‘liminality’ to underline the intrinsic thematic, textual and narrative ambiguity of the three novellas. I claim that the texts’ liminality – involving slippery entities, settings, situations and narrative modalities that do not fit any precise category – voices the cultural and political instability of the decade under analysis.

The study makes a deeper, and more nuanced, contribution to the literature on Landolfi, reflecting upon the author’s strategies for problematizing contemporary historical and cultural issues by means of a fiction only apparently detached from reality.

## Introduction

The literary production of Tommaso Landolfi (1908-1979) – not only a writer, but also a translator and literary critic, whose activity stretched from the 1930s to the 1970s – has, since the late 1970s, increasingly attracted scholarly attention. This critical appreciation coincided with the beginning of the debate on the Italian Fantastic, a genre of which he is normally seen as one of the most paradigmatic writers.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Landolfi has scarcely enjoyed the fame of other canonized twentieth-century ‘Fantastic’ authors such as Dino Buzzati or Italo Calvino. Scholarship, in the past, tended to explain his lack of popularity to the greater public with his alleged inaccessibility as a writer. For instance, Guglielmo Petroni asserts: ‘Le immagini di Landolfi sono l’involucro dorato e quasi impenetrabile, pur se trasparente, che nasconde un fitto centro intellettuale [...]. Come le cose lucidissime e perfettamente rifinite che riflettono la luce in maniera tale che spesso ci ingannano e ci fanno pensare che siano dotate di una fonte di luce propria’.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Giuseppe Dessì claims, in reference to *La pietra lunare* that ‘tutta la narrazione è tenuta in piedi da una razionale magia, da un espediente tecnico, la cui stessa razionalità permette al Landolfi di uscirne quand’egli voglia e di riposarsi su una piattaforma d’ironia [...]. Rimane [...] il senso di una non comune abilità, che rivela, oltre tutto, il coraggio di far decisamente della letteratura per la letteratura, con piena e lucida coscienza’. On the same line of thought, Pietro Pancrazi defines Landolfi ‘scrittore di ingegno’.<sup>3</sup> His refined style and language – full of archaisms, regionalisms, neologisms, intertextual references and quotations – as well as the content of his works, which are dense, cryptic and ambiguous, reinforced the idea of Landolfi as an elitist author, and of his oeuvre as self-referential intellectual free-play.<sup>4</sup> More recent scholarship, however, has, instead, attributed Landolfi’s limited fame to his troubled editorial life, which prevented him from reaching a broad audience.<sup>5</sup> Landolfi’s

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<sup>1</sup> ‘La riscoperta – o scoperta – di Landolfi comincia nel momento preciso in cui il fantastico acquisisce, anche in Italia, una nuova importanza agli occhi della critica, diventando un oggetto di ricerca degno di interesse’. Stefano Lazzarin, ‘Trentacinque anni di teoria e critica del fantastico italiano’ (dal 1980 a oggi) in *Il fantastico italiano. Bilancio critico e bibliografia commentata (dal 1980 a oggi)* ed. by Stefano Lazzarin, Felice Italo Beneduce, Eleonora Conti, Fabrizio Foni, Rita Fresu, Claudia Zudini (Florence: Le Monnier Università, 2016), pp. 1-58 (p. 12).

<sup>2</sup> Guglielmo Petroni, ‘Landolfi e La pietra lunare’, *Prospettive*, 3, 8 (1939), 16, pp. 148-153.

<sup>3</sup> Pietro Pancrazi, ‘Tommaso Landolfi scrittore d’ingegno’, in *Scrittori nuovi*, ed. by Pietro Pancrazi (Bari: Laterza, 1946).

<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Dessì, ‘La pietra lunare’, *Primato*, 1, 1 (1940), 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Il problema di Landolfi non è mai stato nel genere di letteratura che lo connota (‘difficile’, ‘élitaria’ e tutto quanto è stato detto), ma nel fatto che al grande pubblico in realtà *non è mai arrivato*. Le poche volte



progressive isolation, beginning in the 1950s, within the intimate setting of his family manor in Pico Farnese, in the Frosinone area, was the result of a series of biographical events, economic difficulties, and frustrations in his career as a writer, which he himself defined as ‘una carriera sbagliata’.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, the traditional perception of Landolfi as a disengaged and isolated author has been questioned, particularly as concerns his early production and his relationships and collaborations with a dynamic circle of intellectuals and artists in Florence and Rome throughout the 1930s.

By drawing on and revising recent scholarship, this thesis pursues a threefold aim. Firstly, it attempts to challenge established views of Landolfi’s use of the ‘Fantastic’. Such finding appears particularly important in the light of the Italian use and reception of the Fantastic and the way this literary mode and its representative authors have been canonized. Fantastic, indeed, is a volatile category at the centre of manifold debates. While the debate on the category of marvellous traces back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (IV century B.C.), discussions around the category of ‘Fantastic’ began two centuries ago, in nineteenth-century France. When Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman’s short stories were translated in French, his treatment of the supernatural relying on an original blending of ‘realistic’ and ‘marvellous’ elements was described by Jean-Jacques Ampère with the term *fantastique*. Theophile Gautier then used the term to address a daily or plausible Fantastic.<sup>7</sup> The daily Fantastic is therefore characterized by the irruption of the supernatural into an ordinary dimension and distinguished by the *merveilleux*, in which the supernatural characterizes all aspects of the narration. Since then, the notion of Fantastic has been differently used and conceptualized. Tzvetan Todorov, with his influential study *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970) elaborates a precise definition of the genre as ‘that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event’.<sup>8</sup> The author’s view of the Fantastic is that of a literary genre historically coinciding with a

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che ciò nel passato è avvenuto [...], le opere di Landolfi sono state molto lette, a vari livelli e dalle persone più diverse – per età, cultura, stato sociale.’ Idolina Landolfi, ‘La mésalliance con Vallecchi e avvenimenti coevi (1938-1972)’ in *Il piccolo vascello solca i mari*. *Bibliografia degli scritti di e su Tommaso Landolfi (1929-2006)*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi, 2 vols (Florence: Cadmo, 2015), I, pp. 65-176 (p. 92).

<sup>6</sup> The author uttered the following words during the only video-interview available: -Tommaso Landolfi: un'intervista difficile- by Franco Simongini, recorded 1 January 1963, during the ceremony for the literary prize ‘Premio Montefeltro 1962’.

<sup>7</sup> Theophile Gautier, ‘Hoffmann’ in Charles de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, *Histoire des oeuvres de Théophile Gautier* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), pp. 11-14.

<sup>8</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.

close cluster of texts and authors operating in the nineteenth century and defined as the Fantastic literature of the European Romanticism. Alternatively, modern scholars like Remo Ceserani view the Fantastic as a literary modality flourished in periods of great social and cultural revolutions between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century and used to tell in effective ways the experience of modernity. As a modality, it may be reused in works belonging to very different genres, even mimetic-realistic.<sup>9</sup> Nowadays, the notion of Fantastic is often overlapped with the category of ‘fantasy’ and stretched including confusingly a wide range of modalities, forms and genres, such as science fiction, utopian, horror, gothic and apocalyptic. Among this group of scholars, Robert Schlobin, Rosemary Jackson, Kathryn Hume, Everett Franklin Bleiler.

In Italy, the Fantastic has been long considered an extraneous genre in relation to its literary tradition.<sup>10</sup> Its detachment, escapism and obscurity have been historically considered extraneous to the Italian tradition.<sup>11</sup> Such element gives the modern Italian debate on the Fantastic a particular shape. The modern debate arises precisely after the translation of Todorov’s study in 1980. Tommaso Landolfi is one of the authors involved in such debate and considered remarkably representative of the genre. The thesis will show how the lines of the reception of the Fantastic in late twentieth century coincide and shape the same reception of Landolfi. Indeed, one of the reasons of his unsuccess within a great audience is attributed to his alleged ‘detachment’ from reality. This thesis attempts to challenge such established views by finding in his works elements of oblique socio-political critique.

Secondly, it endeavours to problematise views of Landolfi as an isolated author, enclosed in his own literary world, and overall indifferent to the socio-political and cultural changes of his time. I will thus detect in three of Landolfi’s early novellas – *La pietra lunare* (1939); *Racconto d’autunno* (1947); and *Cancroregina* (1950) – signs of his participation in literary and political debates, which will be shown to have been much more consistent than is usually assumed. Thirdly, I argue for the importance of non-literary sources – particularly oral tradition and folklore (chapters I and II), occultism and magic (chapter III), and psychiatry (chapter IV), together with ‘minor’ genres such as the Gothic and science fiction – in the construction of Landolfi’s highly

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<sup>9</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il fantastico* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Leonardo Lattaruolo, ‘Antica storia narra così. Considerazioni sul fantastico italiano ottocentesco’ in *Geografia, storia e poetiche del fantastico*, ed. by Monica Farnetti (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1995), pp. 121-134 (pp. 121, 122).

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the debate between Classicisti and Romantici originating in nineteenth-century Italy and discussed in chapter 2.

refined writing laboratory. As a consequence, I will depict Landolfi as a complex intellectual figure, whose work brings together different sources and forms of expression in order to voice pressing concerns around the changes in Italy's society from the late 1930s to the early 1950s.

Written immediately before Landolfi's self-isolation, the three novellas analyzed here have been repeatedly considered by scholars (the first of whom was Vittorio Sereni)<sup>12</sup> as forming a cluster in themselves, corresponding to the phase of Landolfi's 'pure' Fantastic. Leonardo Cecchini addresses these three texts as a 'Fantastic trilogy',<sup>13</sup> based on their interconnections. In Sereni's view, a real crisis in the author's writing occurred in 1950; its first symptoms, he argues, were already visible in *Cancroregina*, a novella acquiring the hybrid form between tale and diary.<sup>14</sup> From this viewpoint, *Cancroregina*, the last text in my selection, represents a turning point in Landolfi's production in that it marks the transition to a phase in which Landolfi's opts for more volatile genres and forms such as journal entry, newspaper article, and *elzeviro*.<sup>15</sup> Other scholars followed Sereni's view, including Edoardo Sanguineti,<sup>16</sup> Luigi Baldacci,<sup>17</sup> Andrea Cortellessa<sup>18</sup> and Leonardo Lattaruolo.<sup>19</sup> Taking the opposite stance, Leonardo Cecchini<sup>20</sup> and Italo Calvino<sup>21</sup> consider Landolfi's production as an overall consistent whole, supporting this view by retracing recurring elements and references. My view follows Sereni's argumentation and for this reason I have selected the three main texts belonging to the authentic 'Fantastic season'.

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<sup>12</sup> Vittorio Sereni, 'Tre crisi degli anni Cinquanta. 1. *Cancroregina*' in Id., *Letture Preliminari* (Padua: Liviana, 1973), pp. 19-24.

<sup>13</sup> Leonardo Cecchini, *Parlare per le notti: il fantastico nell'opera di Tommaso Landolfi* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Sereni, 'Tre crisi degli anni Cinquanta. 1. *Cancroregina*', p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Landolfi's diaries are: *LA BIÈRE DU PECHEUR* (1954); *Rien va* (1963); *Des mois* (1967). Landolfi's numerous articles and elzeviri have been collected in several volumes: *Ombre* (1954); *Un panier de chioccioline* (1968); *Gogol a Roma* (1971); *Del meno* (1978).

<sup>16</sup> Edoardo Sanguineti, 'La bara dell'accidioso' in Tommaso Landolfi, *LA BIÈRE DU PECHEUR* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Luigi Baldacci, 'Cronache di narrativa. Landolfi' in Id., *Letteratura e verità. Saggi e cronache sull'Ottocento e sul Novecento italiani* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1963), pp. 198-200 (p. 199).

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Cortellessa believes that such division enables critics distinguish 'due mondi espressivi e simbolici, due strategie scritte, in definitiva due dimensioni autoriali'. In the scholar's opinion, precisely the crisis of Fantastic and Surrealism of Landolfi's first production led him to abandon the form of the novella to focus on the short form of the articles and elzeviri. Andrea Cortellessa, "'Caetera desiderantur': l'autobiografismo fluido dei diari landolfiani', in *Le lunazioni del cuore. Saggi su Tommaso Landolfi*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996), pp. 77-106 (p. 78).

<sup>19</sup> Leonardo Lattaruolo, 'Landolfi e l'impossibilità del fantastico', *Ermeneutica Letteraria*, I (2005), 99-104.

<sup>20</sup> Leonardo Cecchini, *Parlare per le notti: il fantastico nell'opera di Tommaso Landolfi*.

<sup>21</sup> Italo Calvino, *Le più belle pagine di Tommaso Landolfi scelte da Italo Calvino* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1982).

In addition to these considerations, my choice of corpus is based on more directly historical reasons. The three novellas were all written in or just before the 1940s, a crucial decade of political and social transition in Italian history: *La pietra lunare* was published in 1939, one year after the promulgation of the Racial Laws (1938) and the same year of the alliance stipulated between Italy and Nazi Germany, the Pact of Steel (1939); *Racconto d'autunno* appeared in 1947, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and the author explicitly declares it to have been inspired by wartime events; *Cancroregina* was published during the tense period between the reconstruction and the Cold War, characterised by techno-scientific developments and increasing modernisation. Building on the political interpretations of Gothic and Fantastic literature which have become increasingly widespread in English-speaking scholarship since the 1980s,<sup>22</sup> I will not only rectify the common misconception of Landolfi as a detached author writing for a selected audience; I will also make a larger point about twentieth-century Italian Fantastic and its subversive elements. Whereas Anglo-Saxon scholarship has widely theorised the possibility of a political reading of Gothic and Fantastic literature, no systematic study of the critical potentialities of such a body of texts has been produced in Italy. Similarly, no attempt to analyze the extratextual references in Landolfi's fiction has been undertaken thus far, with the exception of a political-allegorical reading of Landolfi's 'Il mar delle blatte' and a recent ecocritical reading of *La pietra lunare* as problematising Fascist biopolitics.<sup>23</sup> My choice of texts has also to do with their peculiar textual form. Indeed, their shape as novellas, or long tales, distinguishes them from most of Landolfi's oeuvre, mainly composed of collections of short stories.<sup>24</sup> Written in a hybrid form, these three texts make use of both the potentialities of the short story – such as a faster rhythm of narration and the 'unity of effect' aimed at leaving a powerful impression on the reader and typical of Fantastic fiction<sup>25</sup> – and the descriptive possibilities of the novel. For this reason, I will draw connections, from time to time, to Landolfi's collections of short

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<sup>22</sup> See in particular David Punter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, 2 vols (London and New York, NY: Longman, 1980) and Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York, NY: Methuen, 1981). However, in 1974 a study by Irène Bessièrè already recognized the Fantastic as a narrative modality able to erode common knowledge and ideologies. Irène Bessièrè, *Le récit fantastique. La poétique de l'incertain* (Paris: Larousse, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> Keala Jewell, 'Italian Rural Gothic: The Powers of Were-Goats in Tommaso Landolfi's *La pietra lunare* (The Moonstone)', *Gothic Studies* 16, 1 (2014), 55-69 (p. 59).

<sup>24</sup> With the exception of *Le due zittelle* (1946) and *Ottavio di Saint-Vincent* (1958).

<sup>25</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'Twice-Told Tales. A Review', *Graham's Magazine* (1842) in Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews* (New York, NY: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 569-577.

stories produced during the same time span,<sup>26</sup> but I will not carry out their organic analysis here. The goal of this thesis is, instead, to use an in-depth textual approach to these three longer and highly representative texts, to show that their hybridism and complexity is both a textual and meta-textual feature.

As stated above, one of my objectives is to challenge established views of Landolfi's Fantastic which have developed since the 1980s, in coincidence with the flourishing of the debate about this genre in the Italian tradition and on the very possibility of speaking of an 'Italian Fantastic'. As is well known, this process was marked by three landmark publications, cementing an image of Landolfi that was to become hegemonic: Italo Calvino's anthology *Le più belle pagine di Tommaso Landolfi* (1982), Enrico Ghidetti's and Leonardo Lattaruolo's collection *Notturmo italiano* (1984), and *Italia magica* (1988) by Gianfranco Contini,<sup>27</sup> originally published in French, in 1946, as *Italie magique*.

Contini includes Landolfi in a prominent position within his anthology. This is highlighted by the fact that the choice of excerpts in terms of each author's visibility in the book is unbalanced. Landolfi is, after Palazzeschi, the best represented, covering 24% of the text's total.<sup>28</sup> All the stories collected in the volume have in common a refined use of language and a reliance on irony, according to the anthology's aims. By emphasising these components of Landolfi's poetic, Contini ignores other features that could have been included in the anthology and more specifically what we might term the author's most 'authentically' Fantastic core, which directly dialogues with

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<sup>26</sup> Particularly, *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* (1937), *Il mar delle blatte e altre storie* (1939), *La spada* (1942). In these, it is also possible to detect recurrent Gothic and Fantastic patterns.

<sup>27</sup> When it first appeared in Italian in 1988, Contini's work was naturally drawn into the debate occasioned, only a few years earlier, by anthologies such as Calvino's *Racconti fantastici dell'Ottocento* (1983) and Ghidetti and Lattaruolo's *Notturmo italiano*: it was interpreted as an anthology of the Fantastic, whilst its original significance was forgotten. As illustrated by Beatrice Sica, the significance of the term 'magic' used by Contini, once contextualised in the historical and cultural environment of the first edition, goes beyond the literary field. The term 'magic' had profound resonances in the intellectual debate developed in France and in Italy in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s. See Beatrice Sica, *L'Italia magica di Gianfranco Contini. Storia e interpretazione* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2013), pp. 20-22. Marco Barsacchi was the first scholar to attempt to interpret Contini's refusal to use the term 'fantastico' in the anthology: 'Non sappiamo se Contini evitasse intenzionalmente la parola 'fantastico': ma certo ben sapeva quanto gli autori raccolti [...] fossero lontani – ad eccezione di certe cose di Landolfi – dai temi e dalle atmosfere del 'conte fantastique' fiorito nell'Ottocento'. Marco Barsacchi, 'Introduzione al 'fantastico' nella cultura italiana', *Antologia Vieusseux*, 65, 17 (1982), 57-70 (p. 68).

<sup>28</sup> Sica, *L'Italia magica di Gianfranco Contini*, p. 32. Five short stories were selected: 'Settimana di sole' and 'Mani' from the collection *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* (1937); 'Il racconto del lupo mannaro', 'Il dente di cera' and 'Notte di nozze' from the collection *Il mar delle blatte e altre storie* (1939); 'Il racconto della piattola' from *La spada* (1942).

nineteenth-century models and relies on an 'irrational tension', rather than on 'il lucido controllo della ragione'.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Calvino's anthology proved to be a reductive operation, an attempt to frame Landolfi's work within rigid and simplistic schemes. Giovanni Raboni individuated certain hidden intentions behind Calvino's strategy: 'Il 'rilancio' editoriale di Landolfi era parso alquanto danneggiato se non addirittura compromesso dall'azione elegantemente perfida commessa nell'82 da Italo Calvino con *Le più belle pagine di Tommaso Landolfi*, un'antologia che era impossibile ideare con propositi più sottilmente riduttivi e liquidatori e di cui Idolina scrive ora, con molto understatement, che 'sicuramente non avrebbe incontrato il favore dell'autore'.<sup>30</sup>

Enrico Ghidetti and Leonardo Lattaruolo heeded to Contini's and Calvino's models, in particular the notion of intellectual Fantastic. In the editors' view, Landolfi's Fantastic itinerary coincides with a phase of research doomed to failure: 'Il fallimento di questa ricerca comporta l'abbandono del fantastico per una letteratura di commento saggio, disincantato e nostalgico alla propria esistenza desolata'.<sup>31</sup>

Tellingly, neither Contini, Calvino, Ghidetti nor Lattaruolo, took into consideration the novellas of 1939-50, focusing instead on short stories. This choice was dictated by ideological reasons, contributing to the perception of Landolfi as a quintessentially 'Fantastic' writer. At the same time, the very notion of the 'Fantastic' took on an ideologized meaning. From different perspectives and for different reasons, these three anthologies elevated the twentieth-century Fantastic over nineteenth-century examples, and particularly over the Gothic genre, which was perceived as excessively emotional, melodramatic, and deprived of artistic value;<sup>32</sup> they saw the Fantastic as an intrinsically

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<sup>29</sup> Contini individuates in Landolfi an intermediary figure between Palazzeschi and Calvino and in the three authors the cornerstone of Italian twentieth-century magic surrealism: 'Ma non sarebbe possibile sottovalutare l'importanza l'importanza del primo Landolfi, tematicamente a metà strada fra l'anziano Palazzeschi e il più giovane Calvino, eppure stilizzato al livello della prosa d'arta, nella narrativa 'magica' del secondo anteguerra'. Even commenting on the influence of Hoffman and Poe in Landolfi, Contini still avoids to use term 'fantastic'. Gianfranco Contini, *Letteratura dell'Italia unita. 1861-1968* (Florence: Sansoni, 1994), p. 931. Thus, in his biographical note on Landolfi in *Italia magica*, Contini asserts that '[Landolfi] dissimula un intelletto lucidissimo e mirabilmente ammobilato [...] sotto la scorza mitica di un personaggio notturno dai costumi misteriosi e fatali' (Contini, *Italia magica*, p. 191).

<sup>30</sup> Giovanni Raboni, 'Da qui all'eternità', in *Europeo*, 14 giugno 1991.

<sup>31</sup> Enrico Ghidetti and Leonardo Lattaruolo, 'Prefazione' in *Notturmo italiano. Racconti fantastici del Novecento* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984), pp. vii-xii (pp. x, xi).

<sup>32</sup> In his theoretical reflections on the Fantastic, Calvino outlined two typologies: one more emotional, implying an abandonment of the reader to the supernatural and a feeling of fear or trouble; another more intellectual one, implying a distance between the reader and the story. In Calvino's words, the emotional Fantastic belonged to the nineteenth-century tradition and was replaced, in the twentieth century, by an intellectual Fantastic, reasoned through irony and the meditation on humans' fears. In doing so, Calvino collocated himself within this stream of Italian intellectual Fantastic, in which the problem of hesitation

literary phenomenon, detaching it from coeval, extra-literary discourses; they were particularly attentive to identifying the specificity of the ‘Italian way’ for the Fantastic in the refusal of irrationalism and the adoption of a ‘rationalistic’, detached, and ironic perspective.<sup>33</sup>

The novellas of 1939-50 offer a different perspective, and further problematise the possibility of Landolfi’s use of ‘Fantastic’ themes beyond the pre-conceived categories of ‘rationalism’, irony, and parody. As I will show, these works discuss in various ways the role of authority, the problem of anthropocentrism and the purity of race in Fascist Italy (chapters I and II); the war as a ‘state of exception’ and traumatic aspects of the liberation phase (chapter III); the tensions connected to the diffusion of techno-developments in post-war society and the perspective of an imminent manned spaceflight (chapter IV). Moreover, they do so through a deeply interdiscursive relationship with literary and non-literary sources, beyond the canon that is normally associated with Landolfi. In the first chapter, for example, I contextualise and reconstruct in detail Landolfi’s *pastiche* of Leopardi’s *Zibaldone* in the appendix to *La pietra lunare*; in the third chapter, I individuate precise intertextual references to entire sections of the *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* by French Occultist Éliphas Lévi (1854–1856); in the fourth chapter, I analyze Landolfi’s use of psychiatric terminology and knowledge as derived from Emil Kraepelin’s manual of psychiatry (*Compendium der Psychiatrie: Zum Gebrauche für Studierende und Ärzte*, 1833).

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plays a minor importance and the exception is filtered through the instrument of irony. At the same time, Calvino individuates in Leopardi a precursor of this model of intellectual Fantastic and Landolfi, Buzzati, Palazzeschi and Bontempelli as its twentieth-century representatives. Italo Calvino, ‘Il fantastico nella letteratura italiana’ in *Saggi. 1945-1985*, ed. by Mario Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), pp. 1672-1682.

<sup>33</sup> In Gianfranco Contini’s *Italia magica*, one of the main selection criteria was the linguistic richness and the refined use of irony. Contini’s edition gathered eight authors (Palazzeschi, Baldini, Lisi, Zavattini, Morovich, Moravia, Landolfi, and Bontempelli), all characterised, in his opinion, by a willing use of irony as a filter meant to preserve intellectual rationality (‘la lucidità del controllo è ineliminabile’). Gianfranco Contini, *Italia Magica. Racconti surreali novecenteschi scelti e presentati da Gianfranco Contini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988). As recently shown by scholars, his intention was to propose a model of Italian surrealism to oppose to the predominant model coming from France, and indeed his anthology has later been recognised as a direct reply to André Breton’s manifesto. The main element which, in Contini’s analysis, made Italian surrealism unique was ‘la lucidità del controllo’ which gives rise to ‘[un] magico senza magia, [un] surreale senza surrealismo’ as opposed to its French counterpart characterised by a taste for irrationalism, an exploration of the unconscious and automatic writing modalities. See Beatrice Sica, *L’Italia magica di Gianfranco Contini. Storia e interpretazione*.

In methodological terms, instead of working with psychoanalytical, biographical, thematic, or symbolic approaches, as has repeatedly been done,<sup>34</sup> I will adopt a historical-cultural approach to textual analysis which links the development of the Fantastic with historical and cultural changes of the period, tracing a gradual development of the genre. Looking at the historical, political and literary background surrounding the texts sheds new light on their literary meaning. For instance, the following problems will be taken into consideration in my close readings: Italy's political and geographical instability; the position of the intellectuals within the Fascist regime; the flourishing of esoterism and theosophism in the 1930s; magical and mythical ideas of the Fascist Regime; the elaboration of 'Il manifesto della razza' and preexistent beliefs about an autochthone Aryan-Mediterranean race; the tension, in literary discourses of the time, between the categories of 'art' and 'nature'; historical and oral alternative accounts of 'liberation' by the Allies; technological advances in the 1950s and the development of a 'first mass culture'.

This methodological approach also attempts to broaden the dialogue between literature and culture by drawing tools of interpretations from interdisciplinary frameworks, such as anthropological theories: Van Gennep's<sup>35</sup> (1909) and Victor Turner's<sup>36</sup> (1967) theories on liminality and the rites of passage will be adopted to interpret the narrative structure and magic motifs of the three novellas. In all of them, the protagonists have to overcome thresholds of different types and their transitions often mark the passage to the domain of the supernatural or the underworld.<sup>37</sup> The body itself sometimes becomes a threshold marking different transitions (from masculinity to femininity; from humanity to animality). Carlo Ginzburg's investigation of the phenomenon of Sabbath, *Storia Notturna*,<sup>38</sup> also offers interpretative support, especially in my analysis of *La pietra lunare*. Applying the categories Ginzburg describes as characteristic of the sabbath, the novella is read from an anthropological perspective as a tale of witchery. Metamorphosis, banquets in a cave, encounters with dead souls are all preliminary steps for the ecstatic experience of the sabbath, in Landolfi described as

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<sup>34</sup> For example, by Oreste Macrí in *Tommaso Landolfi. Narratore poeta critico artefice della lingua* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1990) and the more recent contribution by Franco Zangrilli, *L'oscura foresta. Simboli del fantastico in Landolfi* (Caltanissetta: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>36</sup> Victor W. Turner, *Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

<sup>37</sup> Even though an ambiguity between the plausibility of the supernatural events is always kept, accordingly to Todorov's considerations on hesitation as the fundative element of the Fantastic.

<sup>38</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia Notturna* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008).



a phenomenon of panicked fusion with nature, the feminine and the amorphous. Robert Graves' theory of the magical and ritual origin of poetry<sup>39</sup> similarly offers enlightening perspectives, enabling me to read the novellas as a metaliterary work on poetry itself, and the initiations undewent by the protagonists as attempts to reach the 'truth' through the literary process.

Moreover, I will adopt Giorgio Agamben's,<sup>40</sup> Roberto Marchesini's,<sup>41</sup> and Rosi Braidotti's<sup>42</sup> theories of the 'post-human' as supporting tools for the interpretation of the recurrent episodes of 'transmigration' of the self into a different shape (human, machine, hermaphrodite) and to disclose an inner deconstruction of the notion of *humanitas* in the texts. Metamorphoses, hybridisations, and 'liminal' situations, I show, challenge the very notion of 'humanity'. Agamben's theory of 'sovereign power' and 'bare life' (1998) allows an interpretation of the transmigration of human nature also in the light of the historical events. The experience of war represents, for Agamben, a 'state of exception' which involves the highest degree of minimisation of the distance between 'life' and 'power'.<sup>43</sup> This phenomenon dissolves the boundaries between humanity and animality, giving rise to an experience of defamiliarisation that is mirrored by my selected texts and allegorised by Landolfi in a very peculiar way. Georges Bataille's theory of the *heterogenous* is also used as a supportive interpretative framework. Heterogeneous, meaning exterior to the human order and therefore 'rejected by the homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value', is a category that can be applied to several characters/situations of the three novellas, as well as, perhaps, to the Fantastic itself.<sup>44</sup> With similar aims, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of 'Becoming Animal' as a transgression and a 'a festive return to nature' will serve as a supporting frame to look at the episodes in which the body is returned to its original condition as flesh.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the repertoire of characters, situations and rituals deriving from Italian myths and traditions are given renewed significance, as I study them alongside the debate on mythology, ethnography and folklore flourishing in Italy from

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952).

<sup>40</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *L'aperto. L'uomo e l'animale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> Roberto Marchesini, *Post-human. Verso nuovi modelli di esistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) and *The Post-human* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Georges Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 137-160.

<sup>45</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

1948 onwards and exemplified by Einaudi and Cesare Pavese's and Ernesto De Martino's *Collezione di studi religiosi, etnologici e psicologici*.<sup>46</sup> In doing so, I use De Martino's *Il mondo magico*<sup>47</sup> (1948) and his later works on Southern Italy (*Sud e magia*,<sup>48</sup> 1959, and *La terra del rimorso*,<sup>49</sup> 1961) to address the intersections between geographical marginality, superstition and folklore.

Each chapter problematises broader issues related to Landolfi's time. I will therefore develop a detailed textual analysis alongside a reading of the wider historical context.

Chapter 1 analyzes and contextualises a *pastiche* of Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, added to the posthumous edition of *La pietra lunare*. This appendix enables me to discuss the literary and social environment of Italy in the 1930s, with its exploration of the categories of nature and reason, spontaneity and artificiality. This will be discussed through the lens of the long-lasting debates on Classicism and Romanticism from Leopardi's time onwards. Most importantly, the appendix allows me to reassess the Italian Fantastic as a literary genre originating from ancestral, magical, Italian sources rather than from a mere reuse of classical 'Northern' settings and atmospheres. Building on a new interpretation of the *pastiche* from Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, the chapter tackles the problem of the legacy of Fantastic literature in Italy and the question of how to create authentic poetry in modernity, and, more specifically, in Landolfi's time.

Chapter 2 is an analysis of *La pietra lunare* in the light of the cultural, political and historical environment in which it was produced. It interprets the opposition between city and countryside as well as of further series of opposites – paganism and catholicism; human and animal; normativity and festivity; unity and hybridity – in terms of a tension between control and primitive drives, rationalism and popular superstitions, normativity and diversity, civilisation and nature. At the same time, it underlines the manner in which themes borrowed from Gothic and Fantastic literature – such as witchcraft and animal metamorphism – point to a tension between centralism and geographical marginality. For instance, they depict the Italian countryside as the venue for the return of a chthonic and pre-classical religion (the 'Mothers'). Finally, the chapter shows how, through this thematic landscape, the novella performs an oblique

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<sup>46</sup> Book series of 'religious, ethnological, and psychological studies' published in Italy by Einaudi from 1948 to 1956.

<sup>47</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *Il mondo magico. Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e magia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960).

<sup>49</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud* (Milan: Mondadori, 1968).

critique of the values of the Fascist Ventennio. In its marginalised and depopulated settings, the text locates a possibility of subterranean resistance against the forced modernisation imposed by the unified state both before and after the intervention of the regime.

Chapter 3 discusses Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno* to question its widespread reading as a form, albeit unusual, of 'romanzo di resistenza'. It contextualises the novella within the immediate post-war environment and the widespread commitment on the part of Italian authors to provide narrative accounts of the civil war. The chapter illustrates how, after an initial historicised situation in which the political stance of the author/protagonist appears willingly ambiguous, its conclusion radically questions the notion of 'liberation'. Finally, the chapter analyzes the narrative strategies adopted and unearths a consistent use of themes, situations and images borrowed from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic/Fantastic literature, thus explicitly echoing a genre in which defamiliarisation, destabilisation and unsettling material are central to the literary project. The novella, with respect to its ancestors, reveals a crisis in the potentialities of the Fantastic. Few traces of the lunar ancestral world of *La pietra lunare* survive and they are ultimately buried by the irruption of history in the story.

Chapter 4 analyzes *Cancroregina*'s lunar imagery, remarkably different to that of the previous case studies. Described as a diaphanous entity in the earlier stories, the moon now becomes a material destination and an escape route from the dreariness of earthly life. Influenced by 'popular' literature (Verne and Wells, among others) and the press, the novella anticipates by a few years the development of science fiction in Italy and gives voice to the uneasiness caused by WWII rocket artillery and the start of the hunt for UFOs in the 1950s. At the same time, the novella's interest in the irrational side of humans, and its ethno-anthropological concerns, represent a cultural phenomenon exemplified, in Italy, by the *Collezione di studi religiosi, etnologici e psicologici* edited by Cesare Pavese and Ernesto De Martino.

Together, these four chapters reveal a different use of Fantastic and Gothic patterns, from the ones generally attributed to the Italian Fantastic of the period, and thus revise our understanding of Landolfi's early production and, by extension, of Italian twentieth-century Fantastic.

## Chapter 1: Landolfi, Leopardi, and the Legacy of the Twentieth-century

### Fantastic

#### *Introduction*

*La pietra lunare*, the first of Landolfi's novellas,<sup>50</sup> appeared in 1939, though its conclusion bears the date 1937, the year of its composition.<sup>51</sup> The reason behind

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<sup>50</sup> Although Landolfi's three longer works have often been defined 'novels', due to their length and rhythm, they are closer to the form of the novella. Henceforth, I will refer to my three case studies as novellas. A terminological exploration of the term is therefore necessary at this stage. The term novella has been long at the centre of problems of definition. In spite of the many modern theories of the novella, particularly in German criticism, attempts to formulate a satisfactory definition often failed. Applied to signify the Renaissance tales of Boccaccio or Marguerite de Navarre, 'novella' has also been used as a synonym for the German *novelle* (a genre flourishing in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries which attracted such authors as Goethe, Hoffman, Storm and Keller) and as a label to describe modern works of fiction of intermediate length, that is between the short story and the novel (typically a novella is about forty/fifty and a hundred pages long; in word count, between 15,000 and 50,000). This last usage seems to derive from Henry James' use of the term *nouvelle* to describe his own short story fiction. However, the modern use of the term 'novella' cannot be purely based on the criteria of the book's length, but has to look at other patterns that make it an exclusive type of fiction. In considering these patterns, scholarship is again divided. According to the so-called historical approach, the recurrence of the same patterns across the different types of novella above-mentioned, demonstrate its historical development, that is to say, the three definitions would address just different versions of the same genre. Such approach, however, is rejected by scholars such as Lutz Mackensen and Heinrich Henel who adopt a 'normative approach' in favour of the specificity of the German *novelle*. These scholars stress the differences, in terms of complexity of plot and proclivity towards symbolism, between the German *novelle* and the Renaissance novella. An intermediary position suggests to employ different terms that imply a certain affinity between the three types of novella and yet retain some basic literary distinctions between these forms of fiction. Accordingly, 'novella' would address the Renaissance form, 'novelle' the Romantic and post-Romantic German tradition and 'novelette' or 'short novel' modern works of intermediate length. See Clements Roberts and Gibaldi Joseph, 'Theory of the Novella' in *Anatomy of the Novella. The European Tale Collection from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Cervantes* (New York: New York University Press, 1977) and Springer Mary Doyle, *Forms of the novella* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975). Gerald Gillespie recognizes the modern novella as a product of the nineteenth century and individuates among its peculiar features the 'fusion of action and symbolism', the development of turning points moving toward a moment of resolution, a realistic setting that yet preludes some mysterious drama. According to Gillespie, 'It is not the extent of materials covered, but the special techniques of selectivity which distinguish the novella'. See Gerald Gillespie, 'Novella, nouvelle, novella, short novel? - A review of terms', *Neophilologus*, 51,1 (1967), 225-30. On a similar line, Jeremy Hawthorn suggests that 'although the typical novella is more limited in its concerns than the novel [...], it characteristically compensates for this limitation by means of a greater reliance on implied or suggested secondary meaning. Hence it has some of the concentrated power of the short story, but without the frequent one-dimensionality that characterizes many short stories'. Symbolic richness is one of the effects of such net of secondary meanings. See Hawthorn Jeremy, 'The short story and the novella' in *Studying the novel* (London; New York: Edward Arnold, 1997), p. 59. In the light of the previous overview, my use of the term novella is closer to Gillespie's and Hawthorn's views, as it intends to evoke the nineteenth-century tradition of the *novelle*. This choice is connected to Landolfi's deep knowledge of such tradition and his deliberate imitation of the genre, not only by means of recuperating many of its thematic motifs but also its narrative and formal components (e.g. no excessive descriptivism, symbolic richness, lack of psychological investigation of the characters, lack of multiple points of view, unity of impression).

<sup>51</sup> Tommaso Landolfi, *La pietra lunare. Scene della vita di provincia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1995), p. 148. As we will see in chapter 2, Landolfi wrote *La pietra lunare* between July and August 1937 and published it as a volume in 1939 because of a failed agreement with Bompiani and a subsequent delay on the part of publisher Vallecchi. Two fragments, however, appeared beforehand in journals: the sixth chapter was

Landolfi's choice to include the original date may not be incidental, as 1937 was the centenary of Leopardi's death, and *La pietra lunare* appears to be an homage to Leopardi in many aspects.<sup>52</sup> The text tells the story of Giovancarolo, a young poet coming from the city who temporarily moves to the countryside. The arrival in such a rural and marginal environment and the encounter with mysterious creatures like Gurù mark the beginning of a journey of initiation through an irrational and unruly world. While the text clearly shows Leopardi's influence in terms of lexical and stylistic choices (particularly archaisms derived from Leopardi), as well as in its themes and setting (moonscapes, diaphanous atmospheres, representations of nature, and country life), the most direct sign of Landolfi's debt appears in the appendix appended to the novella, entitled 'Dal giudizio del signor Giacomo Leopardi sulla presente opera'.<sup>53</sup> This appendix is comprised of a montage of ten passages of different lengths (from long paragraphs to single sentences) excerpted from Leopardi's collection of thoughts, notes, and philosophical reflections, which had initially been published – as we will see below – as *Pensieri di varia filosofia e di bella letteratura* and later, precisely in 1937, under the title *Zibaldone di pensieri*.

The appendix poses several problems. Why did Landolfi, to legitimate his own work, choose Leopardi, a poet from the previous century, and his hybrid notebook? What process did Landolfi follow in selecting and combining Leopardi's fragments in order to

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published in its entirety in *Letteratura*, II, 4 (October 1938), pp. 56-61; a section of the fifth chapter was published in *Campo di Marte*, II, 11-12 (1 July-1 August 1939), p. 5. Landolfi wrote to Bompiani in February 1938 in order to come to an agreement on the publication. In this letter, Landolfi – who had thus far only published a volume (*Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, which had appeared in 1937 with Parenti) – inquired about Bompiani's willingness to publish the novella as soon as possible, insisting that *La pietra lunare* necessarily appear before the end of the year. This urgency, in Giovanni Maccari's opinion, was due to Landolfi's anxiety to publish more and quickly: 'Se si considera che il primo racconto pubblicato da Landolfi è del 1929 ("Maria Giuseppa"), e la prima raccolta, il *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, del 1937 (lasciamo il fatto che nel frattempo lo scrittore abbia collaborato intensamente a varie testate con racconti, saggi, articoli critici, traduzioni dal russo), egli si ritiene probabilmente "in ritardo": donde la sua terribile fretta, e la conseguente impazienza, altro segno distintivo dei suoi rapporti con gli editori'. The same condition was then imposed upon Vallecchi, who took charge under the false promise of a quick publication. The novella finally appeared in 1939. Landolfi then included the original year of publication at the closure of the work: Giovanni Maccari, 'Landolfi, la via del disinganno' in Idolina Landolfi, ed., *Il piccolo vascello solca i mari*, II, pp. 17-18.

<sup>52</sup> Leopardi's influence frequently appears in many of Landolfi's literary works. Short stories like 'Voltaluna' (included in *La spada*, of 1942), 'Il racconto del lupo mannaro' (from *Il mar delle blatte e altre storie*, 1939) and 'La dea cieca o veggente' (*In società*, 1962) are clear homages to Leopardi and reveal his work to be a main source of inspiration for Landolfi.

<sup>53</sup> 'La leopardiana oscillazione, o meglio tensione, tra affabulazione e parodia, tra modi fantastici e ansia metafisica diventa in Landolfi la misura di uno stile e di una ricerca. Per questo il giudizio del Signor Giacomo Leopardi è messo in scena, con una filosofica mimesi di scrittura, in appendice a *La pietra lunare*, il bellissimo racconto del 1937. La luna landolfiana osservata, leopardianamente, nella sua ambivalenza: divina e familiare, enigmatica e prossima, sovrana e compagna': Antonio Prete, 'Cosmografie landolfiane', *Chroniques Italiennes*, 81/82 (2008), 111-118 (111).

convey a specific message about *La pietra lunare*? And, finally: what is this message, and what can it tell us about Landolfi's use of Fantastic themes? In order to answer these questions, I will tackle them one by one, starting from the significance of Landolfi's choice of the *Zibaldone* in the year 1937.

This chapter introduces Landolfi's use of Fantastic patterns through a historical contextualization of the appendix to *La pietra lunare*. First, I will undertake a textual analysis of Landolfi's montage, showing that the appendix is formed by a collage of fragments excerpted from Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, and more precisely from the notes constituting the original nucleus of Leopardi's *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica* (1818). This text constitutes Leopardi's response to the so-called Classicist/Romantic quarrel, taking place from 1816 to the late 1820s, in which he opposes both the Classicists' claim for 'rational' poetry and the irrationalism of 'Northern' Romantic and Gothic literature. I will argue that the quarrel's underlying tensions were reactivated, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the debates between 'calligrafisti' and 'contenutisti', among the literary movements of *La Ronda*, the later avant-gardist initiatives of *Solaria*, and the third generation of Florentine Hermeticism in which Landolfi's early career took place.

By so doing, I will read the appendix in a new light. Criticism has normally paid attention to Landolfi's appendix following two strains of interpretation: on the one hand, critics such as Leonardo Cecchini or Filippo Secchieri interpret Landolfi's re-assembly of Leopardi as a self-critical operation, by which Landolfi manages to deconstruct ironically his own novella;<sup>54</sup> on the other, Anna Dolfi sees it as an 'epigrafe auto-assolutoria' of Landolfi's own art, which performs the impossibility of producing a truly modern literature without falling into rationality and artificiality.<sup>55</sup> By inserting the appendix within the context of Leopardi's early twentieth-century reception, I will instead demonstrate the ways in which Landolfi's use of Leopardi is more problematic and less conventional than it seems: Landolfi's montage is not only a playful declaration

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<sup>54</sup> Leonardo Cecchini, 'L'esperienza della notte: La pietra lunare' in Id., *Parlare per le notti. Il fantastico nell'opera di Tommaso Landolfi*, pp. 74-83 and Filippo Secchieri, *L'artificio naturale: Landolfi e i teatri della scrittura* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006), pp. 175-76. See also Marcello Verdenelli, *Prove di voce: Tommaso Landolfi* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1997), p. 115; Oreste Macrí, *Tommaso Landolfi: narratore, poeta, critico, artefice della lingua*, pp. 65-74; Nino Borsellino and Walter Pedullà, *Storia generale della letteratura italiana*, 12 vols (Milan: Federico Motta, 1999), XI, p. 234; Marcello Carlino, *Landolfi e il fantastico* (Rome: Lithos, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Dolfi, 'Ars combinatoria, paradosso e poesia' in Ead., *Terza generazione. Ermetismo e oltre* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), pp. 315-356 (p. 320). In the same line of thinking, see Lazzarin, 'Dissipatio Ph.G. Landolfi, o l'anacronismo del fantastico', 207-237.

of his own poetics, but also an instrument to obliquely enter into contemporary literary and cultural debates by using Leopardi's voice in a specifically political manner. As I will show, Landolfi's choice of the *Zibaldone* and the 1818 fragments implicitly questions earlier political uses of Leopardi made under the Fascist regime. Through his unique use of Leopardi's texts, Landolfi instead establishes the imagination as a site of resistance. From this viewpoint, Landolfi's montage reveals itself as a most timely cultural operation, providing an anti-Fascist reading of Leopardi and unconventionally employing his legacy in order to address the problem of the survival of the imagination in the space of modernity.

At the same time, this reading of the appendix to *La pietra lunare* will allow for a re-assessment of the Leopardi-Landolfi connection from a more problematized point of view. Italo Calvino, primarily looking at the *Operette morali*, sees Leopardi as the founding father of Italy's twentieth-century 'rational' Fantastic, of which Landolfi is allegedly the most striking representative.<sup>56</sup> In my interpretation, Landolfi's use of the *Zibaldone* instead delineates a different genealogy, grounded in the irreducible opposition between reason and imagination. This opposition manifests through Landolfi's reiteration of Leopardi's earlier understanding of 'illusions' as the only legitimate source for literature. Through Leopardi and his highly problematic response to the Classicist/Romantic quarrel, Landolfi thus manages to negotiate the opposition between 'rationalism' and 'irrationalism', a duality which he identifies as a constant, underlying tension throughout Italian literary history.

### *Leopardi and the Zibaldone in 1937*

In Landolfi's time, the *Zibaldone* was still a recent discovery, profoundly changing the perception of Leopardi and his work. Indeed, begun in the summer of 1817 and finished in December 1832, the *Zibaldone* remained unknown until the end of the nineteenth century, when a governmental commission chaired by Giosu  Carducci produced the first edition in seven volumes. The first of these volumes appeared on the centenary of Leopardi's birth, in 1898, while the last was printed two years later.<sup>57</sup> In 1937,

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<sup>56</sup> Italo Calvino, 'Il fantastico nella letteratura italiana', pp. 1672-1682. Calvino's view has been further elaborated upon in a recent study by Giuseppe Sandrini, *Le avventure della luna. Leopardi, Calvino e il fantastico italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Pensieri di varia filosofia e di bella letteratura* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1898-1900).

Francesco Flora published a second edition<sup>58</sup> coinciding with the centenary of Leopardi's death. This edition appeared in a profoundly different cultural environment, which was deeply influenced by Hermeticism, an artistic movement which had emerged in the early twentieth century and which, while not directly opposing the regime, never responded to its solicitations.<sup>59</sup> The real and primary target of Hermeticism was to make poetry and its investigation was all oriented towards that objective. Poetry was conceived and exalted as a superior spiritual reason and required a refusal of reality and each form of rhetoric. Not only a different conception of literature and its practise distinguished the movement, but its major element of distinctiveness in the Italian environment was its European drive. Within the debate around the independence of Italian literature, the Hermetics emerged for their deliberate search of foreign interlocutors (particularly French Symbolism and Surrealism). Hermeticism, therefore, played the role of container of the European poetic forms that since symbolism onward had not been incorporated in the Italian official culture. Nonetheless, the movement did not cease to dialogue with the Italian tradition and found an ideal interlocutor in the lyric line that from Petrarch and Tasso arrives to Leopardi, while rejecting the experiences of late nineteenth century of Carducci and D'Annunzio for their excess of rhetoric.<sup>60</sup> I believe that both their European tension and their peculiar reception of Leopardi, far from standardised interpretative frames, did have an impact on the formation of Landolfi and on the redaction of *La pietra lunare* and its appendix.

Landolfi came to Florence in the years of the so-called third generation, beginning his university career in Russian Language and Literature at the local university. There, he came into contact with many exponents of late 1920s Hermeticism, including Carlo Bo, Renato Poggioli, Leone Traverso, Luigi Anceschi, Gianfranco Contini, Oreste Macrí, Vittorio Sereni, and Mario Luzi. He also actively collaborated on the journals

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<sup>58</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, ed. by Francesco Flora (Milan: Mondadori, 1937)

<sup>59</sup> The Hermetic movement (1926-1934) originated and developed mainly in Florence (partially in Milan and Rome) at the beginning of the Thirties and ended in the post-war years. Its chronological collocation fully coincides with the years of Fascism. Fascism and Hermeticism did not share principles nor finalities and yet their simultaneity paved the way to many controversial interpretations. While Fascism required intellectuals to adhere to the Regime to be fully legitimized, the Hermetics' idea of literature did not accept any compromise with political or religious positions. The opposition to the Regime enacted by the journal *Solaria* before the advent of Hermeticism was recovered by the Hermetics in the form of a reluctance to take any position and respond to the Regime's solicitations. Their lack of active commitment was to be condemned in the post-war environment: their literature was labelled as escapist and considered guilty of not having opposed actively the regime. And yet its attitude of disinterest and passivity in front of the Fascist imperial values and the redaction of obscure, incomprehensible poetry was perceived as suspicious. See Sergio Pautasso, *Ermetismo* (Milan: Bibliografica, 1996).

<sup>60</sup> Pautasso, *Ermetismo*, p. 13.



*Letteratura* (edited by Alessandro Bonsanti) and *Campo di Marte* (edited by Alfonso Gatto, Vasco Pratolini, and Piero Bigongiari). The Florentine years were decisive for Landolfi's cultural formation, given the peculiar environment offered by the city, which was characterized by political unrest and openness towards other European cultures. Alongside his studies in Russian language and literature, Landolfi enjoyed the lively exchanges taking place in the city cafés and cultural circles. Within this context, and inspired by his closest friends Poggioli, Bo, and Traverso, Landolfi deepened his knowledge of European literature – particularly during the Romantic and decadent periods. He also developed a strong interest in linguistic experimentation, the history of the Italian language, and Italian dialects.<sup>61</sup>

Landolfi's close relation with the third-generation Hermetic group may have had an influence on his peculiar rediscovery of *Zibaldone* as it appears in *La pietra lunare*'s appendix and in the novella itself. Indeed, an incomplete view of the philosophical importance of Leopardi's work had endured since the nineteenth century and the publication of Leopardi's intellectual journal triggered new possibilities for interpreting his work as it opened a window onto the diachronic development of his thought and onto the 'laboratory' of his poetic writing. Most importantly, the publication of the *Zibaldone* paved the way for the first interpretations of Leopardi as a poet-philosopher.<sup>62</sup> The Hermetic movement refused to see Leopardi as a model for rational perfectionism and enhanced instead the complexity of his 'poetical thought' (*pensiero poetante*). Their operation diverges from interpretations relegating Leopardi's radical philosophy to the margins and framing his poetics into very rigid categories. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, his work and thought underwent a process of 'domestication',<sup>63</sup> being systematically framed within pre-established schemes: 'nihilist,

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<sup>61</sup> Idolina Landolfi, 'Cronologia' in *Tommaso Landolfi: Opere I (1937-1959)*, pp. xxi-lxvi (pp. xxxv, xxxvi).

<sup>62</sup> Cosetta M. Veronese, 'Leopardi and the *Zibaldone* into the New Millennium' in *Ten Steps: Critical Inquiries on Leopardi*, ed. by Fabio A. Camilletti and Paola Cori (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 57-84. Benedetto Croce, as is well known, violently opposed this renewed interpretation of Leopardi as a poet-philosopher. From his idealistic point of view, all the debates around Leopardi's philosophical stance as a 'pessimist' or an 'optimist' – and, more generally, about pessimism and optimism as philosophical problems – were useless and merely pseudo-philosophical: see Mario Marti, 'Leopardi nella critica del Novecento' in *Leopardi e il Novecento*, pp. 23-63 (p. 37).

<sup>63</sup> I borrow the term 'domestication' from the field of translation studies where it addresses a strategy aimed at minimizing the strangeness of a foreign text in order to make it conform to the target readers. See Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: a history of translation* (New York: Routledge, 2008). In a similar way, some components of Leopardi's work, particularly its philosophical tension and its non-classicist elements, were 'foreign' to certain literary and ideological stances of twentieth-century Italy. As a consequence, Leopardi's work was repeatedly framed by intellectuals and politics according to recognizable sets of values.

progressive, unconsciously Catholic, Marxist or postmodernist *ante litteram*'.<sup>64</sup> Focus remained on his poetry, which was praised for the purist and 'Classical' qualities of its style, rather than for the complexity of its thought.

A most striking example of such partial reading of Leopardi was offered by the journal *La Ronda* (1919-1923). While positioning itself in an intermediary position between the need for experimentalism and an ideal poetry grounded in the imitation of canonical models, *La Ronda* remained bound to Croce's aesthetic principles and to the idea of a necessary 'ritorno all'ordine'. Due to an inherent suspicion of the genre of the novel, *La Ronda* also theorized the death of poetry, which led to the creation of the phenomenon of the so-called 'prosa d'arte'.

Within the group of *La Ronda*, the literary critics Vincenzo Cardarelli and Riccardo Bacchelli paid specific attention to Leopardi. They focused primarily on his poetry, specifically its stylistic and musical values, which they aligned with their own purist idea of literature. In *La favola breve di Leopardi* (1920),<sup>65</sup> Cardarelli praised the elegant prose of the *Operette morali*, claiming that the moral and metaphysical concepts elaborated by the poet were merely a pretext for the production of true stylistic enchantment. Cardarelli identified the idea of 'diletto' with musical and stylistic enjoyment, erasing the system of passions and ideas that had originally led Leopardi to develop his ironic and disenchanted approach. Ultimately, the *rondisti* emphasized the formal and Classicist components of Leopardi's writing, setting aside the elements of complexity in his thought that did not fit into their view of stylistic and them., debates, where Leopardi would become a stylistic counterexample to the entrenched models of D'Annunzio and the 'poesia crepuscolare'.<sup>66</sup>

In 1921, *La Ronda* released a unique publication of Leopardi's texts, which anticipated to some extent Landolfi's textual strategy in *La pietra lunare*. The journal published a selection of literary reflections extracted from the *Zibaldone*, with the title 'Testamento letterario di Giacomo Leopardi'. The publication appeared in a triple issue (March, April, May) and quickly found widespread success, requiring an immediate

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<sup>64</sup> Fabio Camilletti and Paola Cori, 'Introduction' in *Ibid.*, *Ten Steps: Critical Inquiries on Leopardi*, pp. 6-14 (p. 10).

<sup>65</sup> *Viaggi nel tempo*, Florence, 1920.

<sup>66</sup> Sergio Solmi, 'Leopardi e *La Ronda*' in Centro nazionale di studi leopardiani, eds, *Leopardi e il Novecento: Atti del III convegno internazionale di studi leopardiani. Recanati, 2-5 ottobre 1972* (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1974), pp. 127-140 (p. 130).

reprint.<sup>67</sup> The *rondisti* focused on passages concerning stylistic matters, elegance in literature, and on the dichotomies between tradition and modernity, reason and nature. The content was organized in different chapters, decontextualizing the historical construction of Leopardi's thought and inserting it into abstract and arbitrary categories:<sup>68</sup> 'Poesia e natura (polemica contro i romantici)'; 'sistema di restaurazione della lingua italiana antica fondato sul concetto dell'eleganza'; 'precetti di stile'; 'autori'; 'intorno alle letterature moderne e particolarmente alla francese'; 'l'antico e il moderno'.

In the preface to this anthology, Cardarelli reflects on Leopardi's views on language. More specifically, he describes Leopardi's discussion of the distance between the 'authenticity' of Dante's and Petrarch's fourteenth-century language, and Bembo's sixteenth-century systematization, which, in Leopardi's view, had destroyed the vitality and spontaneity of medieval Italian. Cardarelli praises Leopardi's lively ability to draw on an older variety of the Italian language, as well as Latin and Greek, without giving the impression of writing in a dead tongue. Lastly, he declares that, if it had been known at Leopardi's time, the *Zibaldone* would have changed the course of Italian literature. Manzoni, Cardarelli imagines, would not have developed his theory of language, and poetry would have enjoyed a wider variety of perspectives. The three predominant literary trends that followed (Purism, Romanticism, and Aestheticism) would have been surpassed by Leopardi's historical awareness of Italy's national literature. In Cardarelli's view, Leopardi was the first and last to truly reinvent the tongue of the *trecentisti*: 'di essa si fece un gran falò che arse rabbiosamente per tutto il secolo'.<sup>69</sup>

Carlo Bo – belonging, like Landolfi, to the so-called 'third generation' of Italian Hermeticism – would later disparage the recuperation of Leopardi orchestrated by *La Ronda* as an unacceptable manipulation of Leopardi's thought, aimed at hiding its philosophical dimension, specifically its interest in complex and universal questions about human nature.<sup>70</sup> Bo claims that earlier twentieth-century reception of Leopardi in

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<sup>67</sup> Vincenzo Cardarelli, ed., *Il testamento letterario di Giacomo Leopardi: pensieri dello Zibaldone. Scelti, annotati e ordinati in VI capitoli da La Ronda* (Rome: La Ronda Editrice, 1921).

<sup>68</sup> Solmi, 'Leopardi e *La Ronda*', p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Cardarelli, 'Prefazione', in Id., *Il testamento letterario di Giacomo Leopardi*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> '[...] Nello stesso 1962, Carlo Bo scrive due importanti interventi (pubblicati due anni dopo in *Siamo ancora cristiani?* e in *L'eredità di Leopardi e altri saggi*) in cui si interroga sulla crisi di valori che a partire dal secondo dopoguerra ha colpito la letteratura e la società, e che è giunta a piena ed evidente maturazione nelle forme di un linguaggio sempre più privo di «integrità spirituale». [...] Venticinque anni dopo quel 1962, egli ritornerà sulla percezione di un sostanziale sfaldamento dell'autenticità del

Italy concealed a major component of his ‘poetical thought’ (*pensiero poetante*). Bo focuses on the neglect of Leopardi’s philosophical investigations, particularly his assumption that ‘non ci sono verità fisse, non ci sono verità tramutabili in oggetti di poesia, esiste soltanto una verità in atto, in movimento, esiste la verità nell’interrogare, non già nel rispondere’.<sup>71</sup> In Bo’s opinion, the specific configuration of the Italian literary scene, especially under the influence of Croce’s aesthetics, refused this interrogation of Leopardi’s work as potentially dangerous from an intellectual point of view. For this reason, earlier interpreters ignored the most original component of Leopardi’s thought, epitomized by ‘La ginestra’ and by his polemic and doctrinal poems (such as the *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia* and the ‘Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi’).

Bo’s interpretation voiced a general concern that was peculiar to the Hermetics of the third generation, namely the refusal to see Leopardi as a model for rational perfectionism and poetic definiteness. The Hermetic reading of Leopardi instead acknowledged the questioning value of his poetry, and assumed that no rational frames could be applied to its interpretation. In the Hermetics’ view, poetry could not be defined but by poetry itself. While Leopardi’s poetry had been previously interpreted as an attempt to reach already established meanings and values, the Hermetics defined it as rooted in energy, primitive drive, and impulse. For the Hermetics, there were no truths to be found in poetry, with the only truth emerging from the obscure and uncontrollable essence of the poetic act itself. As a consequence, Leopardi’s poetic activity epitomized the poet’s endless attempt to grasp knowledge through the constant pursuit of a truth that cannot be completely attained.<sup>72</sup>

### *Landolfi’s Textual Operation*

The strategy used to construct the appendix consists in an operation of selection, cutting, and re-assemblage. The passages selected and combined in the appendix are taken respectively from [4, 1], [9, 2], [10, 1], [17, 1], [20, 1], [8, 1], [14, 2], [15, 1], [17,

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messaggio letterario’. Chiara Fenoglio, ‘Carlo Bo lettore di Leopardi’, *Studi Urbinati*, 82 (2012), 69-79 <<http://ojs.uniurb.it/index.php/studi-B/article/download/217/209>> [accessed 9 March 2017], (pp. 69, 70).

<sup>71</sup> Carlo Bo, *L’eredità di Leopardi e altri saggi* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1964), p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Piero Bigongiari, ‘Leopardi e l’ermetismo’ in *Leopardi e il Novecento*, pp. 149-167.

1], [5, 1].<sup>73</sup> Two of the selected fragments (9, 2 and 10, 1) had been recorded by Leopardi in the *polizzina* (index) *Teorica delle arti, lettere ec. Parte pratica, storica ec.*; three more (8, 1; 14, 2 and 15, 1) in the index *Romanticismo*. Thus, the passages selected by Landolfi closely cover the dichotomies between reason and nature, and between artificiality and spontaneity, through which Leopardi delineates his critique of Romanticism.

Landolfi's re-assembly of Leopardi's writing begins with an account on the current state of Italian art. It claims first that art has fundamentally changed, having lost its original spontaneity (I).<sup>74</sup> The text notes that, to avoid the risk of mistakes, modern poets produce mediocre works, which are well refined in terms of language and style, but are unable to be recorded and preserved through the centuries (III). Even when modern poets are able to experience marvel and wonder, their rational attempt to uncover the secrets behind such experience makes all real poetic inspiration impossible (IX). The Romantics are particularly at risk on this point, in that their 'sentimental' and 'psychological' language, devoted to a detailed description of the individual's emotions, negates the authenticity of the language of nature (IV). The appendix proposes, instead, the need to act spontaneously, following the example of ancient poets (II). The necessary condition to produce great art is to let oneself be overcome by 'illusioni', a predisposition, peculiar to both 'primitives' and children, who see everything as marvelous (VII, VIII). Paradoxically, such expressive simplicity – the only source of the vagueness that is the condition of possibility of poeticality – can only be achieved through the continuous reading and imitation of ancient poets (IV). Yet an apparent excess of art (which is to say, artificiality and rhetoric) becomes detrimental ('così la tropp' arte nuoce a noi', IV). The last fragment reiterates: 'Ma [si ripete in conclusione] questo senno e questa esperienza sono la morte della poesia'(X).

The argument developed here is threefold: first, the study of art is necessary to create memorable poetry; second, modern times particularly require such study, given the loss of wonder experienced by the modern poet compared to the ancients; third, an excess of study and imitation is detrimental to poetry. The emerging principle seems to be an

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<sup>73</sup> The numbers in brackets indicate the original page in Leopardi's manuscript, followed by an indication of paragraph (the numbers after the comma). For example, [4,1] indicates the fourth page of Leopardi's manuscript, first paragraph.

<sup>74</sup> The following Roman numerals in parenthesis indicate the order of the fragments as in Landolfi's selection.

unsolved paradox: modernity has lost the chance to create authentic poetry as it cannot avoid using the filter of rationality and artifice; this, in turns, negates art.

As seen in Anna Dolfi's interpretation, Landolfi uses the appendix to legitimate his own poetics and its wide reliance on a praxis of imitation and artifice (as is shown by *La pietra lunare* itself). Considering Landolfi's recurrent use of quotations, as well as the intertextuality typical of his narrative style, Anna Dolfi concludes by interpreting the appendix as a self-justifying tool ('epigrafe auto-assolutoria') for Landolfi's own art:

Se, insomma, secondo il giudizio leopardiano e landolfiano dell'*Appendice*, la spontaneità della vera arte pare negata dalla pratica della nuova poesia, spinta dal fallace timore dell'errore all'imitazione degli antichi, è anche vero, *docet* Leopardi, e lo prova nei fatti Landolfi, che l'imitazione, nella raggiunta maturità, nell'impossibile naturalezza dei moderni, è l'unico modo per non discostarsi troppo dalla poesia. Nuoce insomma l'imitazione e insieme giova [...].<sup>75</sup>

Moving from similar premises, Stefano Lazzarin claims that Landolfi's appendix and the novella emphasize the need for modern literature to fall into premeditation and rationality: '*La pietra lunare* è un'opera estremamente meditata e, se si vuole, artificiale, il capolavoro di un'epoca sentimentale: l'*Appendice* non fa che constatarlo, con il rimpianto ironico e lo sguardo freddamente intellettuale che sono prerogativa di ogni letteratura tardiva'.<sup>76</sup>

Both arguments should, however, be rethought through a reconsideration of the notion of 'artificiality' as it emerges in Landolfi's use of Leopardi's voice. In the formulation of the *Zibaldone*, study is necessary in order to create the opposite effect of spontaneity. The aim of Landolfi's Leopardi, in other words, is to recuperate the original value of poetry through an active engagement with tradition, one which does not imply sterile imitation. As a consequence, imitation does not necessarily coincide with artificiality, and *La pietra lunare* itself, notwithstanding its erudite background, its many intertextual references, and its highly mannered style, cannot be considered as an 'artificial' work in the literal understanding of this term. These aspects of Landolfi's work correspond, instead, to Leopardi's principle of the 'invisibility of art': 'E il sommo dell'arte è la naturalezza e il nascondere l'arte, che i principianti o gl'ignoranti non sanno

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<sup>75</sup> Dolfi, 'Ars combinatoria, paradosso e poesia', p. 321.

<sup>76</sup> Lazzarin, 'Dissipatio Ph.G. Landolfi, o l'anacronismo del fantastico', p. 216.

nascondere, benché n'hanno pochissima, ma quella pochissima trasparisce, e tanto fa più stomaco quanto è più rozza [...]’.

Moreover, most of the fragments selected by Landolfi in the appendix (nine out of ten) seem to insist on the need for spontaneity in poetry, as opposed to an excess of rationality and premeditation. The closure of the appendix consists in an assertive sentence, claiming that an excess of experience and rationality (as opposed to openness to wonder and spontaneity) determines the death of poetry: ‘Ma [si ripete in conclusione] questo senno e questa esperienza sono la morte della poesia’. This impression is further confirmed by Landolfi’s cuts, which eliminate passages that suggest the need for imitation of the Classics:

E così chi sente e vuol esprimere i moti del suo cuore ec. l’ultima cosa a cui arriva è la semplicità e la naturalezza e la prima cosa è l’artificio e l’affettazione [...] [i romantici] che mentre bestemmiano l’arte e predicano la natura, non s’accorgono che la minor arte è minor natura [20, 21]

Per guardarci dai vizi e dalla corruzione dello scrivere adesso è necessario un infinito studio e una grandissima imitazione dei Classici, molto molto maggiore di quella che agli antichi non bisognava, senza le quali cose non si può essere insigne scrittore, e colle quali non si può diventar grande come i grandi imitati; [5,1]

E però abbiamo moltissimo più senno e arte che gli antichi, i quali per questo cadevano in infiniti difetti (non conoscendoli) in cui adesso non cadrebbe uno scolaro. [4,1]

Against the use of Leopardi as a model of style, Landolfi ironically employs a calque of Leopardi’s own text in order to denounce the uselessness of sterile imitation. In Landolfi’s view, influence is rather a conversation between authors and readers, as was the case with the column of poetic reviews run by Carlo Betocchi beginning in 1933 in the journal *Frontespizio*. There, Betocchi commented on literary innovation with discussions of the current situation of poetry, reading methodologies, and aesthetics. Betocchi’s work also conveyed the idea of the reading process as a conversation between author and reader, implicitly questioning the monistic and idealistic conception of poetry elaborated by Croce.<sup>77</sup> Thanks to a reluctance for self-commentary and a

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<sup>77</sup> Such a view aimed at challenging the monistic and idealistic conception of poetry elaborated by Croce. ‘La poesia non si consuma nelle ineffabilità del suo essere, ma si ripercuote nell’onda di una

general distrust of literary critics, Landolfi thus relegates the task of critical reflection to a writer of the previous century. By so doing, Landolfi's use of Leopardi conveys his own sense of inadequacy towards his own epoch and his contemporaries, as well as his feeling of belonging to another age.

In this sense, the title itself – ‘Dal giudizio del signor Giacomo Leopardi sulla presente opera’ – provides further hints for understanding the role of the appendix. The initial preposition ‘dal’ (from) is similar to ‘del’ (about), but the difference between the two words is meaningful. In fact, if we consider the literal meaning of the title, the appendix is presented as an extract *from* Leopardi's judgement on *La pietra lunare*. As a consequence, Landolfi fictitiously constructs the *Zibaldone* as a judgement on his work, from which the passages have been excerpted. More specifically, Landolfi draws on sections of the work in which Leopardi had drafted the ideas that would later form the backbone of his *Discorso di un italiano intorno la poesia romantica* (1818). Landolfi thus implicitly locates his novella within the context of the quarrel dividing the ‘Classicists’ and the ‘Romantics’, and explicitly puts it into a dialogue with Leopardi's *Discorso*.

Landolfi's dialogue with the *Discorso* is less untimely than it might seem at first glance. Leopardi's text, a sharp response addressed to Ludovico De Breme's review of Byron's *Giaour* (and more generally to the Romantic movement), took the shape, almost immediately, of a universal reaction against modernity.<sup>78</sup> The same problems addressed by Leopardi – how to be natural in an era in which art is synonymous with artifice and how to inhabit nature in denatured world<sup>79</sup> – were still felt as urgent in the 1920s and 1930s, as we shall see. To clarify further the relevance of the *Discorso*, let us review the original debate between the Classicists and the Romantics. We will then look at the way that this debate was reactivated, at the beginning of the twentieth century, through the quarrels between ‘calligrafisti’ and ‘contenutisti’ within the literary movements of *La Ronda*, the later avant-gardist initiatives of *Solaria*, and the third generation of Florentine Hermetics.

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partecipazione umana’. When participated in, poetry becomes a source of consolation and communion for the poet. Claudio Scarpati, ‘Sulle origini dell’ermetismo critico’, *Vita e pensiero*, 51, 4 (1968), 354-363 (pp. 356-357).

<sup>78</sup> The *Discorso* was first published only sixty years after Leopardi's death in *Scritti vari inediti di Giacomo Leopardi dalle carte napoletane* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1906), pp. 183-272.

<sup>79</sup> Antonio Prete, *Il deserto e il fiore. Leggendo Leopardi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2004), p. 103.



*Tradition and Modernity: Landolfi, the Classicist/Romantic Quarrel, and the Literary Debates of the 1930s*

Leopardi contributed to the Classicist/Romantic quarrel first with the *Lettera ai Sigg.ri compilatori della 'Biblioteca italiana'* (1816) and, two years later, with the *Discorso* (1818). Both texts remained unpublished, and they would only appear at the end of the nineteenth century. By that point, the quarrel had largely been over, but from 1816 to the late 1820s, the controversy had violently polarized the Italian literary world. While Classicists stressed the Greco-Roman roots of Italian culture and encouraged a return to Classical antiquity as a model of poetic praxis, the Romantics suggested an opening up of Italian culture towards the wider European scene, arguing for a stronger connection between literature and the tensions of the present.

Although Leopardi's position did not entirely match the Classicists' arguments, he nonetheless saw Romanticism as a threat to poetry, literature, and culture as a whole. In particular, Leopardi had been inspired to write the *Lettera* and the *Discorso* by two earlier publications respectively: Madame de Staël's article 'Della maniera e la utilità delle traduzioni', published in the first issue of *Biblioteca italiana* in 1816, and Ludovico di Breme's review of the first Italian translation of Byron's *Giaour*.<sup>80</sup> In Staël's and Breme's eyes, the Italian literary scene was dominated by an artificial Classicism detached from reality. The Classicist approach had, as its foundational principle, the precept of imitation, a literary praxis that was grounded in the repetition of stereotyped formalisms and predetermined structures. For Staël, the construction of a new literature, in post-Waterloo Italy, was a necessity that could no longer be delayed, and, in order to contribute to it, Staël suggested that the Italians leave aside the 'antica mitologia' whose fables had been long outdated and abandoned in the rest of Europe. In her view, the post-revolutionary writer needed to choose between 'profound emotions' and empty formalism, between inanity and action. Staël proposed that Italian *letterati* undertake a massive effort to translate foreign literatures, mainly German, English and French, in order to open themselves up to a European dimension which was, in fact, largely identifiable with Northern European trends.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Fabio A. Camilletti, *Classicism and Romanticism in Italian Literature* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 48.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

Leopardi's concerns were generally coherent across the *Lettera* and the *Discorso*. In the first place, he understood 'Modern' and 'Romantic' as synonymous. By questioning Staël's and Breme's arguments, Leopardi thus defied modernity as a whole, arguing that the longing for newness and the worship of the mutability of literary fashion poetry were dissolving the propensity towards immortality that was peculiar to the ancients.<sup>82</sup> Within the context of the Classicist/Romantic quarrel, Leopardi's *Discorso* appears as an ambiguous and complex text, difficult to frame within fixed schemes. Leopardi, indeed, questioned both the rejection of classical tradition promoted by the Italian Romantics and the sterile precepts of imitation reaffirmed by the Classicists themselves. Aiming to support the arguments of Classicism, the *Discorso* equally proposed itself as an artistic manifesto directed at the renovation of Italian culture. Such renovation was to be achieved through a critical engagement with Classical antiquity, of which Italian literature was seen as the most privileged heir. Leopardi did not aspire to a restoration of antiquity, which he felt to be impossible, but rather to the attainment of an ancient effect to produce wonder in the reader. As a consequence, the *Discorso* acknowledged the fracture provoked by the Enlightenment and by the Napoleonic wars, believing that an active engagement with tradition could be a way to face it. Nonetheless, while the initial virulence of the Classicist/Romantic quarrel paved the way for a progressive negotiation between opposing sides,<sup>83</sup> Leopardi's voice was to remain unheard, and his theory of literature would find no followers, at least not in his century.<sup>84</sup>

Tellingly, the rediscovery of Leopardi's *Discorso* and the *Zibaldone* – where, as we have seen, he had collected his preliminary notes in preparation for a response to Breme's review – took place in a moment that was characterized equally by quick modernization and the traumatic experience of war. The impact of technological developments between 1880 and 1910 on people's daily lives was remarkable: homes and streets began to be illuminated with gas and electricity; telephones, gramophones, and wireless communications were invented; the first silent cinemas opened their doors; cars appeared; finally, the growth of the middle class led to increased consumption, and millions of Italians left the country in search of work elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> In literature, beginning with the dawn of the Futurist movement, a sense of expectation and

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> Ann Hallamore Caesar, and Michael Caesar, *Modern Italian literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 143, 144.

discomfort had spread among literary circles. The reasons behind the discomfort of the Italian *letterati* were several: the solitude in which they operated, given the absence of a homogeneous group with a precise theoretical paradigm; the political climate of Fascism which engendered regression, absence of freedom, and intellectual isolation, particularly among the ‘letterati-letterati’ (‘pure writers’) who chose an ‘abstentionist’ position when confronted with the Regime, pursuing their intellectual interests in a kind of ivory tower.<sup>86</sup> Within this environment, Leopardi’s texts touched on issues of continuity and fracture, tradition and modernity, providing early twentieth-century writers with an intellectual model for understanding their own anxieties in a period of historical uncertainty.

In Fascist Italy, the burden of tradition was still heavy, being fed by the conservatism of the literary elite and by the impressive legacy of past glories. At the same time, there emerged an engaged cultural and ideological resistance to what modernity represented.<sup>87</sup> The Fascist Regime encouraged the recovery of the Classical tradition, as shown by the 1923 reform of the education system, which firmly identified the study of Classical antiquity as the cornerstone of education and the formation of public functionaries. One of the effects of this focus on the Classics, further dictated by a general sense of the authority of the past, was the continuing primacy of an elaborate, Latinate syntax in literary prose style. Furthermore, the image of Italy itself as a repository of great cultural heritage meant that the prestige and pride of Italy was continually bound up with the country’s past.<sup>88</sup>

These forces pushed contemporary literature towards a confrontation with Italy’s literary tradition. There is lasting evidence of this process in the extraordinary flourishing of lyric poetry in twentieth-century Italy (and a parallel resistance to the novel in the first half of the century), where the Petrarchan tradition and its legacy thrived even in the loosest, free-form verse (as epitomised by Ungaretti). The core of early twentieth-century Italian literature was grounded in a literary language that was elevated, rich, formal, and lyrical. For example, the Neo-classical, syntactically complex, and highly-imaged prose of the 1920s known as ‘prosa d’arte’ (practised by figures such as Vincenzo Cardarelli and Emilio Cecchi operating within the environment of *La Ronda*) was elaborated, as we have seen, within the programme of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>87</sup> Robert S. C. Gordon, *An Introduction to Twentieth-century Italian Literature: A Difficult Modernity* (London: Duckworth, 2005), p. 43.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

the so-called 'ritorno all'ordine'.<sup>89</sup> Reinforced by Benedetto Croce's aesthetic idealism, these currents supported an ideal of literature as something pure and absolute, existing beyond the concerns of historical mutability, echoing the Classicist claims of the 1820s.<sup>90</sup>

As a consequence, in the 1930s, the tension between impulses of renewal and those of conservatism took the form of a reaction against the past, official culture, and its imposed models.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the Hermeticists' attempt to create a separate language for poetry,<sup>92</sup> detached from the language of communication and addressed to elite readers, has been seen as a reaction against the Fascist use of language, revealing a need to overcome the official channels of culture and create alternative forms of expression.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the journal *Solaria* played an important role in the reaction against contemporary culture and politics. The simultaneous publication of Montale's *Ossi di seppia* (1925) and Julius Evola's *Saggi sull'idealismo magico* (1925), discussed in the pages of the first issue of *Solaria* (1926), contributed to creating a feeling of expectation for coming novelties and for new developments in literature.<sup>94</sup>

In the 1930s, several events advanced the discussion of the relationship between tradition and modernity, art and morality, purist formalism and emphasis on content.<sup>95</sup> The debate focused on two crucial aspects of the new cultural atmosphere: on the one hand, the relation between art and morality, and on the other, an intolerance towards Croce's aesthetic idealism. The predominant feeling was to dismantle the sense of perfection in literature and anything that signified cultural organization, systematized thought, and fixed categories. New revolutionary concepts arose, antithetical to the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>91</sup> Donato Valli, 'Le "occasioni" dell'ermetismo storico' in *Dai solariani agli ermetici: studi sulla letteratura italiana degli anni venti e trenta*, ed. by Francesco Mattesini (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1989), pp. 27-54 (pp. 38, 39).

<sup>92</sup> In the case of Hermeticism, nonetheless, it is important to note co-presence of Classicism and experimentalism. A more classicist phase had, as its model, Montale's *Ossi di Seppia*, while the experimental one, relied on the example of Ungaretti.

<sup>93</sup> Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Il linguaggio della poesia' in Francesco Mattesini, ed., *Dai solariani agli ermetici*, p. 23.

<sup>94</sup> Valli, 'Le "occasioni" dell'ermetismo storico', p. 29.

<sup>95</sup> Giovan Battista Angioletti's article, 'Aura poetica' (1929), was written in response to the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses*. The article asserted the role of poetry as the only path of salvation for the isolated literary man. Angioletti divided *letterati* in two groups: one proclaiming the death of poetry because of developments in science and technology; the other hoping for a rebirth of poetry emerging from changes in time and culture. One year later, in 1930, the publication of the anthology *Scrittori nuovi*, edited by Enrico Falqui and Elio Vittorini, manifested the need for detachment from the previous experiences of Futurism, Crepuscularism, and Impressionism, calling instead for the development of a new kind of poetry. Finally, we should consider the debate around Lorenzo Montano's review of the book by Carlo Franellich, *Caratteri e vicende* (1926). Valli, 'Le "occasioni" dell'ermetismo storico', p. 38.

aesthetic systematization previously promoted by both Croce and Gentile. Elio Vittorini, in particular, declared the incompatibility of literature with tradition and official culture. In an article entitled ‘Scarico di coscienza’, he declared the death of the literary experience found in *La Ronda*, Croce’s aesthetics, and the model of D’Annunzio. Modern literature, in Vittorini’s view, had to originate from an encounter between Italian literature and a wider European tradition,<sup>96</sup> an invitation that appears similar to the one advanced by Staël in the previous century.

In the context of the debate between ‘calligrafisti’ (*letterati* supporting the primacy of formal perfection) and ‘contenutisti’ (writers claiming the importance of content above expression), the separation between poetry and prose, together with the one between formalism and knowledge, became sharper. The literary circle associated with *Solaria* theorized a synthesis between these two positions, proposing a type of novel that would incorporate a lyrical dimension in its prose, following the example of European trends such as the French one. This type of novel retained the need for stylistic refinement without losing contact with social and historical reality. Indeed, criticism towards previous literary experiences (particularly *La Ronda*’s ‘prosa d’arte’) was not directed at refinement of style, but rather at the self-sufficiency of stylistic elegance. The idea of literature as pure escapism and *divertissement* was the real object of criticism for the members of *Solaria*. Anticipating the post-war wave of neorealism, the writers of *Solaria* tried to identify a new social function for literature, in order to maintain the connection between literature and life.<sup>97</sup>

Seen from this angle, Landolfi’s choice of Leopardi appears more meaningful than we might assume at first glance. Just like Leopardi, Landolfi was in his time ‘un antico sopravvissuto al moderno’, having an unusual, isolated perspective and experiencing modernity in a conflictual manner.<sup>98</sup> The two writers seem to have many elements in common, not only from an artistic point of view,<sup>99</sup> but also a biographical one. They both came from aristocratic families living in provincial environments (Recanati and Pico Farnese), torn between the hope of leaving their native environment or staying. They received a strict education while remaining inside vast family manors and

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<sup>96</sup> Valli, ‘Le “occasioni” dell’ermetismo storico’, pp. 40-43.

<sup>97</sup> Lia Fava Guzzetta, ‘Gli anni di «Solaria»: dal frammento al romanzo’ in Francesco Mattesini, ed., *Dai solariani agli ermetici*, pp. 174-177.

<sup>98</sup> This definition comes from Lorenzo Polato, *Il sogno di un’ombra. Leopardi e la verità delle illusioni* (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), p. 55.

<sup>99</sup> See Andrea Cortellessa and Novella Bellucci, eds, *Quel libro senza uguali: Le ‘Operette morali’ e il Novecento italiano* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), p. 200.

libraries. Finally, they both had conflicting relations with paternal figures, and a timid personality.<sup>100</sup> In Calvino's words: 'Un filo che lega Leopardi a Landolfi esiste, tra i due borghi selvaggi e i due paterni ostelli e le due giovinezze spese sulle sudate carte e le due invettive contro le umane sorti all'apparir del vero.'<sup>101</sup> Landolfi's choice of Leopardi as a source of inspiration and as an interlocutor thus seems connected to a sort of personal empathy that extends beyond the importance the poet played in the literary debates of the 1920s and 1930s. Perhaps Landolfi saw himself as the twentieth-century addressee of the 'message in a bottle' mentioned by Leopardi in the last pages of the *Zibaldone*, when referring to his own notebook.<sup>102</sup>

With the composition of *La pietra lunare* and its appendix, Landolfi challenges the mainstream image of Leopardi as a Classicist and rational poet that had been widespread in the political and cultural climate of the 1920s and 1930s. In contrast, Landolfi emphasizes Leopardi's 'Romantic' and 'irrational' essence. He chooses Leopardi as a literary model and the 'reviewer' of his own novella, the same Leopardi who was both promoted by Croce's aesthetics as the poet of order, rationality, and received values, and celebrated by the Fascist Regime as a national poet and emblem of patriotic sentiments and Italy's Classical roots.<sup>103</sup> *La pietra lunare* instead tells the journey of a poet through an irrational world, guided by hybrid creatures and phantoms. This journey ends with a process of initiation, described in the terms of a panic fusion with nature, femininity, and animality. Landolfi's work, therefore, appears more in line with that of the Hermetics, challenging both the aesthetic systematization of Croce and *La Ronda*, as well as the official use of Leopardi carried out by the Regime in support of its nationalistic propaganda.

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<sup>100</sup> Landolfi was sent to the Collegio Cicognini di Prato, whereas Leopardi's education had been mainly entrusted to Count Monaldo and took place inside the family manor. In their family libraries both Landolfi and Leopardi were able to enjoy a degree of humanistic retirement, devoting their time to reading the Classics. However, this ideal phase, for Landolfi, ended in the 1950s, after the dissolution of his entire patrimony, which forced him to write for journals and work as a translator to maintain himself and his family. Even Leopardi had to face economic difficulties once he reached adulthood.

<sup>101</sup> Italo Calvino, 'L'esattezza e il caso' in Id., *Le più belle pagine di Tommaso Landolfi*, pp. 415-426 (p. 421).

<sup>102</sup> 'La civilizzazione tende naturalmente a propagarsi, [...] massime in quanto all'estensione, e finché vi sieno creature civilizzabili, e associabili al gran corpo della civilizzazione, alla grande alleanza degli esseri intelligenti contro alla natura, e contro alle cose non intelligenti. Può servire p. la Lettera a un giovane del 20.o secolo. Il vedersi nello specchio, ed immaginare che v'abbia un'altra creatura simile a se, eccita negli animali un furore, una smania, un dolore estremo' (Zib. 4279-4280). Quoted in Camilletti and Cori, 'Introduction' in Id. *Ten Steps: Critical Inquiries on Leopardi*, p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> Benjamin George Martin, 'Celebrating the Nation's Poets. Petrarch, Leopardi, and the Appropriation of Cultural Symbols in Fascist Italy' in *Donatello among the Blackshirts. History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, edited by Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 187-202.

In this sense, the whole novella functions as a site of resistance against modernization and, particularly, the transition from an agrarian to an urban society and the forces of change Fascist Regime imposed over the agrarian world. The very choice, in *La pietra lunare*, of the rural landscape as a central setting (and almost living participant of the story), not only evokes Leopardi's early representation of nature as an innocent source of beauty and poetic inspiration, but it takes on more powerful symbolic resonance. Literary landscapes, indeed, reveal both a real and a symbolic space, rich with resonances of memory and return, of mourned lost worlds. The representations of the countryside at Landolfi's time<sup>104</sup> represented a way of preserving the rural landscape in the collective memory against the forces of modernization. Landscape itself was portrayed as an idealised locus of childhood, authenticity, and innocence, in tune with the impulses and temporal rhythms of nature rather than culture and history. In addition, considering the ideological value the countryside was charged with by Fascism, its association with fertility and its view of the peasant as emblem of virility, Giovancarolo,<sup>105</sup> the protagonist of the novella, appears as the opposite of the model man promoted by Fascist rhetoric and ideology: not powerful, not virile, not a conqueror, but the victim of the charm of Gurù (the feminine co-protagonist of the novella), and fearful when confronted with peril.

Such feeling of resistance was common among the circle of intellectuals at the Giubbe Rosse café to which Landolfi belonged. This group of *letterati*, indeed, was united by a cautious, but persistent and caustic, criticism of Fascism. As a result, the activities at the café began to attract the attention of the Regime: its members were monitored by the Fascist police; some intellectuals, such as Piero Bigongiari, were asked not to attend meetings at the Giubbe Rosse; Montale, Vittorini, and Bonsanti were listed among the 'soggetti a sorveglianza'; in 1934, *Solaria* was raided after the publication of Vittorini's 'Il garofano rosso'; in 1941, the same fate befell *Argomenti*, the journal edited by Carocci and Raffaello Ramat; in 1943, Landolfi himself was

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<sup>104</sup> Landolfi's *La pietra lunare* is not the only example of a similar representation of the countryside, symbolizing an escape from the modern world. See also later works such as Cesare Pavese, *La luna e il falò* (1948); Elsa Morante, *L'isola di Arturo* (1957); and Elio Vittorini, *Conversazione in Sicilia* (1941).

<sup>105</sup> The name of the protagonist of *La pietra lunare*, in my opinion, reinforces the feeling of brotherhood between Landolfi and Leopardi. Indeed, Giovancarolo may be a combination of the two personal names 'Giovanni' and 'Carlo' or of the adjective 'giovane' and the name 'Carlo'. In this sense, the name's meaning could be that of 'young Carlo', like Leopardi's younger and beloved brother, Carlo Leopardi.

detained for one month, accused of anti-Fascist activity perpetrated with other members of the Giubbe Rosse.<sup>106</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In the context of Landolfi's literary production and of literary modes calling into question the boundaries between real and imaginary in the 1920s and 1930s (from 'realismo magico' to Surrealism), the significance of the appendix must, first and foremost, be related to the discourse of the marvellous and the possibility of its reproduction. Stefano Lazzarin interprets the appendix's central problem – the possibility of creating poetry in modern times – in light of the genre of the Fantastic. According to Lazzarin, given the need to rely on artifice to write modern poetry, the traditional nineteenth-century Fantastic becomes unsuitable and needs to be replaced with the extreme, elaborated forms of the 'meta-fantastic'. In Lazzarin's view, the role of the appendix consists in validating a historical situation – the risk and the need to be rational and artificial in modernity – through the use of irony:

Il discorso sulla poesia si fa discorso sul fantastico, e sulla difficoltà di praticare il genere in un'epoca che 'non ci permette più di parlare se non con arte'; il fantastico classico, per eccesso di intelligenza, di ironia, di artificialità, diventa sempre più impossibile e deve cedere il posto - i tempi lo esigono! - alle forme 'lavorate, studiate, pulitissime', alle forme estreme, del meta-fantastico. [...] I moderni continuano pure a fare del fantastico e a mettere in scena i lupi mannari come facevano i padri [...]; sappiano però che non possono più fare astrazione dalla lucida coscienza, dall'arte raffinata, dal controllo ininterrotto della ragione.<sup>107</sup>

In Lazzarin's opinion, the appendix reveals the intrinsic anachronism of the marvellous and testifies to the development of the intellectualistic, rational, and ironic forms characteristic of the twentieth-century Fantastic. According to Lazzarin, *La pietra lunare*, like the rest of Landolfi's production, signals the end of the tradition of the marvellous and manifests the first signs of a gradual transformation of the Fantastic into new forms, suggesting a new constructed and premeditated nature ('*La pietra lunare* è

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<sup>106</sup> Ernesto Livorni, 'The Giubbe Rosse Café in Florence. A Literary and Political Alcove from Futurism to Anti-Fascist Resistance', *Italica*, 86, 4 (2009), 602-622.

<sup>107</sup> Lazzarin, 'Dissipatio Ph.G. Landolfi, o l'anacronismo del fantastico', p. 215.



un'opera estremamente meditata').<sup>108</sup> However, even if the idea of a meticulous construction of the novella were correct,<sup>109</sup> such premeditation is precisely meant to dissimulate its intertextuality and stylistic refinement, as I have tried to demonstrate above.

The recourse to art and reason in *La pietra lunare* is a literary strategy meant to reach the irrational and return to the original nucleus of poetry. As theorized by Leopardi, this nucleus resides in an archetypal shock provoked by the astonished observation of nature. *La pietra lunare* shows this principle at many levels, particularly in a general absence of boundaries between the human and the inhuman: in the novella, as we will see in the following chapter, the human and the animal are merged (and in this we could perhaps hear an echo of Leopardi's critique to the anthropocentrism of Byron's poetry in the *Discorso*); the aesthetic categories of beauty and ugliness are altered (see, for example, the attractiveness of Gurù's animal counterpart); lastly, the feminine and the masculine, together with the Christian and the pagan, are blended. All these elements of the novella are characterized by an absence of structures and limits, thereby formally enacting the effect of panism described in Giovancarlo's initiation. The absence of structures and rigid rules is also visible at a stylistic and linguistic level. Indeed, there exists a mixture of different sources (from high literature to popular folklore and legends, from foreign literature to autochthonous traditions) and registers (the literary language is made up of both precious archaisms, Latinisms, together with dialectal forms and proverbs). All these elements challenge Croce's 'ritorno all'ordine' as well as the Classicist principles of unitarism. By means of various literary techniques, Landolfi, like Leopardi, aimed at producing the effects of wonder and uncanniness felt by the ancients, who were themselves dominated by illusion and superstition.

Landolfi's work also allows us to problematize Calvino's view of Leopardi as a forefather of the model of the allegedly rational, ironic, and intellectual components of the twentieth century Fantastic. In fact, key themes of Calvino's reading of Leopardi

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 216

<sup>109</sup> On the short periods of composition of Landolfi's works, see Maccari 'Landolfi, la via del disinganno', p. 18: one month and half for *La pietra lunare* (Pico, July-August 1937), a few months for *Le due zitelle* (1943), one month for *Cancroregina* (1949), and two weeks for *Ottavio di Saint-Vincent*. Maccari comments: 'Tempi incredibilmente brevi e concentrati, immersione totale alla maniera di D'Annunzio, intervallati da lunghi spazi di latenza dedicati alla *vita*'. On the corrections of the manuscript, Idolina Landolfi reports that the first 12 pages actually present 'numerose correzioni e brani cancellati'. Another group of 24 pages, from the beginning of first chapter to the beginning of third chapter, instead, 'appaiono quelle d'una ricopiatura in bella', with rare corrections and a clear handwriting.

(including his playful attitude, meta-literary approach, and an enlightened and cerebral understanding of fantasy) have been questioned and problematized by recent criticism.<sup>110</sup> According to Camilletti and Cori,

Leopardi would become the spiritual father of Calvino's anti-Gothic use of fantastic themes, as he detaches himself from the macabre vogues of Northern literatures (which, for Calvino, are intrinsically alien from Italian sensibility) by recuperating the legacies of Lucian and Voltaire, and thus reconciling fantastic literature with Enlightenment rationalism by means of a 'mente lucida, controllo della ragione sull'ispirazione istintiva o inconscia, disciplina stilistica'<sup>111</sup>

Calvino's Leopardi is a postmodernist *ante litteram*, the poet of lightness and disenchantment, already embodying many of the features that we connect to Calvino himself.<sup>112</sup> Calvino, indeed, sees Leopardi as the intermediate point of a sub-cluster of writers in the Italian literary tradition – running in a line from Cavalcanti to Ariosto and Galileo – who all share a similar intellectual use of the imagination. Such a line culminates in the twentieth-century model of the cerebral Fantastic, with the figure of Calvino himself as its last representative. Calvino locates Landolfi in this same genealogy of the intellectual Fantastic. Yet, although Calvino's argumentation is well constructed, his canon of the Fantastic needs to be re-contextualized. In my view, and on the basis of the previous analysis, the use Landolfi made of Leopardi is, contrary to Calvino's view, one of spontaneity, irrationality, hybridity, ancestrality and stylistic blending.

Most importantly, both Leopardi and Landolfi use their works for recovering autochthonous materials as literary sources. Landolfi, in particular, revitalises the repertoire of the Northern European Gothic by firmly locating it in the context of provincial Italy, seen in his mixture of stereotyped Fantastic settings (the manor/castle,

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<sup>110</sup> Without direct reference to Calvino or to his interpretation, the authors of the present introduction have, however, touched on several core aspects of his reflections: in 'Il passo di Nerina. Memoria, storia e formule di pathos ne *Le ricordanze*', *Italianistica*, 39: 2 (2010), 41-66, Fabio Camilletti has reassessed the function of memory in Leopardi's works in the light of the Freudian concept of the Uncanny, making a connection between 'Le ricordanze' and the genre of the Fantastic tale in German-speaking areas; in "'Di temenza è sciolto": pensiero e poesia della soglia', *Rivista Internazionale di Studi Leopardiani*, 7 (2011), 41-68, Paola Cori has analyzed the 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie', a pivotal text for Calvino's interpretation, stressing, beyond the traditional interpretations of this *Operetta*, its theological substratum.

<sup>111</sup> Camilletti and Cori, 'Introduction' in *Iid.*, *Ten Steps: Critical Inquiries on Leopardi*, p. 8.

<sup>112</sup> 'The fascination for meta-literary games and dissimulated quotations, a joyful and gracious irony, a sharpness and levity in style, and a self-aware employment of literary masks'. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the abandoned village) and clichés (witchcraft, necromancy, lycanthropy, and metamorphosis) with local traditions (the village festival in Pico, traditional clothing, the religious procession), landscapes (the mountains and valleys of Ciociaria, particularly the Aurunci Mountains), and myths (the goat, symbol of Faunus, ancient Italic God; the legendary ‘briganti’; popular legends). In so doing, Landolfi also challenges the view that the supernatural lacks appeal in an Italian environment, asserting instead the possibility of an Italian irrational Fantastic, which draws on popular, primitive, and folkloric imagery.<sup>113</sup> His goal is to return to a state of being ‘shepherd boys’. As Leopardi writes: ‘il cuor nostro non è cangiato, ma la mente sola’. The mind must step back, in order to allow those illusions to re-emerge, being the only path to enjoyment.

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<sup>113</sup> A similar invitation to a rediscovery of popular oral sources for literature comes from Cesare Pavese’s remarks on the use of myth. Pavese refers to the spontaneity and freshness of American contemporary literature as an example of a culture still preserving the sensitiveness to and primitivism of a mythical dimension. Pavese mentions plainness of style and highly evocative literary language as characteristic elements of this type of spontaneous literature: ‘Gli scontenti della narrativa contemporanea dovranno riflettere a un caso curioso: niente somiglia ai malfamati procedimenti costruttivi (ambientazione sommaria; dialogo scheletrico; disinvoltura di paesaggi; natura ridotta a simbolo) dei nostri giovani narratori che i miti e le leggende di ogni terra nei quali si è espresso oralmente per millenni il gioco narrativo della fantasia’. Cesare Pavese, ‘Raccontare è come ballare’ (1948) in *La letteratura americana e altri saggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), pp. 325-327 (p. 327).

## Chapter 2: *La pietra lunare*: The City and Outer Space

### *Introduction*

Landolfi's *La pietra lunare*<sup>114</sup> was published as a volume in 1939, that is to say at a peculiar historical moment, when the Fascist dictatorship was becoming radicalized, racial laws were promulgated, and the 'Pact of Steel' between Nazi Germany and Italy was stipulated. If looked at in this historical light, the novella appears to incorporate several tensions of that time. Subtle references to Fascist symbols, its system of values and bio-political interventionism are scattered throughout the text. In chapter I, as I will argue in the following pages, the ambiguous expression 'l'immensa ombra di una croce' (p. 21) may refer to the swastika; indeed, other allusions and subtle references interspersed within the novella's texture seem to suggest the possibility of reading it as an oblique expression of a socio-political critique.

At the same time, whereas criticism has repeatedly defined *La pietra lunare* as a highly representative text in Landolfi's pathway to the Fantastic,<sup>115</sup> and identified the novella's main literary sources among texts belonging to German and French Romanticism, the anthropological sources of Landolfi's inspiration have been generally overlooked. This omission is particularly relevant since *La pietra lunare* widely draws on a repertoire of themes and clichés on the borderline between literature and folklore. In doing so, Landolfi demonstrates that the Italian way to the Gothic and the Fantastic does not need to rely exclusively on foreign and 'high-brow' sources. In his use of popular traditions, legends and myths, all drawn from a Mediterranean imagery connected to agrarian myths and rituality, Landolfi, in line with Leopardi – as we saw in the preceding chapter – shows how an Italian Fantastic can count on its own autochthonous sources of mystery and imagination.

Moving from these considerations, this chapter provides a new reading of Landolfi's *La pietra lunare* as a site of resistance against socio-political transformations (particularly against the impositions of the Fascist regime) through its combination of

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<sup>114</sup> I will quote from the following edition: Tommaso Landolfi, *La pietra lunare. Scene dalla vita di provincia*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milan: Adelphi, 1995). Page numbers will henceforth be provided within brackets, in the main text.

<sup>115</sup> In this respect, however, scholars tend to be divided. As mentioned in the Introduction, some see Landolfi's production as divided into one traditional phase and another one corresponding to the features of the neo-Fantastic postulated by Calvino. Other scholars believe that each work results from a mixture of the two components.

literary Fantastic and folkloric themes. While other works by Landolfi have been interpreted in a political way, particularly the short story ‘Il mar delle blatte’,<sup>116</sup> little attention has been paid to the possible political value of *La pietra lunare*.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, I will interpret the tension between the city and the countryside, as well as another series of binary oppositions – paganism and catholicism; human and animal; normativity and festivity; unity and hybridity – in terms of a tension between control and primitive drives, rationalism and popular superstitions, normativity and diversity, civilisation and nature. These tensions will help me to contextualize *La pietra lunare* as an answer to a set of political issues: the transition from an agrarian to an urban society and the migration of millions of Italians from rural areas; the loss of beliefs and modes of thought belonging to the countryside sphere; the threat of Fascist modernization against peripheral tradition; and the debate on race and on the boundaries of ‘humanity’. My reading will be supported by the use of anthropological theories and categories, particularly Van Gennep’s and Victor Turner’s concept of liminality and Carlo Ginzburg’s interpretation of witchery. Through my analysis, I will argue that, through its marginalised and depopulated settings, and through challenging fixed categories and boundaries – e.g. the one between human and animal – *La pietra lunare* locates the possibility of subterranean resistance against the forced modernisation imposed first by the nation-state and later by the Fascist regime.

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<sup>116</sup> ‘Il mar delle blatte’ (1939) has been read as an allegorical representation of mass rebellion to Fascism. The dark swarming sea of roaches in the short story has been interpreted as an allegory of the compact mass, calm and unanimous until one of its members is touched (i.e. squashed by a sailor). The assault on the ship and the transition from innocence to savagery represent, in this view, the unanimous rebellion against the tyrant. See Oreste Macrí, *Tommaso Landolfi. Narratore poeta critico artifice della lingua*, pp. 122-23.

<sup>117</sup> A notable exception is a recent contribution by Keala Jewell, who interprets the novella as a denunciation of Fascist bio-political interventions. Jewell suggests that the were-animals depicted in the novella challenge the effectiveness of discourses of controlled population management; that the outline of a Fantastic journey moving from the plains to the mountains criticizes the concrete attempt made by the regime to manage and transform the grazing populations and the culture of transhumance. However, her interpretation appears at times quite extreme, particularly when, discussing Gurù’s controlling position above the other characters and animals, the author claims that she represents a female version of the male despotic power at the centre of Fascist ideology and as a ‘reverse, female mirror image of a domineering dictator’. Indeed, in my view, Gurù’s role is of guidance and her strong character must compensate Giovancarolo’s lack of personality and help him through his process of maturation. See Keala Jewell, ‘Italian Rural Gothic’, p. 65.

*An oblique political critique?*

In the first chapter of *La pietra lunare*, during Giovancarlo's visit to his relatives' place, his uncle tells him about a black cross he saw in the garden on a night of waning moon. He defines the apparition in terms of an almost paranormal phenomenon:

Lo zio parlava ora d'una tal quale croce nera. Sosteneva in particolare di aver visto, una notte di luna calante, su un folto di lauri nel giardinetto davanti alla cucina, l'immensa ombra d'una croce, senza che fosse mai riuscito a scoprire l'origine del fenomeno (come lo chiamava). Distrattamente, a sentir questo, Giovancarlo si volse verso il luogo indicato; traverso la porta esterna aperta, all'estremo del giardinetto si vedeva infatti nereggiare una massa di fogliame.

The semantic sphere of blackness ('nereggiare') and the oppressive immensity of the cross may possess an implicitly political significance: black was the colour of Fascism, and precisely a black hooked cross, the swastika, was the symbol of Nazi Germany. Indeed, the negotiations for the alliance between Germany and Italy began in 1937, while Landolfi was drafting his novella. After initially declining Hitler's offer, the crisis of Italo-French relations induced Mussolini to accept in January 1939.<sup>118</sup>

Giovancarlo's visit to his relatives is interspersed with references to Fascism. Another passage seems to ironically discuss the Fascist instrumental use of rhetoric and propaganda, and particularly the Fascist re-fashioning of the myth of Garibaldi as a national hero. While the family members are engaged in an animated discussion, the cousin chooses to play a record:

Il cugino, dopo lungo rimestare, aveva trovato finalmente il disco di suo gusto; postolo sul piatto, aveva avviata la macchina, sicché quando nessuno se lo aspettava, distratti com'erano gli altri dalle comuni imprecazioni, echeggiarono più stridenti di quanto non convenisse, nella cucina, le note di *Torna Garibaldi*. Come se non avesse atteso che questo segnale, il fratello della zia si levò di scatto e senza far motto prese a marciare in lungo e in largo a passo di parata, seguendo la musica. (20)

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<sup>118</sup> Mario Toscano, *The Origins of the Pact of Steel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), pp. 396-97.

The song mentioned in this passage is *Torna, torna Garibaldi*, also known as *Canzone garibaldina*, composed by Rodolfo Falvo and Libero Bovio around 1914. The piece is a battle hymn, celebrating the sacrifice of the Italian volunteers of the Garibaldi Legion that fought in France against the Germans in 1914, before Italy entered the Great War. Giuseppe Garibaldi II, the grandson of Italy's national hero, was the head of the French Foreign Legion, entirely composed of Italian citizens.<sup>119</sup> The song lyrics are quite conventional and exalt the return of Garibaldi's national heroism and desire for freedom, symbolized by the red shirt:

Torna, torna Garibaldi  
Torna la camicia rossa  
Bella e santa ci proteggerà.

Bruno prima, poi Costante  
e poi mille e mille eroi morti  
gridan: Libertà!

On the one hand, the inclusion of *Torna Garibaldi* ironizes the stereotyped lyrics and the bombastic patriotic rhetoric that characterize this kind of song, which had been deeply incorporated into Fascist propaganda ('Ricamerai la carabina e il fiore / nei tre colori della tua bandiera / nell'ora del periglio e del cimento / sventolerai la bandierina al vento').<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, the song itself possesses a double symbolic value, given the polysemy of Garibaldi as an ambiguous national hero, subject to leftist as well as to reactionary appropriation.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, Garibaldi's myth was revived many times throughout history and in different forms: one of them was Fascist propaganda. Fascism proposed itself as a form of genuine 'garibaldinismo odierno', and the black shirts were presented as natural descendants of the red shirts. Mussolini's personal admiration for Garibaldi was connected to his ambition to be the new national hero, the leader of a second revolution, and to build a military national state. The same title of 'duce',

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<sup>119</sup> Eva Cecchinato, «La rossa avanguardia dell'Argonna» in *Camicie rosse: I garibaldini dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra* (Bari: Laterza, 2014), pp. 280-283. See also: Patrizia Dogliani, Gilles Peicout, Alessio Quercioli, *La scelta della patria. Giovani volontari nella Grande Guerra* (Rovereto: Museo storico italiano della guerra, 2006).

<sup>120</sup> The song will become very popular in 1957, when it is sung by Claudio Villa in a scene of the movie *Canzone del destino* directed by Marino Girolami. In the movie, the hymn is sung just after the announcement of Italy's declaration of war on Austria-Hungary.

<sup>121</sup> Mario Isnenghi, *Garibaldi fu ferito: il mito, le favole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012).

adopted by Mussolini, was first used by Garibaldi's soldiers and then by D'Annunzio during the Republican experience of Fiume. The use of 'garibaldinismo' on the part of Fascism was detached from its ideological and political implications, and directed to militarist propaganda and the legitimization of political violence: in this light, the march on Rome itself could be legitimized as the accomplishment of Garibaldi's attempt to reach the eternal city during his revolutionary campaign; Mussolini proclaimed himself the reincarnation of the 'spirito garibaldino' and visited Caprera several times to pay homage to his alleged spiritual 'ancestor'.<sup>122</sup> Seen from this perspective, the 'Torna Garibaldi' refrain acquires new and more disquieting resonances: Mussolini himself, as early as in 1918, had used the title of Falvo's and Bovio's already famous song for an article he wrote in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, a few months after the defeat of Caporetto in November 1917. In the article, the Duce-to-be exalted the spirit of the national hero Garibaldi for his ability to involve thousands of citizens, of any age and social status, in the fight for national independence and pride ('migliaia e migliaia di persone di ogni condizione, di ogni età').<sup>123</sup>

Giovancarlo's cousin, who takes the record of *Torna Garibaldi* and instantly begins to march and parade around the room, can thus be taken as an emblem, no less tragic than ironic, of the power of Fascist propaganda to enter the subconscious of individuals. By mimicking the military exercises supported by the regime and imposed on the youth, the young man's body displays the pervasiveness of an authoritarian education, through which individual bodies are disconnected from their will and respond mechanically to the rhythmic patterns of bombastic hymns. This impression is reinforced by Landolfi's insistence on the semantic sphere of irrationality: Giovancarlo's cousin is 'alquanto svanito di cervello', and takes the song as an irresistible impulse to march. Tellingly, Landolfi defines his physical response by reiterating the vocabulary of propaganda: his desire is an 'irresistibile prurigine', his resistance qualifies as an 'intensità indomabile', and his will is 'superiore alle sue forze'. The connection appears even more striking if we consider where the scene is set: we are actually in a provincial environment and

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<sup>122</sup> Emilio Gentile, 'Benito Mussolini' in *Giuseppe Garibaldi due secoli di interpretazioni* ed. by Lauro Rossi (Rome: Gangemi, 2010), pp. 275-84 (pp. 278-80).

<sup>123</sup> Rosario Forlenza and Bjørn Thomassen, 'From Myth to Reality and Back Again: The Fascist and Post-Fascist Reading of Garibaldi and the Risorgimento', *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 2, 3 (2011), 263-81.



Mussolini himself believed the majority of the regime's consent came from the agricultural districts.<sup>124</sup>

Within the context of the novel, the young man's reaction and Landolfi's insistence on its irrational origin also seem to connect to the belief that the power Fascism exercised on people's minds and their routines possessed magical connotations, and that Fascism was actually a 'mystical' or magical form of possessing and directing people's will. In view of Italian esoteric groups, of which Landolfi was surely aware, Fascism used subtler and more complex strategies than political propaganda to exert its influence on the psyche. According to the UR circle, grouped around the journal of esoteric sciences directed by Julius Evola, public opinion was shaped by 'un'azione psichica insensibile e diffusa che potrebbe paragonarsi a quella di un contagio' exercising 'un'influenza subcosciente di cui l'individuo non si accorge e che, dopo il primo momento, gli crea la disposizione effettiva per un dato ordine di persuasioni'.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, the UR circle believed that an 'operare magico' was essential in directing or defending individuals from such magico-political contagion: from 1927, instructions to build 'catene magiche' were divulged in the 'UR' journal. Such guidelines were quite specific, illustrating concentration exercises to practise at established hours in the day in groups or individually. Such 'esperienze di catena' were then reported in journals. The target was to create a collective and fluid energy ('determinare una forza fluidica collettiva') able to operate as an active influence in the Italian cultural, spiritual and political scenario.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Landolfi's acquaintance with the circles meeting in the Giubbe Rosse café in Florence would cause him to be detained for one month accused of anti-Fascist activity in 1943.<sup>126</sup> As stated earlier, the intellectuals belonging to the circle of Florentine Hermetics of the third generation (including Landolfi himself) attempted to rediscover their own poetic voice in response to the pressures of the Fascist regime and the classicist legacy it proposed. The Hermetics made their anti-Fascist comments obliquely, never attacking the regime directly, but rather withdrawing from its empty rhetoric and values. Landolfi seems to adopt a similar type of ideological stance, by giving birth to a magico-political novella in which

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<sup>124</sup> Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist spectacle: the aesthetics of power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 149.

<sup>125</sup> 'Fascismo e influenze collettive', *KRUR*, 9.10.11 (1929) quoted by Marco Rossi, 'Neopaganesimo e arti magiche nel periodo fascista' in *Esoterismo*, ed. by Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), pp. 599-627 (p. 615).

<sup>126</sup> Ernesto Livorni, 'The Giubbe Rosse Café in Florence', 602-622.

Fascism is criticized as a form of black magic, taking hold of people's minds and bodies. As Oreste Macrí comments, the majority of the themes Landolfi explores belong to modern dystopia: the rebellion of the oppressed, including women, the elderly, and animals; the idealization of youth; the crisis of all values and beliefs; and the refusal of technology and science. At the same time, the major discrepancy between Landolfi's poetic and utopian/dystopian fiction precisely relies on his 'soggettivazione autobiografico-simbolica' and the importance attributed to poetic style. As a consequence, Landolfi's political critique is scarcely direct, being incorporated into a 'labirinto di segni che lo rivelano nello stesso momento in cui lo occultano, eccitando, esasperando l'avventura della conoscenza e della rappresentazione'.<sup>127</sup> This aspect, however, is one of the specificities – and, at the same time, strengths – of fantasy as a genre. As Rosemary Jackson writes:

The forms taken by any particular fantastic text are determined by a number of forces which intersect and interact in different ways in each individual work. Recognition of these forces involves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy, and makes it impossible to accept a reading of this kind of literature which places it somehow mysteriously 'outside' time altogether.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed, as I will show in the next paragraphs, Gothic and Fantastic settings, atmospheres and motifs in *La pietra lunare* prove to be suitable to convey anxieties linked to the political and cultural scenario of 1930s Italy.

### *From the city to the province: questioning the Fascist myth of the land*

From its very title and subheading, 'scene dalla vita di provincia', *La pietra lunare* firmly locates its setting in an extra-urban space, generating a contrast between the rationality and conventionality of the cityscape and the magical marginality of the countryside. What was the function of Landolfi's choice to stress the 'provincial' setting of his work?

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<sup>127</sup> Oreste Macrí, *Tommaso Landolfi: narratore, poeta, critico, artefice della lingua*, pp. 122, 123.

<sup>128</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the literature of subversion*, p. 3.

The reference to the ‘province’ can be read in the light of the modern meanings that came to be attached to ‘provinciality’ – stressing its small, traditional, and close-knit dimension – compared to other kinds of community. Literary representation of the countryside contributed to preserving the provincial landscape and its traditions in the memory against the forces of change. These forces had been at work since Italian unification, when the administrative units called ‘regions’ came into being and local communities came to be seen as ‘peripheries’ to a centre. Afterwards, from the beginning of the twentieth century, millions of Italians slowly moved away from rural centres, concurrently with a shift from an agrarian to an urban society. The survival of distinct local communities was felt to be threatened. Institutionalized ways to preserve them from a cultural point of view took various shapes, including museums, local monuments, war memorials and the promotion of lay and religious rituals such as the carnival, local village festivals (*sagra*), and the patron saints day (*festa del santo patrono*).<sup>129</sup>

The representation of the countryside in *La pietra lunare*, however, does not merely evoke nostalgia for the lost dimension of life in the countryside. If we consider the emphasis the Fascist regime put on the rural landscape, at both a bio-political and cultural level, the novella seems to challenge a system of values and political interventions taking place in the years of its composition. As I will show in the following pages, Landolfi represents the countryside as the site for the return of a lost experience of time and of the sacred. The experience of cyclical time and festivity that is still attainable in nature, as opposed to the time and rhythms imposed by culture and history, seems here to evoke the poet’s need to escape modernity in order to reach an authentic artistic experience. The novella, therefore, appears as a site of resistance against forces of change at different levels, particularly at a political level.

For instance, representing the countryside as the place where ancestral, irrational forces resurface seems to address Fascist politics of the land. Fascist rhetoric emphasized the city/countryside divide, opposing the moral condemnation of urban life and the moral and physical healthiness of rural environments. Mussolini, in particular, praised the peasants’ and farmers’ spirit of discipline and sacrifice,<sup>130</sup> seeing them as truly embodying the Fascist values of courage, warlike spirit, patriotism, and sense of

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<sup>129</sup> David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 18-19.

<sup>130</sup> Falasca-Zamponi, p. 149.

duty. Mussolini defended the peasants' right to land as a reward for their service in the trenches of the First World War: 'La terra ai contadini' (land to the peasants) had been a popular slogan during the Great War.<sup>131</sup> Rural qualities were supposed to grant moral health and well-being to the nation and its future development. The ideological investment of Fascism in rural areas also took the shape of political and economic initiatives aiming to facilitate a return to the countryside. One of the regime's first measures in the field of agriculture was the campaign for the 'Battle of Wheat', launched in 1925. The campaign aimed to increase the production of wheat in Italy by adopting intensive forms of cultivation. The target was to reach food autarchy. The measures were supposed to encourage productivity by increasing the use of fertilizers, high-quality seeds and mechanical systems. Mussolini put significant propagandistic effort into promoting the campaign, ultimately circulating his own image as a farmer through photographs published in magazines.<sup>132</sup> This campaign naturally led to the reclamation campaign of the Pontine marshes in the 1930s. This intervention was one of the most publicized symbols of the Fascist era, promoting the regime's ability to build life from death. The reclaimed lands were converted into arable fields meant to spur the rise in wheat production. Fascism was promoted as granting life and growth. Not only wheat fields, but new towns were built from the swamps, such as Littoria, Pontinia and Sabaudia. The transformed marshes exemplified the regime's victory over nature.

Both the Battle of Wheat and the reclamation of the Pontine Ager ultimately communicated Mussolini's vision of Fascist Italy and the role of agriculture in the virile ascent of Italy to an empire. Indeed, the promotion of a rural way of life was connected to the idea that rural life promoted higher birth rates. Mussolini believed those who lived in the countryside, unlike urbanites, to be more fecund. Hence, they could provide the regime with the numerous population required for building the empire.<sup>133</sup> The fruitfulness of the countryside and of 'mother earth' was, in this model, opposed to the sterility of the city. The return of the population to the countryside was meant to favour growth, offsetting urban sterility. This increased mobility of people in physical space and the creation of new cities far from 'sterile' urban centres had an impact on the very perception of space itself (i.e. where one was socially located).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 155-62.

<sup>134</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society*, p. 7.

This view of the countryside as the place embodying the values of the traditional family, hard work, and simple joys seems to be altered in Landolfi's novella. Not only are Gurù and all the other lunar creatures populating the countryside sterile, but disturbing forms of sexuality and reproduction take place in *La pietra lunare*: Gurù has intercourse with a goat, with a subsequent reciprocal metamorphosis; an orgiastic gathering of hybrid creatures takes place on the mountain before the apparition of the three Mothers; the invasion of diaphanous creatures in the village leads, among other consequences, to the birth of 'il bambino col corpo striato e le corna di vitello' (145).

From a cultural point of view, the novella also echoes the 'city vs. countryside' controversy that took place in the cultural and literary field in that period, and particularly in journals. The tension between the countryside and the city was articulated through the philosophical and anthropological oppositions spontaneity vs. rationality, autochthonous vs. foreign, nature vs. culture. One of the products of the controversy was the birth of two literary movements with their related journals. The so-called movement of 'Strapaese' originated in 1924 and had as its main instrument of propaganda the Fascist journal *Il Selvaggio*, followed, from 1926, by *L'Italiano*. In agreement with the ideology of the regime, *Strapaese* supported the defence and valorisation of the national territory and culture and the rediscovery of local traditions and customs.<sup>135</sup> *Strapaese* adopted the same Fascist view of a mythical original Italic race to be refreshed through the valorization of a provincial and agrarian lifestyle.<sup>136</sup> On the contrary, the movement *Stracittà* promoted opening up Italian culture, both in terms of the reception of European influences and the diffusion of Italian culture abroad.<sup>137</sup>

The distance between the two spheres of the city and the countryside in *La pietra lunare* is first delineated through the ironic representation of the attitude and lifestyle of

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<sup>135</sup> As Giorgio Vecchiotti writes: 'Strapaese è l'unico luogo dove si respira aria italiana, dove si pensa e si agisce all'italiana, dove tutto, grande e piccolo, bello e brutto è italiano, tanto italiano schietto e inconfondibile che vien detto anche arcitaliano. Strapaese è l'anello di congiunzione fra il passato e il presente; è il punto di partenza per domani. Qui s'impara a conoscere la tradizione d'Italia; s'impara a sentirla, a capirla, ad amarla, a riviverla, a intuirne forza, utilità, necessità' (quoted in Adriano Seroni, 'Fascismo e riviste letterarie italiane negli anni Trenta', *Studi Storici*, 23.3 (1982), 541-554 (550).

<sup>136</sup> 'Il Salvatico è colui che si salva; intendendo cioè per selvaggio chi rimane profondamente fedele alle tradizioni della sua terra e della sua casa'. Mino Maccari, 'Difesa dell'italianità', *Il Selvaggio*, 2 (1927), 5-6.

<sup>137</sup> Nonetheless, criticism has underlined how the contrast between the two movements was more apparent than real: '[...] Non esisteva nella realtà un modello urbano come quello auspicato da *900*, come non corrispondeva all'Italia rurale la provincia degli strapaesani [...]. Nella forma, perché molti artisti passarono da uno schieramento all'altro o collaborarono ad ambedue contemporaneamente, dimostrando come, almeno per loro, la differenza tra le due trincee non fosse incolmabile'. Luciano Troisio, 'Introduzione' in *Le Riviste di Strapaese e Stracittà: Il Selvaggio, L'Italiano, 900*, ed. by Luciano Troisio (Treviso: Canova, 1975), pp. 9-49 (p. 33).

Giovancarlo and his relatives. The beginning of the story sees Giovancarlo arriving from the capital in a small village called 'P.'<sup>138</sup> Giovancarlo is a young university student and a writer. His relatives live in the marginality of the province and in accordance with its dynamics. Their appearance reveals an existence of manual work and in contact with the earth ('lo zio si guardava le unghie sporche', 13; 'il piccolo figlio di costei sul cui capo s'espandevano larghe croste di sudicio', 11). The family is sketched like a painting in which every component plays a conventional role, with the uncle in a prominent patriarchal position:

Lo zio, in maniche di camicia e con certi pantaloni incartapecoriti che gli torcevano le gambe come quelle dei cavallerizzi, reggendo la porta con una mano, coll'altra faceva grandi gesti di benvenuto e poi d'invito a entrare. Dietro di lui, come in un affresco del Ghirlandaio, si vedevano spuntare le teste degli altri componenti la famiglia... (11)

Their welcoming attitude, the immediacy of thought and language, and their naïve appearance are emphasised and described through the filter of irony.

From the point of view of these people, the city seems to belong to a remote and mysterious dimension. Giovancarlo's cousin's question 'Come va come va quando sei arrivato che si fa in città?', emphasized by the lack of punctuation, gives an idea of the anxious curiosity felt for the city, communicating, at the same time, his illiteracy. The cousin's attention is particularly attracted by the night life and the fashionable words attached to it: 'Il cugino chiese allora dei locali notturni della capitale, scivolando nel discorso con visibile soddisfazione le parole tabrin girl champagne' (13). Due to a lack of interests in common between Giovancarlo and his relatives, a reciprocal feeling of indifference and boredom soon emerges ('A sentire che di locali notturni Giovancarlo non s'intendeva gran che, il cugino lo guardò con malmentito disprezzo e si tacque, 13). The uncle, then, makes an attempt to find a topic of conversation that can be of interest for Giovancarlo:

Lo zio allora si chiari la gola e, nell'intento di portare il discorso, come il suo magnanimo senso d'ospitalità; esigeva, su un soggetto familiar a Giovancarlo, chiese alfine: 'Ma

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<sup>138</sup> However, Landolfi provides details (building and street names) that easily allow the identification of 'P.' as his hometown, Pico Farnese (FR). Reducing the proper names to their initials is a common device of nineteenth-century novels. Landolfi adopts the same strategy probably in order to maintain ambiguity. In this way, the reader may identify P. as any village.

Leopardi è buono, buono?'. Voleva notizie, cioè, sul valore letterario del nominato Leopardi; sapere, ad esempio, se fosse il primo il secondo il terzo scrittore italiano, se fosse più grande del Tasso o meno, come aggiunse dopo. Naturalmente non fu soddisfatto della risposta del giovane, ma seguiva lo stesso il suo discorso con finta attenzione, mentre gli occhi gradatamente gli si impicciolivano dal sonno;<sup>139</sup>

Leopardi is here used as a pretext to build a connection between Giovancarlo's world and that of his relatives. The uncle does not in fact show any real interest in the topic. Giovancarlo makes another attempt to find a topic of conversation able to grab his relatives' attention. This topic regards Giovancarlo's servant, Giovannina, who had lately become the archpriest's housekeeper and started dressing according to fashion. This episode ironically plays with the pleasure of rumours and, particularly, the joy in others' misfortunes. The reaction of Giovancarlo's relatives is described in a grotesque way:

'Pensate un pò, Giovannina...' pronunciò dunque Giovancarlo di punto in bianco. Gli occhi insonneccchiati si dilatarono, un vivo momento d'attenzione si produsse nella cucina; lo zio si aggiustò sulla seggiola come a dire: fammi star comodo, ora siamo nel campo delle mie competenze e mi sentirai! (14).<sup>140</sup>

A detailed comment on the relatives' discussion follows, focusing on the jealousy felt by the 'provinciali' about someone of humble origin trying to improve his or her social status. Therefore, Landolfi ironically describes the feeling of the decayed aristocracy (the class to which he himself belonged) experiencing the transition from a hierarchical feudal order to the emergence of the middle class. In so doing, he portrays a major concern in post-unification Italy, when the transition became fully effective and was the subject of many novels of the period. The geographical distance between the province and the city also involves a temporal distance, implying that time in the province flows more slowly, old traditions and past orders are preserved much longer and ancient beliefs resurface, while new influences and fashions from the outside are transplanted

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<sup>139</sup> Mentioning Leopardi in the first pages generates a feeling of circularity, as the novella will close with the pastiche from *Zibaldone* analyzed in the previous chapter. This quotation therefore introduces the predominant presence of Leopardi within the text, providing a hint for understanding his importance in its genesis and concept.

<sup>140</sup> '[...] Dapprima la comune indignazione, urgendo dall'interno, non trovò la via per esalarsi e sbuffava fuori da quei volti protesi come il vapore da una pentola a bollore; pò pò bà pos (abbreviazione forse di oh santi numi rafforzato da una p iniziale) si udiva da ogni parte'. *La pietra lunare*, p. 15.

into local traditions.<sup>141</sup> The divergence between these two dimensions will increase in parallel with Giovancarolo's gradual immersion from the narrow environment of the village into the vastness of the mountains and their mysteries.

### *The sense of festivity and the countryside*

The countryside in *La pietra lunare* is also depicted as the site where an original sense of festivity and a primitive feeling of the sacred resurface. Since the Middle Ages, the countryside has been seen as a space of survival, witnessing the metamorphosis of ancient pagan rites into superstitions, opposing and resisting the efforts of the Church to uproot 'ancient' beliefs.<sup>142</sup> The original process of the removal of pagan rituals and beliefs started from the destruction of temples and idols, as reported in many hagiographic accounts, and continued with the imposition of Catholic precepts and rituals. On the contrary, the city was seen as the point of reference for civilization and institutionalized religion. The citizen considers superstitions to be a product of popular ignorance more than a lack of faith.<sup>143</sup> Both Christian and Pagan rituality are depicted in *La pietra lunare* and appear deeply blended.

Chapter V provides a long and detailed description of a village festival, part of the essence of 'la vita di provincia'. From many clues we can recognize it to be the festival in honour of St Rocco, celebrated on 16 August in Pico Farnese.<sup>144</sup> The first part of this narration focuses on the rushed and lively movements of peasants, artisans and mountain men, all converging towards the church. In order to portray this festive atmosphere, Landolfi widely intersperses his description with references to Leopardi, particularly the expression 'i dì di festa' ('da qualche anno avevano abbandonato, i dì di festa, la calzatura locale, una specie di molle coturno', 68), evoking the poem 'La sera del dì di festa' (1825). In this idyll, taking place in a nocturnal setting under the

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<sup>141</sup> As an example, this is how Landolfi describes the outfit of an old woman: 'Del resto non era difficile vedere fra questa gente più o meno progredita, qualche vecchia nell'antica acconciatura, col grembiule di panno tosato avvolto tutt'attorno alle gambe, il busto esterno di velluto e la tovaglia in capo, in luogo del fazzoletto di più recente adozione'. *La pietra lunare*, p. 69.

<sup>142</sup> This connection between the countryside and pagan beliefs is also mirrored in the evolution of the term *paganus*. In French, *paysan* means 'peasant'. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Medioevo 'Superstizioso'* (Bari: Laterza, 1992), p. 28.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>144</sup> During the festival of St Rocco, women carry baskets full of bread rolls adorned with colourful ribbons and offer them to the saint. In *La pietra lunare*, Landolfi describes the same ritual, although he never mentions the saint's name: '[...] Molte donne recavano ceste con grossi ciambelloni lucenti intrecciati di nastrini (regalo ai preti a maggior gloria del santo festeggiato', 69.



moonlight, the lyrical 'I' hears the lonely singing ('solitario canto') of an artisan coming back from the village festival, feeling thereby invaded by a feeling of melancholy and a meditation on the fleetingness of human life. Landolfi's description of women's clothes is also a reference to Leopardi, and particularly to 'Il sabato del villaggio' (1831), which is populated by young peasants adorning their hair and bosom with flowers ('ornare ella si appresta / dimani, al dì di festa, il petto e il crine').

Following Leopardi's example, Landolfi focuses his attention on the peasants, their manners and traditional outfits. The festive atmosphere is described as particularly suitable for their nature: 'I contadini, a vero dire, sanno con maggior precisione che cosa propriamente sia una festa' (66):

Le contadine risalivano a frotte il vicolo verso la piazza chiacchierando, o piuttosto cantando nella loro lingua, animatamente tra loro. Da qualche anno avevano abbandonato, i dì di festa, la calzatura locale, una specie di molle coturno, e portavano sonore scarpette col tacco basso sotto alle vesti pieghettate e ampie alla foggia antica, ma assai più corte, da scoprire i polpacci robusti; intenzionalmente queste bellezze locali seguivano la grande moda di fuori, soltanto lo facevano alla lontana, come avviene nei paesi...(68)

The mountain men and their garments also attract the attention of Giovancarlo. Anticipating the mythical theme of the novella, Landolfi compares them to 'grigi fauni': 'Soprattutto facevano un certo senso a Giovancarlo alcuni uomini della montagna nei loro lunghi cosciali di pelo di capra, classico abbigliamento d'una volta destinato a proteggere dai rovi; grigi fauni apparivano costoro da lontano' (69).

While the manners and dress of the lower classes – including peasants, artisans, and mountain men – suggest a charming echo of old customs, the parade of the middle class is depicted with the aim of mocking them. The bourgeois inhabitants leave their houses later, when all the others are already in the church, carefully dressed and wanting to display themselves as in a parade. Their sense of time does not match the sacred time of the feast, insistently marked by the chiming of bells: 'Il risucchio della Chiesa era quasi finito, le campane s'erano taciute, la messa era cominciata. Ed ecco ora giungere (in ritardo, come d'obbligo) e passare con dignità i borghesi, i signori del luogo, le mezze tacche' (69). These people are deprived of the peasants' sense for festivity, as their participation is more dictated by a need to keep up appearances in society than by a sincere desire for spiritual wealth ('le mamme imponenti menavano alla messa le

figliuole, non solo per la loro salute spirituale', 69). This sense of festivity is defined by Landolfi himself as 'una disposizione dell'animo'.<sup>145</sup>

Landolfi's separation of the middle class and the lower class in terms of a predisposition to festivity is confirmed by Furio Jesi's studies on 'la festa' as a ritual and an event. According to Jesi, the dimension of 'la festa' is inaccessible to bourgeois culture. One of the characteristics of modern society and culture is precisely the lack of a 'sense of festivity'. In his words, humans have lost any historical relation with 'il festivo' in its purity. In Jesi's opinion, the only dimension of festivity still accessible in modernity is the 'collective experience of sorrow and violence' experienced during tragic events and natural catastrophes. However, the cultural debate from the early twentieth century showed a growing interest in primitive cultures and their celebrations. In Jesi's opinion, this interest in the 'other' dissimulates an interest in the 'self' and ultimately leads to the discovery that the boundaries between subjectivity and alterity are not very stable:

Nei selvaggi in festa l'uomo moderno civile si è accinto a ritrovare i propri simili civili, divenuti diversi. Al tempo stesso, nella festa non crudele dei selvaggi egli ha trovato un'occasione di prendere qualche distanza rispetto al proprio io, di spiare il proprio io e gli ha consentito di dichiarare che 'io' è un 'altro'.<sup>146</sup>

Jesi's reflections stem from Károly Kerényi's studies on the history of religion, according to which the gradual evolution of institutionalized confessions corresponded to a process of disintegration and estrangement from a genuine sense of festivity. Whereas primitive celebrations followed natural cycles, using 'festive time' in order to mark the recurrence of sacralised times throughout the year, modern civilizations pre-establish their festive time through the calendar, thereby performing a 'festive action' at predetermined moments. According to Kerényi, in ancient celebrations people could witness the miracle of creation in its repetitive cycles: the festival occurred every time natural signs suggested it, and was celebrated by an unusual form of being and acting.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Gurù, instead, does possess this sense of festivity: 'Ella aveva un senso acuto della festa. Cioè dell'aria di festa, la quale aria, tanto scuorante nelle città, non manca invece, in paese, d'un certo lievito, se si riesce ad esserne avvolti. Il fatto è che mentre là essa è funzionale, nella sua razionalistica balordaggine, in quanto corrisponde ad una reale tregua, in paese, dove tutti, grazie a Dio, oziano a loro grado, consiste più che altro in una disposizione dell'animo; se non si voglia dire in un suono di campane, in un cielo o venticello speciale' (65).

<sup>146</sup> Furio Jesi, 'Conoscibilità della festa' in *La festa. Antropologia, etnologia, folklore* ed. by Furio Jesi (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1977), pp. 4-29 (p. 14).

<sup>147</sup> Károly Kerényi, 'Religione e festa' in *La festa. Antropologia, etnologia, folklore*, pp. 33-49 (p. 43).

Ultimately, ancient celebrations with their brutal routines represented the occasion for an encounter between humans and the gods.<sup>148</sup>

In this light, Landolfi's novella shows us the two different dimensions of festivity. The modern one, taking place in the village in the form of the celebration of the patron saint, is particularly exemplified by the bourgeois' unsuitability; the other corresponds to the perception of festivity on the part of the villagers, and later of the lunar creatures in the mountains and the ditch. The latter's experience of festivity, depicted in the tenth chapter of the novella, delineates a sense of 'la festa' as a way of joining universality and as contact with the divine. Most of the elements connoting the original experience of festivity (the abandonment to the irrational, the panicked union with nature, the disappearance of boundaries, the encounter with the divine, the ritual initiation) are present in this chapter, particularly in the final sequences when hybrid creatures gather around the mythical figures of the three Mothers.

Yet, Landolfi remains aware that Christianity has deeply metamorphosed ancient, pre-Christian beliefs. Gurù often 'si segna' and 'prega', even before she has intercourse with the goat. The word 'pinzochera' (witch) in its etymological evolution also means 'bigotta' (sanctimonious). The words 'spigolista', 'bigotta' and 'picchiapetto' are all used as synonyms to address the figure of Filomena, the village witch. When Gurù watches the religious procession, she becomes serious and contemplative:

Quando però passarono i santi in processione [...] e quando tutti si inginocchiarono per il vicolo (di sulla soglia della chiesa il prete impartiva la benedizione) ella ridivenne seria, e si segnò rapidamente. 'Ma tu perché non ci vai alla chiesa?'. 'Non so', rispose 'Mi pare che quello non sia il mio posto. Che quelli di là dentro, i santi e gli altri, non mi vogliono bene'. (73)

In addition, the time of the narration of *La pietra lunare*, once we have identified the festive day with the festival of St Rocco in Pico Farnese on 16 August, happens to coincide with *Ferragosto*, that is to say with a specifically defined liturgical moment for the Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary. Thus, the time of the Sabbath, in the story, coincides with the time of the Assumption of Mary, contaminating Christianity and paganism. The same syncretism, that of the folklore of Ciociaria, is to be found in Gurù's 'nenie', in which she tellingly mixes pagan and Christian references, by mentioning both 'la madre occulta' and the 'lontana Vergine maria' (141-42)

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<sup>148</sup> Ibidem.

With its isolated dynamics and its different order of temporality, the ‘provincia’ appears in the novella as the specific setting for the return of an original condition of heterogeneity, in the sense given to this term by Georges Bataille: heterogeneous, for Bataille, is what is exterior with respect to human order and therefore ‘rejected by the homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value’.<sup>149</sup> The experience of the ‘provincia’ therefore enables Giovancarło to question the monolithic experience of belief in institutionalized religion and, at the same time, the very experience of identity for the modern, civilized, urban, and male subject he is. In order to do so, Landolfi does not uniquely portray the ‘provincia’, as we have seen, as the site for a syncretistic survival of ancient traditions, but also as the location where *other* forms of existence – such as that of Gurù – can still live and remain relatively undisturbed. As I will show, these creatures – at the border between humanity and animality, as well as between normativity and exceptionality – problematize pre-made concepts of identity and alterity, by calling into question the unity and stability of humanity as a cultural construct.

Gurù first appears in an uncanny atmosphere, in the garden of Giovancarło’s relatives.<sup>150</sup> She is initially described through her eyes, singularly big and silently moving in the darkness, and then becomes manifest as ‘un pallido volto, dei capelli bruni, un seno abbagliante scoperto a mezzo’. The expression ‘pallido volto’ establishes from the beginning a connection between Gurù and the moon, as the same words will be repeatedly used throughout the novella to address the moon itself.<sup>151</sup> Giovancarło is first upset by this mysterious apparition, whose nature is not immediately clear to him (‘il giovane era ormai sul punto di gridare’). Once welcomed by the relatives, who are not troubled by her presence, the girl claims that she comes from the mountains.

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<sup>149</sup> Bataille lists under this category waste products of the human body, some taboo parts of the body, unconscious processes such as dreams and neuroses, and also elements or social forms that the homogenous society cannot assimilate (the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, violent individuals and those who break the rules, including madmen, leaders and poets). Marcus Coelen, ‘Heterology’, in *Georges Bataille. Key concepts* ed. by Mark Hewson and Marcus Coelen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 88-98.

<sup>150</sup> ‘E allora, d’improvviso, il giovane si sentì guardato. Dal fondo dell’oscurità, resa più cupa da un taglio alto di luce lunare sul muro di cinta, due occhi neri, dilatati e selvaggi, lo guardavano fissamente’ (21).

<sup>151</sup> For example, ‘Pallido volto sanguinoso/ sorgi sull’onda delle valli’ (139). The epithet is often used as one word, ‘pallidovolto’, as a synonym for ‘moon’.

Gurù's ambiguous nature soon reveals itself to Giovancarlo. The gaze of Giovancarlo hesitates on 'il corpo snello ed elegante', 'una veste bianca e leggera', 'la line delle cosce affusolate', 'un tornito ginocchio' to discover an unexpected element of her nature:

S'aspettava ora di scoprire una caviglia esile, un piccolo piede. Invece... Il sangue gli si gelò nelle vene e quasi nel medesimo istante gli riflù tutto con violenza alla bocca dello stomaco. In luogo della caviglia sottile e del leggiadro piede, dalla gonna si vedevano sbucare due piedi forcuti di capra, di linea elegante, a vero dire, eppure stecchiti e ritirati sotto la seggiola. E il curioso era che queste zampe, a guardarci bene, parevano la logica continuazione di quelle cosce affusolate; né alcuni lunghi ciuffi di pelame ruvido bastavano a stabilire un'ideale soluzione fra l'agile corpo e le sue mostruose appendici (22-23).

The aesthetic value of Gurù's goat legs appears problematic. Indeed, in the previous description, two orders of adjectives are intertwined. One delineates the profile of a delicate and sensual image of femininity ('affusolate', 'tornito', 'esile', 'sottile', 'leggiadro', 'elegante'); the other of a repugnant and monstrous figure of animality ('forcuti', 'stecchiti', 'ruvido', 'mostruose'). After his initial disgust, Giovancarlo concludes that the goat legs look repugnant in themselves ('cioè se visti in maniera isolate dal resto del corpo'), but as a 'logical continuation' once they are seen as appendixes of Gurù's graceful womanly body. Renato Aymone recognizes this reverse aesthetic perception of feminine beauty and sensuality as one recurring motif in Landolfi's literary production:

Fin dal *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, tutto il motivo della donna si giuoca in opposizione alla norma del sublime erotico corrente. Il ripugnante si trasforma in desiderabile a patto di non assumere le sembianze della canonica figura istituzionale della madre e della moglie, ma si presenti nelle fattezze di una creatura che abbia il dono di assecondare le più segrete aspirazioni di libertà.<sup>152</sup>

In this different perception of beauty it is also possible to detect a trace of Leopardi's thinking. Indeed, in *Zibaldone* [49], Leopardi mentions the fable of the peacock – drawn from Giovanni Roberti's poem *Il pavone che si specchia in un ruscello* and inspired in

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<sup>152</sup> Renato Aymone, *Tommaso Landolfi. Analisi e letture* (Salerno: Palladio, 1978), p. 13.

turn by Aesop – <sup>153</sup> in order to expose his own view on beauty. In the fable, the peacock is ashamed of its legs, which look ugly if compared to the rest of its colourful body. Leopardi contradicts its content, by identifying beauty with ‘convenience’, that is utility in a natural context:

La favola del pavone vergognoso delle sue zampe pecca d’inverisimile anzi d’impossibile, giacchè non ci può esser parte naturale e comune in verun genere d’animale, che a quello stesso genere non paia conveniente, e quando sia nel suo genere ben conformata non paia bella: giacchè la bellezza è convenienza, e questa è idea ingenita nella natura. [...] Quali cose però si convengano, questo è quello che varia nelle idee non solo dei diversi generi di animali, ma eziandio degl’individui di uno stesso genere, come negli uomini, agli Etiopi (per non uscire dalla bellezza del corpo) par bello il color nero, il naso camoscio, le labbra tumide, e brutti i contrari che a noi paion belli, e tra i bianchi questa e quella nazione si diversifica assaissimo nel valutar come bella questa o quella forma che all’altra nazione dispiacerà. (*Zib.* 49)

Leopardi does not believe in absolute beauty, therefore the way to establish what is beauty is relative to each animal species and, in a human context, to each geographical and racial environment. Consequently, beauty does not correspond to parameters such as the harmony between several parts of the body:

Ma la bruttezza assoluta ben noi ce la figuriamo, che, vedendo le zampacce del pavone e parendoci sconvenienti al resto del suo corpo, non crediamo che possano parer belle a nessuno animale; ma il fatto non istà cosí, anzi al pavone parrebbero brutte nel proprio genere quelle zampe piú grosse, carnose, morbide, ornate, vestite ec. che a noi parrebbero piú belle, e giudica brutto quello del suo genere, o specie che la vogliamo dire, che non ha le zampe perfettamente secche, asciutte ec.

Giovancarlo’s reaction to the goat legs, seen in this light, seems to assert Gurù’s nature in terms of a continuity between humanity and animality. When they are seen as separate from the rest of the girl’s body, Gurù’s legs look ugly and repugnant, but in the whole picture of Gurù’s silhouette, they look like its logical continuation. This criticism of anthropocentrism is frequent in the work of Landolfi, whose stories are populated by

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<sup>153</sup> Editorial note Z49 n. 1’ in *Zibaldone*, ed. by Michael Caesar, Franco D’Intino (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), p. 2120.

animals presenting human connotations and vice versa.<sup>154</sup> What appears most fascinating and attractive to Giovancarlo is, precisely, not the animal counterpart in itself, but the continuation of human nature in that of the animal and the (figurative and physical) point of juncture, the *limen*, between these two natures, which gives them an uncanny grace. In Leopardi's words, 'la grazia ha successione di parti, anzi non si dà grazia senza successione. Quindi veduta una parte, resta desiderio e speranza delle altre'. The view of Gurù's legs awakens in Giovancarlo the desire to know more about that mysterious body:

Dove precisamente, cioè in quale punto del suo corpo, cessava la fanciulla d'essere donna per mutarsi in capra? Qui il giovane si perse in vane congetture, inutilmente tentando di solo immaginare il modo preciso e il luogo del trapasso, e l'aspetto possibile della linea d'attacco fra la vellutata pelle femminile e il pelo ferino (24).<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, Gurù's animal nature is not only conveyed by her goat legs but also by her attitudes and other physical traits: after her first physical contact with Giovancarlo, her reaction is that of '[accostare] la guancia alla sua allisciandovela leggermente' (58); occasionally she produces a 'soffice mugolo, dolce grugnito' (58); in the fresh air, 'le narici [di lei] si dilatavano' (74). Her teeth are sharp and her smell is wild (29).

Problems of identity and alterity raised by the hybrid character of Gurù link her unconventional femininity to Bataille's conception of the heterogeneous, as we have said. For Bataille, the act of becoming human coincides precisely with the removal of the heterogenous from life, which means the negation of nature, the repression of the entire ontology of the flesh and the prohibition of animal functions:

Man is the animal that negates nature: he negates it through labor, which destroys it and changes it into an artificial world; he negates it in the case of life-creating activity; he negates it in the case of death. The incest prohibition is one of the effects of the repugnance

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<sup>154</sup> For example, the monkey Tombo in 'Le due zittelle', the cancer-machine in *Cancroregina*, the crooks in 'Il mar delle blatte', the dogs in 'Nuove rivelazioni della psyche-umana. L'uomo di Mannheim', the owl in 'Night must fall' and many others. See Paolo Trama, *Animali e fantasmi della scrittura. Saggi sulla zoopoetica di Tommaso Landolfi* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2006).

<sup>155</sup> In Chapter VII, the mystery regarding the physical point of juncture between the two natures will be solved, when Giovancarlo sees Gurù's naked body after the metamorphosis. In the detailed description of the transformation, Lazzarin recognizes echoes of three episodes from Dante's *Inferno* and, particularly, the metamorphoses of Buoso (XXV), Vanni Fucci (XXIV) and Cianfa Donati and Agnello Brunelleschi (XXV). Stefano Lazzarin, 'Memoria dantesca e modelli folclorici nella *Pietra lunare* di Tommaso Landolfi', *Il Ponte*, 3 (1997), 121-131.

felt for his condition by the animal that became human. The forms of animality were excluded from a bright world which signified humanity.<sup>156</sup>

This idea is also linked to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical theory of becoming animal, as a movement from stability and identity into amorphous, nomadic modes of existence, from the 'major' (the constant) to the 'minor' (the variable). In this view, humans are eventually capable of transgressing the boundaries that determine what they are. These transgressions, for Deleuze and Guattari, do not happen by accident, but take the form of a festive return to nature taking place in sacrificial meals, festivals of transgression and various forms of eroticism in which the *body* is returned to its original condition of flesh.<sup>157</sup> These kinds of transgressions will all take place in the novella, particularly in the final sequences that seem to depict a Sabbath, articulated in scenes of a fight, feast, orgy, sacrifice and ritual initiation.

Moreover, Gurù's liminal nature of weregoat and its transgressive, implicitly threatening role for the community is mirrored by her exclusion from the social order of the village. Indeed, she is the last descendant of an aristocratic despotic family and lives alone in an abandoned manor, avoided by most of the village's inhabitants who suspect her to be a witch. Her condition assumes, to some extent, the form that Giorgio Agamben defines as 'vita sacra' (life excluded from social order).<sup>158</sup> In order to express his idea on the ban from the juridical order, Agamben precisely adopts the example of the werewolf. In his words, the werewolf inhabits an indistinct zone between the human and the feral. The werewolf's life constitutes a threshold of indeterminacy, and its passage between the animal and the human, between *physis* and *nomos*, corresponds to a passage between exclusion and inclusion. The werewolf is, at its origin, the figure of the man banned by his community. This transformation corresponds to a state of exception, and the werewolf's life becomes neither natural life nor social life, but rather bare or 'sacred' life, excluded from both the profane and the divine order.<sup>159</sup> The position of Gurù in the social system of the village seems to confirm her marginal nature. Giovancarlo, a young solitary poet, is for her the only possible interlocutor, and

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<sup>156</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1993), 61–62.

<sup>157</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, 'Becoming Animal (Some simple ways)', *New Literary History*, 38, 4 (2007), 703–720 (p. 708).

<sup>158</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), p. 28.

<sup>159</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 105.



the only one she will be able to introduce to her parallel world in the mountains (during their first encounter, Gurù will proclaim: ‘Sono venuta per andare con lui’, p. 25).

The meditation on animality performed in literature and the arts brings us close to that aspect of our being from which we distance ourselves, according to Agamben. The representation of thresholds, like the one represented by Gurù’s hybrid nature, brings us into close contact with an animality that is at once intimate and extrinsic, at the same time the basis of human identity and that which we must externalise in order to perform ourselves as human beings.<sup>160</sup> Within the philosophical and even political debate of the 1930s, Gurù as a liminal character therefore appears to be particularly problematic. As Agamben shows, the idea of man as the measure of all things has been part of a hegemonic cultural model since Protagoras. Ideals of bodily perfection – reverberating in a set of mental, discursive and spiritual moral values – formed an integral part of this humanistic discourse, throughout the *longue durée* of the history of Classical tradition. Central to this discourse is the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration. In this light, subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas otherness is defined as its negative counterpart. This idea of otherness raises issues of power and exclusion, and, indeed, as Rosi Braidotti points out, humanism fuelled the imperial destinies of nineteenth-century Germany, France and Great Britain.<sup>161</sup> Humanism and ideas of purity were particularly at the centre of Fascist discourse, both in relation to the imperialistic invasions of Ethiopia and Albania and to the debate on the purity of race flowing into the racial laws of 1939. In the following sections, I will precisely focus the problem of race, part of a lively debate in Italian culture at the time and obliquely called into question and problematized by Landolfi’s novella.

#### *A matter of purity: questioning race*

In chapter VII of *La pietra lunare*, Gurù tries to defend Giovancarlo from one of the bandits encountered in the mountains by mentioning his ‘solar’ nature: ‘Ma che vuoi fare! Ma che credi! Quello è un solare!’. ‘Che solare, come solare?’ chiese poco convinto Bernardo fermandosi. ‘Insomma l’ho portato con me per spaventarlo e per divertirci’. (95)

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<sup>160</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *L’aperto. L’uomo e L’animale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002).

<sup>161</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Post-humanism: Life Beyond the Self’ in *The Posthuman*, pp. 13-54 (pp. 13-15).

In Gurù's view, Giovancarlo belongs to a different species from the one she and the other creatures of the mountain belong to. By contrast, Gurù and the bandits are 'lunari'. The distinction between 'solari' and 'lunari' does not just mirror a separation between the world of the alive and of daylight and that of the dead and of moonlight. It also draws a boundary between the world of humans and that of hybrids, a separation that is essentially racialized. If we read Landolfi's novella in the light of the contemporary debate on the purity of race and consider the specific value attributed to the terminology adopted by the author, the story acquires a double political meaning, aimed at questioning the foundational values of Fascist racism. Indeed, Giovancarlo's journey into a world of 'lunari' seems to be based on a criticism of anthropocentrism, of canonical ideas on beauty and purity. By promoting, as we have seen, heterogeneity against homogeneity, *La pietra lunare* obliquely challenges discourses on race and purity that had formed the backbone of the Regime's colonial project and were becoming hegemonic following the Pact of Steel.

As is well known, the discourse on the purity of race became particularly predominant in Italy after the promulgation of the racial laws in 1939. Differentiating itself from the widespread discourses on race in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, the Italian environment deliberately tried to create its own theory of race, meant to support the specific needs of Italian nationalism, colonial discourse, and foreign policies.<sup>162</sup> The idea of an Italian 'Aryan-Mediterranean' race arose. 'Aryan' and 'Mediterranean' ideas of race were used conveniently both in contrast to and in conjunction with each other in the context of Fascist biopolitics and the racial laws.<sup>163</sup> As Fabrizio De Donno argues:

these ideas eventually converged in a specifically 'Aryan-Mediterranean' geopolitical concept of race and citizenship, through which the fascists not only sought to seal their alliance with the Nazis on an ideological level, but also sought to defeat internal difference, instill a racial and imperial consciousness in the minds of Italians, and claim leadership for

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<sup>162</sup> Fabrizio De Donno 'La Razza Ario-Mediterranea: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885–1941', *Interventions*, 8, 3 (2006), 394-412 (p. 394).

<sup>163</sup> These ideas were articulated in two theoretical poles: the 'Aryan' idea, according to which the Italics were Aryan and had come from India; and the 'Mediterranean' idea, according to which the Italics were non Indo-European but Eurafrikan populations, and belonged to a Mediterranean race that had originated in the Horn of Africa. De Donno, 'La Razza Ario-Mediterranea', p. 395.

Italian fascism in Europe and within the new order of fascist and institutionally racist powers.<sup>164</sup>

This racial differentiation was also traditionally articulated in national geographical terms, referring to a prevalence of Aryan genetic influences (prevalently Germanic) in northern Italy and of Mediterranean influxes (i.e. Latin/Semite) in the South. This opposition also entered the colonial discourse, in that Italians, as holders of civilized values, had the ‘duty’ to bring progress and liberalism to oppressed countries. The Aryan idea was finally used to discuss the negative implications of hybridity, in colonized countries, between Italians and local inhabitants. As a consequence, a code of law was introduced in colonial Eritrea to regulate interracial ties between Italians and Eritreans and to define the juridical status of citizens and their rights.<sup>165</sup>

These ideas on race started to be connected to the pre-Roman Italic population, the myth of the foundation of Rome and the idea of Romanity. According to this view, the ancient Romans with their spiritual superiority above other races were the ideal ancestors of Fascism. Mussolini found in the philosopher and esotericist Julius Evola’s work a unique form of racism, pertinent to the purposes of Roman Fascism, and gave Evola the task to articulate those notions in a real Fascist doctrine of race. Evola became one of the most important figures at the centre of this debate. In developing his theories, Evola was influenced by the Swiss anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen’s theories on the matriarchal origin of human societies.<sup>166</sup>

Bachofen’s and Evola’s use of the adjectives ‘solare’ and ‘lunare’, in parallel with Landolfi’s use of the terms, helps us to shed light on some aspects of *La pietra lunare* that have received scarce or no attention in criticism. Indeed, the adjective ‘solare’ has been used in anthropology/ethnology to delineate a group of primitive cultures with a patriarchal imprint, rooted in the worship of the sun, which was identified as a male divinity (i.e. Apollo or Zeus) and symbol of strength and military virtue. On the other hand, ‘lunar’ cultures were supposed to be the most ancient ones, matriarchal societies addressing their worship to the moon, which was seen as a feminine deity and a symbol of fertility, its cyclic alternation mimicking the agricultural one between periods of

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<sup>164</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>165</sup> De Donno, ‘La Razza Ario-Mediterranea’, pp. 396-400.

<sup>166</sup> Evola would later write the introduction to Bachofen’s *Le Madri e la virilità olimpica. Studi sulla storia segreta dell’antico mondo mediterraneo* (Milan: Bocca, 1949). Bachofen’s *Das Mutterrecht* had appeared in 1861.

shortage and abundance. The transition from ‘lunar’ to ‘solar’ societies also marked a transition from matriarchal to patriarchal societies, possessing opposite sets of values and a different understanding of time.<sup>167</sup> In Bachofen’s opinion, the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy followed a parallel transition in cosmic and religious beliefs, from the cults of the feminine Mother Earth to the worship of masculine gods and a celestial ‘father’:

Nel matriarcato ha dominato la notte e l'oscurità rispetto alla luce del giorno, il dì che dà vita a se stesso come il figlio dalla madre; lo sviluppo della patrilinearità-giorno dalla matrilinearità-notte segue lo sviluppo del modello cosmico dei corpi celesti: quest'ultimo obiettivo viene raggiunto solo con il dominio dell'uomo sulla donna, del sole sopra la luna.<sup>168</sup>

The same adjective ‘solare’ was later to be used by Evola in order to define the specific features of the ‘Aryan race’, as exposed in his *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (1941). Evola’s claims start from the assumption that, in prehistoric times, the Arctic land became frozen and progressively inhospitable. In the memories of many populations, preserved by myths, this land would appear as ‘la terra del sole’ and a sacred territory, consecrated to the deity of light. The race once living in the Arctic land, which Evola terms ‘iperborea’, was the purest and the most superior among all other races existing at that time in the earth. In its perfection, it mirrored the very purity of the spirit. In terms of Evola’s ‘spiritual’ racism, opposed to the biological approach to matter that had become hegemonic, for example, in Nazi Germany, the study of fossils could not say much, in itself, about the essence of each race.<sup>169</sup> According to Evola, traces of the authentic spirituality of the Northern populations had been preserved in the spiritual life of ancient Rome, ancient Greece, Persia, and India. These races, generated by three waves of migration of the Northern ‘iperborea’ race, were labelled with the adjectives

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<sup>167</sup> James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993).

<sup>168</sup> In his work, Bachofen proposes four phases of cultural evolution: a wild nomadic earth-centred phase; a matriarchal lunar phase based on agriculture; a Dionysian transitional phase, in which patriarchy began to emerge; an Apollonian, patriarchal solar phase.

<sup>169</sup> Francesco Cassata, *Building the New Man: Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in Twentieth-Century Italy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), pp. 264, 265.

‘ario’ and ‘ariano’. The Aryan supernatural inheritance of ancient races needed to be preserved and awakened through different rituals.<sup>170</sup>

In *La pietra lunare*, Giovancarlo is identified as a representative of the ‘razza solare’ who lives in the daylight and ignores the fact that during the night ‘ci sono cose che corrono navigano girano per conto loro mentre noi dormiamo’ (31). Giovancarlo lacks ‘earthly wisdom’ and the only element predisposing him to access the ‘lunari orrori’ through Gurù’s intermediation is his poetic attitude. The ‘creature lunari’ are imperfect and non-harmonic in their physical attributes, if considered through the parameters of normative beauty. The lunar ‘deformi’ and orgiastic creatures are very distant from the model of physical and moral perfection delineated by Fascist aesthetics:

Di esse l’una sembrava recare su spalle umane una gran testa di lupo, un’altra, in vista di spropositato uccello, mostrava fra le ali chiuse, come fra i lembi d’un manto, un tenero corpo femminile, un’altra ancora protendeva muso e barbizzo caprine, dalla testa d’una quarta, non si vedeva se umana o bestiale, spuntavano lunghe corna ramificate oscillanti e timide [...]

In Landolfi’s dreamlike vision, these creatures invade the world of the sleeping ‘solari’ during the night, disturbing their dreams and occasionally giving birth to other ‘creature deformi’ (‘fu così che nacque il bambino col corpo striato e le corna di vitello’, 145). The ‘lunari’, in other words, act as a force of resistance against policies of eugenics, reinstating the values of heterogeneity and difference in the monolithic world of the ‘solari’.

### *The triumph of alterity: witchery and lycanthropy*

In the character of Gurù, Landolfi elaborates themes and tropes related to the legendary figure of the werewolf, revealing a good familiarity with ethnographic literature and tradition on the topic.<sup>171</sup> Gurù’s nature is revealed little by little and through sparse clues in accordance with the principles of Fantastic hesitation. In chapter III, the

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<sup>170</sup> The same idea of Aryanity is therefore embedded with a metaphysical meaning. The Aryan race would be the one fighting against ‘dark’ forces, in agreement, according to Evola, with Hinduist thinking. In addition, the Aryan nature may be either inherited or reached through initiation. If it is inherited, it is still necessary to confirm the status through an initiation ritual, which therefore represents a second birth. In any case, it must be preserved through a good lifestyle, aimed at nurturing the soul. See Julius Evola, ‘La razza iperborea e le sue ramificazioni’ in *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1994).

<sup>171</sup> Lazzarin, ‘Memoria dantesca e modelli folclorici’, p.121.

conversation between Giovancarlo and Filomena, an old woman of the village, reinforces Giovancarlo's suspicions about the girl's ambivalent nature.<sup>172</sup> Giovancarlo learns from the old woman that Gurù's behaviour seems to change according to the lunar cycles; that she is sterile and does not fear lightning; that she attracts other animals (particularly goats) and controls them. 'Se ne concludeva che ella era – secondo l'espressione della vecchia – "capra mannara"'.<sup>173</sup> The source of Gurù's metamorphic nature – traditionally originating in magic, destiny, or supernatural judgement – seems to lie in the actions of her ancestors, the perpetrators of murders, blasphemous ceremonies, and abuses of power.<sup>174</sup> In Lazzarin's words, she is a 'capra mannara del tutto involontaria'.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, Gurù lives in a typical Gothic setting, 'un palazzotto nero dagli anni' (33), and she is the last descendent of a fallen noble family. In the mountains, Gurù is friends with a group of spirits of bandits. Her existence seems to lie at the border between the world of the alive and that of the dead.

Gurù's typical traits of the were-animal – above all, her becoming agitated on nights of a full moon – appear intertwined with others signs that suggest a connection with witchery. Indeed, the belief in the werewolf is traditionally associated with that in witchery. Firstly, Gurù is a seamstress ('di professione, cucitrice di bianco', 37) and this element connects her to Mediterranean myths of feminine magical powers, since the ability of weaving and spinning has been traditionally associated with the orchestration of humans' destinies, as exemplified by the Roman *Parcae* and the Greek *Moirai*. Furthermore, Gurù lives a lonely existence, reads books and sings unknown 'nenie' (singsong rhymes or lullabies), which remain, most of the time, incomprehensible to

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<sup>172</sup> 'Gurù doveva essere "lunare" (cioè sterile), come si sarebbe certo dimostrato se ella si fosse sposata. È arcinoto che appunto fra le lunari – dette così non senza una ragione – Quell'Amico (cioè il demonio, l'Infando) recluta di preferenza i lupi mannari. [...] Come uomini essi scontano i peccati dei loro maggiori e in generale di tutti i morti insepolti o inconfessi, come lupi sono senz'altro strumenti del demonio, che se ne serve in modi diversi, salvo il caso anzidetto (proteggere dalla «cosa trista», il fulmine). Non bisogna però credere che esista una sola specie di lupi mannari, teoricamente invece sono possibili scambi, totali o parziali, colla natura di qualsiasi bestia. [...] Ora, era stato notato che Gurù se l'intendeva colle capre in generale, le quali venivano a lei da ogni parte come gli uccelli a san Francesco. Se ne concludeva che ella era – secondo l'espressione della vecchia – "capra mannara"' (51-52).

<sup>173</sup> Lazzarin notices that the very name Gurù, recalls the French *loup-garou*, 'werewolf'. Stefano Lazzarin, 'Parole-vitici: bestiario e onomastica di Tommaso Landolfi', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 74, 34, (2007), 307-337 (p. 337).

<sup>174</sup> In particular, see the description of a blasphemous nocturnal banquet: 'Si riceveva, un giorno, nella casa una nobile fanciulla del paese, concessa sposa dagli atterriti parenti a uno dei fratelli. Al banchetto notturno furono convocati, stavolta, volenti i primi, riluttanti le seconde, cani e donne; la sposa sedeva triste a capotavola. E fu durante quest'orgia che sotto la tavola venne posto un crocifisso, sul quale i fratelli e i loro cortigiani con selvaggia allegria, le donne con malinconico terrore, buttarono per tutto il banchetto le ossa spolpate; ringhiando contro i loro compagni, scavalcando la sacra immagine, tutta la notte i cani si contesero il succulento cibo'. *La pietra lunare* (35).

<sup>175</sup> Lazzarin, 'Memoria dantesca e modelli folklorici', p. 122.

Giovancarlo. Gurù's 'nenie' eventually seem to have the power of acting as magic formulas. The girl has extensive knowledge of the natural (particularly the vegetable) world. She knows the names and nature of every species of flower and herb. She will say of them: 'Sono mie amiche, non calpestarle' (83). Gurù is sterile, like the werewolf, Satan and witches, and such sterility is, according to scholarship, behind the orgiastic nature of the Sabbath. Indeed, during the Sabbath, witches have intercourse with the devil. According to demonology treatises, witches and werewolves come together in the festive gatherings of the Sabbath and witches themselves may acquire the shape of a wolf.

However, why did Landolfi replace the wolf counterpart with the goat? The choice takes the potential 'demonic' nature of Gurù to the extreme, given that the goat is often identified with Satan himself and the witches go to the Sabbath flying on goats and billy goats.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, in fifteenth-century treatises on witchery, the satanic goat is indicated as the head of the ritual. It receives the offers of its faithful worshippers and presides over the nocturnal ride of the witches.<sup>177</sup>

Nonetheless, the sources of Landolfi's imagination are not only mythical and literary, but also anthropological. Carlo Ginzburg illustrates how the origins of lycanthropy and animal metamorphism can be traced back much earlier than the fourteenth century, to pre-Christian shamanic and totemic rituality. The act of acquiring an animal shape through a mask and costume was a ritual habit during the January harvest festivals across a broad geographical area. Werewolves in Germanic, Baltic and Slavic countries were believed to be particularly active during the twelve nights between Christmas and the Epiphany, when the souls of the dead wander. Moreover, 'i travestimenti con pelli di capra, (erano) praticati nella penisola balcanica in occasione delle pantomime a sfondo erotico e buffonesco celebrate a inizio di gennaio'. Transforming into an animal through a rite of passage in a state of ecstasy symbolized the temporary departure of the soul from the body. Such experiences were later interiorized and re-elaborated in the phenomenon of witchcraft.<sup>178</sup>

In this light, Landolfi's choice to replace the wolf counterpart with a goat has closer connections to the primitive traditions and folklore in Central Italy, resurfacing in the wild countryside as a sign of resistance against the impositions of centralized politics

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<sup>176</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: the devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 130.

<sup>177</sup> Schmitt, *Medioevo 'superstizioso'*, pp. 170-71.

<sup>178</sup> Ginzburg, *Storia Notturna*, pp. 135-36.

aiming at obscuring the individuality of rural and marginal areas. In Roman mythology, the God Faunus, a counterpart of the Greek Pan, is a horned god with goat legs ruling forests, plains and fields. According to Virgil, Faunus was a legendary king of the Latins who came with his people from Arcadia. Faunus, worshipped as the god of the countryside, agriculture and pastoralism, was also called Luperco for his role as the protector of herds against the wolves. He procreated the Fauns, half human–half goat creatures, the manifestation of forest and animal spirits, which can be easily compared to Landolfi's 'veranie'.<sup>179</sup> Faunus' memory is also connected to the Roman festivals Lupercalia and Faunalia. On those occasions, as reported by Cesario di Arles, wearing animal skins and masks to assume the appearance of a beast was common:

ci sono individui sani di mente che si mascherano da cervi (*cervulum facientes*); altri indossano pelli di pecore o capre, altri ancora si camuffano con maschere animalesche (*alii vestiuntur pellibus pecudum, alii assumunt capita bestiarum*), esultando perché, assunto un aspetto bestiale, non sembrano più uomini (*gaudentes et exsultantes, si taliter se in ferinas species transformaverint, ut homines non esse videantur*).<sup>180</sup>

In Ciociaria, shepherds still wear goats' pelts during the summer festivals. In his 'Elegia a Pico Farnese', written during a visit to Landolfi's place, Eugenio Montale probably refers to these celebrations when he mentions 'orde di uomini-capre'. Landolfi's novella therefore appears to be anthropologically connected to his own native place. This intention to recover its traditions seems to be linked to the Fascist impositions that affected Landolfi's own territory. As a matter of fact, Landolfi's hometown, Pico Farnese, suffered one of those central impositions that did not take into account the specificity of the local territory and its traditions, during the Fascist Regime. As Landolfi recounts in 'I contrafforti di Frosinone',<sup>181</sup> Pico had always been under the jurisdiction of Caserta, but, in 1927, in the course of the rearrangement of the Italian provinces, it was included under the extended province of Frosinone. Landolfi is harsh

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<sup>179</sup> The neologism 'verania' contains the Latin root of *verum*, which means 'the truth'. In so doing, Landolfi implicitly seems to attribute these Fantastic creatures the role of bearers of the truth. Speaking more generally, this element reinforces the idea of the illusions as source for artistic inspiration and enjoyment. On this aspect, Lazzarin claims: 'la verania porta inscritta nella sua carne fatta di linguaggio la questione della verità della letteratura. Perciò, più direttamente ancora del porrovia, la verania costituisce un emblema del fantastico'. Lazzarin, 'parole-vitici': bestiario e onomastica di Tommaso Landolfi', p. 319.

<sup>180</sup> Cesario di Arles, quoted by Ginzburg in *Storia Notturna*, p. 165.

<sup>181</sup> Tommaso Landolfi, 'I contrafforti di Frosinone' (*Se non la realtà*, 1960) in *Opere II (1960-1971)*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milan: Rizzoli, 1992), pp. 10-14.



in his account of the episode and underlines the power of this administrative intervention to delete centuries of history, local traditions and identities.

*The way to the Sabbath*

Chapters VI to X contain a sequence of scenes describing some of the constitutive elements of the Sabbath, as summarised in Ginzburg's anthropological analysis of witchery, *Storia Notturna*. First of all, in chapter VI, Gurù's intercourse with a goat and her metamorphosis into a were-goat; in chapter VII, the encounter with a band of dead souls; in chapter VIII, the journey into the earth's depths and the banquet in a cave; in chapter IX, the fight and gathering of were-animals; in chapter X, the apparition of the Mothers and Giovancarlo's initiation. One of the most impressive of these sequences is the one describing Gurù's relationship with the goat and her subsequent metamorphosis. In the abandoned and ghostly village of Campello, with a furious storm raging in the background, Giovancarlo witnesses an incredible scene of intercourse between the girl and a goat. During this act, an exchange of nature occurs:

Le gambe affusolate della fanciulla [...], le sue natiche vellutate d'andavano coprendo d'una peluria bruna, mentre le cosce ferine s'inargentavano e il pelo se ne diradava insensibilmente. [...] E Gurù sorse dal groviglio ormai colle sue gambe di capra; a piè della roccia una forma mostruosa restò distesa sul fianco, pesante e immobile, con lunghe gambe di donna e torso bestiale'. (92)

Giovancarlo's questions about the physical coexistence of Gurù's two natures finally finds an answer by beholding the girl's naked body. Giovancarlo's idea on the harmonic blending of the human and animal nature of the girl is confirmed: the description of the point of juncture between the two natures focuses on the femininity and elegance of Gurù's body and the narrator concludes: 'la fanciulla portava le sue appendici caprine come le sirene la loro coda' (93). The problematic value of this scene of metamorphosis, and of a more general lack of stable boundaries in the novella, appears clearer if we look at metamorphosis as a principle of organic vitality that 'runs counter to notions of unique, individual integrity of identity in the Judaeo - Christian tradition'.<sup>182</sup> In this

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<sup>182</sup> Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other worlds. Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 35.

tradition, metamorphosis helped to differentiate good from evil, the blessed from the damned, marking out heterodoxy, instability, perversity and pity. ‘In the Christian heaven, nothing is mutable, whereas in hell, everything combines and recombines in terrible amalgams, compounds, breeding hybrids, monsters – and mutants’.<sup>183</sup> Similarly, in Dante’s *Inferno*, the damned sinners undergo a process of eternal annihilation and loss of identity. Fantastic processes of metamorphoses are elaborated in the circle of the thieves. These sequences may have influenced Landolfi himself, as pointed out by Lazzarin, who draws connections between the scene in *La pietra lunare* and two episodes from Dante’s *Comedy*.<sup>184</sup>

Once the metamorphosis has taken place, Giovancarlo seems to cross the borders into a world inhabited by the dead, precisely the connecting element of all myths around the Sabbath: accessing the hereafter and coming back from it. A series of new characters from the mountain make their appearance and are introduced by Gurù, who is the intermediary between Giovancarlo’s solar world and her lunar one. The first of them, Bernardo di Spenna,<sup>185</sup> assumes the role of Giovancarlo’s antagonist. Bernardo, Sinforo il Rosso, Antonio lo Sportaro, and Vincenzo di Squarcia are all dressed as mountain men and ‘briganti’. Indeed, they seem to be the spirits of dead bandits.<sup>186</sup> In Ginzburg’s words, ‘in una società’ di vivi, i morti possono essere impersonati soltanto da coloro che sono inseriti imperfettamente nel corpo sociale’.<sup>187</sup> Giovancarlo finds their names vaguely familiar. One of them, Vincenzo di Squarcia, had taken one of Giovancarlo’s ancestors hostage, asking for a great sum of money to release him and leading to the ruin of the family.

Giovancarlo, accompanied by Gurù and the group of spirits, goes through a hut to enter a subterranean passage that takes them to a cave, reinforcing the impression of a *Katabasis*, namely a descent into an underworld of the dead.<sup>188</sup> The darkness becomes

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<sup>183</sup> Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>184</sup> See note 143.

<sup>185</sup> Dressed like the mountain men, with ‘lunghi cosciali di pelo di capra, la camicia di fustagno senza giacca, cerchi di metallo alle orecchie al modo zingaresco, e calzature locali’, the youth takes ‘una grossa roncola’ (curve blade on a wooden handle, sixteenth-century archaism) and ‘una corta accetta’ (95). He then walks towards Giovancarlo in a threatening way, and Gurù protects him for the first time.

<sup>186</sup> ‘Questi è Bernardo di Spenna, maestro di rapine e di cacce, te ne ho già parlato. E questi Sinforo il Rosso, che un guardacaccia sminuzzò. Ed ecco Antonio lo Sportaro, così detto perché raccolse in una piccola sporta i resti mortali di un suo nemico [...]. Ma le loro imprese non son tutte qui. Gli altri sono per la montagna. Il vecchio è Vincenzo di Squarcia [...]’ (96).

<sup>187</sup> Ginzburg, *Storia notturna*, p. 280.

<sup>188</sup> The cave is a recurrent setting in Landolfi’s stories. According to scholarship, it symbolizes the return to the maternal womb. Moreover, in German mythology, ‘una oscura caverna posta in mezzo alle

so thick that Giovancarlo's only way to orientate himself relies on hearing, touching and smelling. Landolfi describes the events through Giovancarlo's other sensorial perceptions. A banquet starts and wine is poured in abundance:

S'udivano rumori vari, come di gente affaccendata per casa, sgabelli smossi, sportelli aperti o chiusi, acciottolio di stoviglie; gli altri si muovevano per la grotta colla medesima disinvoltura che se la più bella luce l'illuminasse, e non cessavano di chiacchierare del più e del meno (104)

The last step preceding the final crucial moment of the gathering around the Mothers is represented by a bloody battle against Napoleone, the guardian of Giovancarlo's family. After he is brutally killed, another fight and reciprocal metamorphosis takes place, this time between Giovancarlo and his antagonist, Bernardo.

The way to the Sabbath culminates, in chapter X, with the appearance of the female triple entity that Landolfi calls 'le Madri'. The female trinity, as shown by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, has been elaborated through the centuries by various cultures, and religions in an endless number of related images, and can be understood as an archetypal figure.<sup>189</sup> This figure recalls the trinity of the Moon Goddess Hekate, who dominates the world of the living and of the dead and symbolizes the succession of three correlated phases (waxing, full, waning; virginity, maternity, death). It could also represent the three *Moirai* of Greek mythology, the incarnations of destiny, who controlled the thread of life of every mortal from birth to death (and their Roman equivalent, the *Parcae*).<sup>190</sup>

Once more, the non-canonical value of this representation emerges. Indeed, the original female trinity stands in opposition to the Christian patriarchal one and to the exclusively male priesthood. This is one of the elements that made Andrea Zanzotto describe *La pietra lunare* as 'un racconto inimmaginabilmente pagano'.<sup>191</sup> This view is strengthened by Zanzotto's interpretation of the Latin epigraph opening the novella: '*Bene dixisti de me, Thoma. La Luna all'autore*' (11). According to a legend, the words '*Bene dixisti de me, Thoma*' were pronounced by Jesus to St Thomas Aquinas as a sign

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voragini e custodita dal cane infernale Garmr' is the entrance to the kingdom of death, Niflheim. Alfonso di Nola, *Il diavolo* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1987), p. 32.

<sup>189</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, pp. 393-398.

<sup>190</sup> Macrí, *Tommaso Landolfi. Narratore poeta critico artefice della lingua*, p. 63.

<sup>191</sup> Andrea Zanzotto, 'Nota introduttiva' in *La pietra lunare* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990), pp. 1-18 (p.12).

of approval towards his writing. Here, Landolfi replaces the figure of Christ with the Moon and that of the saint with himself (the association being supported by the same first name, Tommaso).<sup>192</sup>

At the bottom of the ditch, the three Mothers stand still towards the moon and their look surveys all the creatures gathered around them: veranie, bandits, all sort of hybrids and Giovancarlo, the only 'solare' in that diaphanous world. The mortal look of the mothers moves searchingly across the 'elected' ('il designato') and terrifies all the others who encounter it. Finally, the mortal look individuates Giovancarlo, who is assisted by his guide and protector, Gurù. After the preliminary tests and the preparation, this is the last, most important step of the initiation ritual. Giovancarlo is penetrated by that look, which searches his very soul:

Ancora un attimo eterno, e gli occhi lo guardavano dritto entro i suoi occhi, seri freddi sereni. Egli sentì diffondersi per tutte le sue membra un etereo pallore, una pena senza nome un'infinita pietà un dolore sconosciuto lo invasero (137)

Once the Mother (the trinity is then absorbed into a singular 'la Madre') has explored Giovancarlo's soul in depth and he has experienced a feeling of panicked fusion with the natural world, the feminine and the animal sphere, the magic act is completed. 'La Madre distolse lo sguardo, lo rifissò sulla luna che tramontava [...]. Adesso conosceva Giovancarlo' (149). By withstanding that mortal look Giovancarlo passes the test and experiences a re-birth which is underlined by a range of symbols associated with spiritual rebirth, as pointed out by Oreste Macrí:

Dal gelo all'ardore, dal carcere notturno-lunare all'alba; da creatura diafana, spettrale, larvale sotto lo sguardo materno, ad adulto solare; non apparente-superficiale del sole tiranno, ma un uomo nuovo che ha attraversato il regno materno dell'inferno e della morte, cifrati nei termini cordiali della «pena » e della «pietà». Giovancarlo ha sofferto ritualmente le sofferenze materne; infine il suo corpo si fonde con i corpi muliebri e naturali, sì che le metamorfosi di Gurù-capra e l'accennata di sé con Bernardo lupo mannaro sono state parodie preliminari nel transito dalla bestialità naturale alla umana permanendo trascesa la naturale.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>193</sup> Macrí, pp. 64, 65.

In this process of initiation, it should be noted that Giovancarolo is a young poet, which makes us read the novella, among other interpretations, as an allegory and a rite of passage from poetic apprenticeship into full maturity. According to Robert Graves, religious ceremonies in honour of the triple Goddess ('the white Goddess') gave rise to the language of poetic myth. Indeed, the original poetic language is, in Graves' words, magical.<sup>194</sup> Its essence and memory have been altered and lost from 'late Minoan times when invaders from Central Asia began to substitute patrilinear for matrilinear institutions and remodel or falsify the myths to justify the social changes'.<sup>195</sup> In spite of this imposition, poetry nowadays still continues to exercise its original function, 'the religious invocation of the Muse', while its use still recalls the primitive 'experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites'.<sup>196</sup> In this view, and also in the light of the appendix closing the novella, which tackles the problem of the authenticity of modern poetry, Giovancarolo's journey may be interpreted as an artistic initiation into the authentic source of poetry, which for Landolfi, as much as for Leopardi, resides in illusions.

### *Conclusions*

From this analysis, we can see how themes in *La pietra lunare* borrowed from Gothic and Fantastic traditions – such as witchcraft and zoomorphism – reveal a tension between centralism and geographical marginality. For instance, they depict the Italian countryside as the venue for the return of a chthonic and pre-Classical religion (as exemplified by the 'Mothers'), a sense of festivity and the sacred. In doing so, Landolfi problematizes most of the established values of the Fascist regime: the countryside as a

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<sup>194</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess. A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952).

<sup>195</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 10.

<sup>196</sup> '... This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down [...] and brought ruin on himself and his family. 'Nowadays' is a civilization in which the prime emblems of poetry are dishonoured. In which serpent, lion and eagle belong to the circus-tent; ox, salmon and boar to the cannery; racehorse and greyhound to the betting ring; and the sacred grove to the saw-mill. In which the Moon is despised as a burned-out satellite of Earth and woman reckoned as 'auxiliary personnel'. In which money will buy almost anything but truth and almost anyone but the truth-possessed poet'. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 14. Grave's last assumption is particularly pertinent to Landolfi's *Cancroregina* where the moon, previously diaphanous entity, is transfigured into a material point of destination. As a matter of fact, Grave's book is published in 1948, two years before *Cancroregina* and in a similar cultural atmosphere.

fruitful site embodying all the moral principles of the traditional family; the Fascist man as an emblem of virility and strength; notions of beauty corresponding to classicist aesthetic canons of bodily harmony; notions of racial purity relying on the belief in an Aryan-Mediterranean dynasty. Moreover, the novella addresses the problem of the sources of literary imagination. By merging a Northern Gothic and Fantastic imagery with mythical and folkloristic elements from central Italy, Landolfi seems to put forward the self-sufficiency of the Italian Fantastic, against predominant views that see Italy as a country naturally deprived of imagination and appeal for the supernatural.

### **Chapter 3: *Racconto d'autunno*: A Gothic counter-narrative of the Italian civil war**

#### *Introduction*

In 1946, in his decaying family manor in Pico Farnese (Frosinone), Tommaso Landolfi drafts the novella *Racconto d'autunno*,<sup>197</sup> which is published one year later.<sup>198</sup> The early post-war years had witnessed a widespread commitment on the part of Italian authors to give birth to what Italo Calvino would later label 'Resistance novels'; namely, narrative accounts of the civil war that had lacerated Italy in 1943-45.<sup>199</sup> Within this framework, Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno* represents a very peculiar case. Indeed, although the novella moves from a clearly historicised situation, one typical of Resistance narratives (a fugitive escaping from enemy patrols in a mountainous environment), it suddenly transforms into an indefinable kind of tale in which the Resistance comes to play no role at all. At the same time, its conclusion, in which history abruptly re-enters the story in the guise of the sudden arrival of French-Moroccan colonial troops, radically questions the very notion of 'liberation': the focus, here, is on a traumatic episode of the Liberation phase of the war that has not yet entered official accounts. Finally, and most importantly, the narrative strategy adopted is all but mimetic, sequential, and accurate. Here, style is evocative, refined and deliberately ambiguous. Moreover, it is heavily

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<sup>197</sup> The title *Racconto d'autunno* contains in itself an indication in terms of literary genre (alongside possessing obvious Shakespearean echoes, which I will focus on later). In this sense, whereas 'racconto', in Italian, usually denotes a short story, in this case Landolfi seems to have played with an extended understanding of the term, indicating something between the short story and the novel properly intended. 'Racconto' must therefore be understood as an equivalent of the English 'tale', and consequently possessing the same indeterminacy and flexibility that, in the field of Fantastic literature, had determined its choice on the part of such authors as Henry James, for example. Through this option Landolfi manages, on the one hand, to keep the rhythm of Fantastic short fiction (which, in Edgar Allan Poe's opinion, had to keep a short length in order to maximise its potential), and, on the other, to dilate the usual time of narration, thereby deferring explanations and twists in the plot.

<sup>198</sup> The first edition of *Racconto d'autunno* was published in 1947 by Vallecchi (Florence), and a second one appeared in 1963. It was subsequently re-published by Rizzoli in 1975, with an introduction by Carlo Bo. Currently, the rights to Landolfi's works are owned by Adelphi, who are publishing the author's whole oeuvre (*Racconto d'autunno* was printed twice, in 1995 and 2005). I will henceforth quote *Racconto d'autunno* from this last edition, indicating the page number in the main body of text. In terms of the context in which the novella was produced, see the testimony of Landolfi's daughter, Idolina Landolfi, 'Mio padre, tra il casinò e la solitudine della campagna' *La Stampa*, 9 May 1987, and Giovanna Ghetti Abruzzi, *L'enigma Landolfi* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), p. 24.

<sup>199</sup> 'Si era faccia a faccia, alla pari, carichi di storie da raccontare, ognuno aveva avuto la sua, ognuno aveva vissuto vite irregolari drammatiche avventurose': Italo Calvino, preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. x-xxv, p. vi.

saturated with archaisms, several of which have been borrowed from Leopardi.<sup>200</sup> Landolfi employs a wide repertoire of themes, situations and images borrowed from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic/Fantastic literature, thus explicitly echoing a genre in which defamiliarisation, destabilisation and unsettling material are central to the literary project.

My working hypothesis is that Landolfi's use of Gothic clichés becomes a powerful mode to express suppressed anxieties about contemporary historical and political events. Indeed, scholarship has repeatedly highlighted the power of the Gothic to interrogate historical moments of change and uncertainty.<sup>201</sup> The reactivation of this literary mode coincides with periods of historical transition and instability: in Kelly Hurley's words, Gothic is 'a cyclical genre that reemerges in times of cultural stress in order to negotiate anxieties for its readership by working through them in displaced (sometimes supernatural) form'.<sup>202</sup> Gothic texts unearth the darkness that the cultural elite seek to hide, whether that darkness is of a political, historical, cultural, or social nature.<sup>203</sup> In doing so, 'they create porous worlds where social, political, spiritual, physical and geographical boundaries are as constantly shifting, as the reality itself'.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, in Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno*, characters, settings and narrative strategies are located in a sphere of ambiguity and indeterminacy. In anthropology, the concept of liminality invests all the conditions and personae that are 'necessarily ambiguous', as they 'elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and

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<sup>200</sup> On Leopardi's influence on Landolfi see: Antonio Prete, 'Luna nera', in *Un linguaggio dell'anima, Atti della giornata di studio su Tommaso Landolfi*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi and Antonio Prete (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2006), pp. 85-92; Elena Frontaloni, *Landolfi senza la luna* (2012), online: [http://www.tommasolandolfi.net/wp-content/uploads/Elena\\_Frontaloni\\_Landolfi\\_Senza\\_Luna.pdf](http://www.tommasolandolfi.net/wp-content/uploads/Elena_Frontaloni_Landolfi_Senza_Luna.pdf) [accessed 16/01/2015]; Tommaso Landolfi, 'Recensione del Signor Giacomo Leopardi sull'opera *La pietra lunare* dell'autore Tommaso Landolfi' in *Leopardi, altre tracce*, ed. by Ugo Piscopo (Naples: Guida, 1999), pp. 13-14; Paolo Zublena, 'Approssimazioni alla lingua "altra" di Tommaso Landolfi', in *Gli 'altrove' di Tommaso Landolfi, Atti del Convegno di Studi, Firenze, 4-5 dicembre 2001* ed. by Idolina Landolfi and Ernestina Pellegrini (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), pp. 155-161. I will discuss in more detail the relationship between Landolfi and Leopardi in my analysis of *La pietra lunare*.

<sup>201</sup> On the political readings of Gothic and Fantastic fiction see in particular: David Punter, *The literature of Terror*; Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy. The literature of Subversion*; Irène Bessière, *Le récit fantastique. La poétique de l'incertain*.

<sup>202</sup> Kelly Hurley, 'British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 189-208, (p.194).

<sup>203</sup> James Corner, 'Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice' in Id., *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), pp. 1-26 (p. 10).

<sup>204</sup> Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey, 'Haunted Landscapes and Fearful Spaces. Expanding Views on the Geography of the Gothic' in Id., *Gothic landscapes: changing eras, changing cultures, changing anxieties* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-18 (p. 3).



positions in cultural spaces':<sup>205</sup> from this angle, *Racconto d'autunno* can be read as a liminal text from both a textual and meta-textual point of view. On the one hand, borders, thresholds, and transitions are present at multifarious levels in the novella. On the other, *Racconto d'autunno* is a liminal text insofar as it deliberately aims to puzzle and displace the reader. The author never provides precise chronological or geographical coordinates and adopts the literary strategies typical of the Gothic and Fantastic tradition to produce a feeling of uncertainty, hesitation, and uneasiness. Finally, the Gothic elements of the novella enter into tension with the sphere of history. These elements determine a sort of meta-defamiliarisation by which, in the role of literary fiction, the text negotiates the trauma of the war, enlightening its 'unsayable' corners precisely by means of a meticulous pattern of intertextual and interdiscursive references.

In this chapter, I will firstly set Landolfi's novella in the historical context of post-war resistance narrative and then explore Landolfi's alternative representation of the civil war by means of Gothic mechanisms; secondly, I will focus on the textual and thematic ambiguity investing the manor, characters and the narrator, by showing the text's intertextual relationship with occult sources that have so far been overlooked by scholarship and by adopting the notion of liminality in order to enlighten the transitional elements in the novella and the way they mirror a historical instability; finally, I will analyze, at the conclusion of the novella, the sudden re-entrance of history, arguing that *Racconto d'autunno* can be read as an oblique way of employing fiction and its deceptive strategies to express the feeling of displacement induced by minor but nonetheless traumatic war events, such as the mass rapes and killings that followed the Battle of Monte Cassino (May-June 1944). I will demonstrate how this effect is produced by comparing specific passages of the novella with the victims' war memories. Thus, rather than considering Landolfi's novella as an escapist work, or as an untimely reactivation of nineteenth-century literary conventions, my hypothesis is that Gothic and Fantastic patterns in *Racconto d'autunno* represent a strategy for bypassing the limits of historical realism. The text then serves to voice, through necessarily oblique means, the emotional lacerations of the individuals experiencing such traumas.

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<sup>205</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969), p. 95.

Racconto d'autunno, *neorealism and Gothic machinery*

The first chapter of *Racconto d'autunno* transports the reader into both a setting and an atmosphere that frequently recur in early Resistance narratives (and are, therefore, familiar to the reader).<sup>206</sup> With a rifle in his hand, an unnamed man is lost in the wilderness, while enemy patrols are dogging him. The narrator indulges in a detailed account of his attempts to escape, as well as his mixed feelings of fear, anxiety and physical discomfort. Finally, the reader is confronted with his relief upon the discovery of an apparently empty building that may serve as a refuge.

However, some elements in the text soon suggest that the situation is more undetermined than the appearance of historical narration may suggest. In the text, details of the actual place, characters and temporal setting are not provided either at the beginning of the story or by the end. The opening sentence of the book is, in this sense, very telling: 'La guerra m'aveva sospinto, all'epoca di questa storia, lontano dai miei abituali luoghi di residenza' (11). The war to which the narrator refers is not specified, and the armies involved have no name (they are addressed as 'esercito invasore' and 'esercito detto liberatore', 11). Moreover, dates are not given ('un certo giorno dell'autunno inoltrato', 12), nor are geographical names. More importantly, the political stance of the protagonist remains ambiguous throughout. This excess of ambiguity has misled most critics who define the protagonist as a partisan and, by extension, the whole novella as a 'romanzo di resistenza'.<sup>207</sup> The following fragment, ambiguously alluding to the protagonist's status, led to the misinterpretation of the text:

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<sup>206</sup> See, amongst others, Pin's shifts through the mountainous environment in Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947); Johnny's wanderings across the woods of Langhe in Beppe Fenoglio's *Il partigiano Johnny* (1968); Milton's lonely trip through the hills around Alba, Mango and Santo Stefano Belbo in Beppe Fenoglio's *Una questione privata* (1963); and the anxious walk of a lonely soldier across a minefield in the mountain, in the short story 'Campo di mine', in Italo Calvino's *L'ultimo viene il corvo* (1949).

<sup>207</sup> 'Racconto d'autunno sarebbe un romanzo breve, un racconto lungo, una memoria di fatti (come pochi Landolfi disprezzò i generi, non sapendo che farsene, ma fingendo di accoglierli tutti) sulla Resistenza'. Raffaele Manica, '1947. Racconto d'autunno. Tommaso Landolfi', in *Cento romanzi italiani, 1901-1995*, ed. by Giovanni Raboni (Rome: Fazi, 1996), p. 38 (p. 38). 'In the plot of Landolfi's novel, the protagonist has already made his decision to resist Fascism but one day finds himself cut off from his comrades at arms', Keala Jewell, 'Racconto d'autunno, 1947', in *Encyclopaedia of Italian Literary Studies A-J*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), pp. 998-999 (p. 998). An exception is Alberto Traldi, who locates *Racconto d'autunno* among the novels telling stories of 'evaders': Alberto Traldi, *Fascism and Fiction. A survey of Italian fiction on fascism and its reception in Britain and the United States* (Metuchen, NJ; London: Scarecrow Press, 1987), pp. 337-38.

[...] coloro che ne avevano la possibilità o se ne sentirono il genio, si organizzarono per una resistenza armata o addirittura per l'offesa, altri resisterono almeno passivamente alle imposizioni degli invasori, altri infine badarono soltanto a togliersi dal folto della mischia. Poiché, dico, appartenevo a una di queste categorie, la mia vita fu a lungo quella del bandito. (11-12)

In so doing, Landolfi creates what Umberto Eco calls a 'white space' within the text, one that has to be filled through the interpretative efforts of the reader.<sup>208</sup> The importance of an interpretive cooperation in Landolfi's writing has been stressed, in particular, by Giovanna Ghetti Abruzzi: 'Landolfi lascia al lettore ogni diritto e libertà di interpretazione, proprio per indicare una condizione naturale dell'arte contemporanea, cioè la sua *difficoltà* ed *oscurità*, in quanto essa deve considerarsi una enorme dilatazione delle possibilità estetiche'.<sup>209</sup>

Such ambiguity undermines, at the very least, plain assumptions about the political implications of the text. In the fragment above, the narrator does not specify the category to which he belongs, and the question remains unresolved as to whether he is a partisan, a deserter, a spy or a bandit. Therefore, such elements make it problematic to refer simply to *Racconto d'autunno* as a 'romanzo di resistenza', as has been done elsewhere. For instance, Keala Jewell defines the protagonist as 'a partisan fighting the Axis powers who is separated from his cohort',<sup>210</sup> while the English translator, Joachim Neugroschel, summarises *Racconto d'autunno* as the story of 'a fugitive partisan' who 'accidentally finds shelter in an eerie mansion ruled by an aging aristocrat'.<sup>211</sup> On the contrary, as I will show in the next sections, Landolfi does rather the opposite in the novella: he questions the absolute positivity of the liberation phase by shedding light on its unsayable corners (particularly, the Allied bombings and mass rapes in central Italy) by means of Gothic and Fantastic strategies.

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<sup>208</sup> Following Eco, the presence of white spaces in fiction is a specific mechanism of interpretive cooperation on the part of the reader. Their existence is part of the very nature of literary texts, defined by Eco as 'lazy mechanism[s]'. They claim additional contribution on the part of the reader in order to work properly. Moreover, a literary text requires that the reader be left a good deal of interpretation still to do, even if the suggestion is usually one of a univocal interpretation. Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa dei testi narrativi* (Milan: Bompiani, 2013), p. 52.

<sup>209</sup> Giovanna Ghetti Abruzzi, p. 40.

<sup>210</sup> Keala Jewell, 'Gothic Negotiations of History and Power in Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno*', *California Italian Studies* 1, 2 (2010), 1-25 (p. 2) <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/496986cm>> [accessed 12/03/2017].

<sup>211</sup> Tommaso Landolfi, *An Autumn Story*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (Hygiene, CO: Eridano Press, 1989), back cover.

Certainly, *Racconto d'autunno* is not the only Italian work of the late 1940s to display the presence of Fantastic patterns in tension with historical representation. Published in the same year as *Racconto d'autunno*, Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947) adopts an oblique gaze – one of a child – in order to grasp the historical complexity of the Resistance, thereby intermixing historical accuracy and an enchanted, fairytale-like perspective. According to Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, the crisis of Italian (Neo)Realism – more a form of commitment than an actual literary school – begins, precisely, with Calvino's novel. As Calvino himself recognises:

A me questa responsabilità finiva per farmi sentire il tema come troppo impegnativo e solenne per le mie forze. E allora, proprio per non lasciarmi mettere in soggezione dal tema, decisi che l'avrei affrontato non di petto ma di scorcio. Tutto doveva essere visto dagli occhi d'un bambino, in un ambiente di monelli e vagabondi. Inventai una storia che restasse in margine alla guerra partigiana, ai suoi eroismi e sacrifici, ma nello stesso tempo ne rendesse il colore, l'aspro sapore, il ritmo...<sup>212</sup>

Similarly, other literary works produced in the same environment display narrative and linguistic strategies that cannot be subsumed by a commitment to the descriptive, low-level and mimetic registers that are normally associated with Neorealism.<sup>213</sup> Just to take some well-known examples, Elio Vittorini's *Uomini e no* (1945) includes surreal situations such as dogs or dead people talking, as well as lyrical deformations and sophisticated attention being paid to the psychological and symbolic sphere (e.g. the dialogues with Enne 2). Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere* (1947) transfigures the Ethiopian landscapes with an unreal atmosphere, in much the same way as *Racconto d'autunno* with its nocturnal opening setting. Finally, in Cesare Pavese's *La casa in collina* (1949) and *La luna e i falò* (1950), the dialectic movement between the city and the countryside, and between the spheres of history and myth, enables the creation of a double narration, one in which the resurfacing of chthonic archetypes and rituals obliquely brings to light the horrors of the civil war, those particularly epitomised in the second novel by the murder/sacrifice of the collaborationist, Santa.

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<sup>212</sup> Calvino, 'Prefazione' in Id., *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p. x. Bàrberi Squarotti, however, claims that Calvino's choice was instrumental, and aimed at challenging the lack of interest in Resistance-related novels on the part of American publishers: Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, *La narrativa italiana del dopoguerra* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1965), p. 157.

<sup>213</sup> Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Introduzione al neorealismo. I narratori* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1974), p. 15.

However, within this literary context Landolfi goes further, employing most of the conventional clichés and settings commonly associated with Gothic fiction in order to represent the chaos of a country in transition and to draw links with historical and psychological components. Considered for a long time an extraneous genre in relation to the Italian literary tradition,<sup>214</sup> the Gothic instead maintains an oblique presence in Italian literature, one that mixes different literary genres (epistolary novel, fairytales), narrative modalities (humour) and literary trends (realism, *Verismo*, magical realism), and is thus orchestrated through a complex system of intertextual references.<sup>215</sup> Its subversive value has been highlighted by scholarship. In Francesca Billiani's words, Italian Gothic is 'a hybrid genre and a mode of writing that seeks to destabilise paradigms of realism, rationality, and morality by using the past as a mirror for the present'.<sup>216</sup> In spite of its historical and geographical distancing from the 'real' world, the Gothic 'may in fact be delivering that world in an inverted form, or representing those areas of the world and of consciousness which are, for one reason or another, not available to the normal processes of representation'.<sup>217</sup> This strong intertextual relation with the European Gothic tradition is immediately introduced by title of the novella, 'Racconto d'autunno' that singularly echoes Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Not coincidentally, Shakespeare's text was a fundamental source for the British Gothic, as it challenged the relationship between animate and inanimate, body and simulacrum.<sup>218</sup>

The first and most powerful element evoking the atmosphere of Gothic fiction is the old manor<sup>219</sup> where most of the story is set, the equivalent of the Gothic castle. The

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<sup>214</sup> Leonardo Lattaruolo, 'Antica storia narra così. Considerazioni sul fantastico italiano ottocentesco', pp. 121-134 (pp. 121, 122).

<sup>215</sup> Francesca Billiani, 'The Italian Gothic and Fantastic: An Inquiry into the Notions of Literary and Cultural Traditions (1869-1997)' in *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic*, ed. by Francesca Billiani and Gigliola Sulis (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), pp. 15-31 (p. 16).

<sup>216</sup> Francesca Billiani, 'The Italian Gothic and Fantastic', p. 23.

<sup>217</sup> David Punter, 'Introductory: dimensions of Gothic' in *The Literature of Terror*, I, pp. 1-19 (p. 15).

<sup>218</sup> Shakespeare's plays are full of ghosts, suspense, fearful moments and cultural anxieties, which many writers in the Gothic mode have since imitated, adapted and appropriated. See *Gothic Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis, Dale Townshend (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>219</sup> The manor mirrors Landolfi's tenancy in Pico Farnese. Its memory is also present in other tales. In *Settimana di sole* a similar setting is described: a huge isolated house ('una vecchia casa di trentaquattro stanze, con cortile e giardino'), in a small village where the silence 'regna sovrano'; a lonely inhabitant who moves through long corridors, stairs, attics, interacting with living furniture ('appena sceso in sala, le seggiole mi sono corse incontro festosamente a leccarmi le mani') and ghosts (Tommaso Landolfi, *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), p. 145). Similarly, in *La pietra lunare*, the young protagonist lives alone ('quasi sempre solo col suo gatto e la sua cagna da caccia') in a big manor where he usually stays awake at night spying on the outside from the big windows of the attic. The ancient house where Guru lives, 'nero dagli anni' ('talmente aggrondato e minaccioso appare questo portone col suo vano cupo, che, se anche non suscitasse spaventosi ricordi, nessuno vi passerebbe davanti di notte senza sentire un brivido gelargli il filo della schiena o senza, di giorno,

protagonist finds the manor completely immersed in a wild environment as he is walking down into a cleft. ‘Essa era posta su una specie di minuscolo altipiano, sto per dire ballatoio, d’ogni parto circondato da groppe o colli, che la montagna formava in quel luogo, ove confluivano due o tre massicce pendici’ (15). From the beginning, the manor is immersed in an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty. Apparently empty and silent, in spite of some smoke coming out of the chimney, the building appears to be inaccessible. Two fierce dogs ‘della razza dei lupi’ protect it. The manor appears as a quintessential site of alterity, first of all for its old-fashioned appearance. Both the furniture and the owner’s behaviour seem to belong to another century, suggesting that the property belongs to a different order of temporality, one independent of the external world. The narrator describes the house in terms of both its majesty and abandonment:

Giunsi a piè della facciata principale: essa si ergeva livida nell’aria bruna e aveva davanti un vasto terrazzo, cui si accedeva pe una doppia rampa e su cui si apriva la grande porta. [...] Sul piano della terrazza, intravidi ciuffi d’ortica o altre erbacce, che crescevano di fra le commisure del lastricato: accanto al portone, il muro aveva perduto un largo pezzo d’intonaco. (16)

This impression is confirmed by the architectonic features of the facade, revealing a construction of the fifteenth or sixteenth century: ‘Notai, sulla balaustra di pietra di questa rampa, alcune piramidi e palle anch’esse di pietra, come ne aveva, tre o quattro secoli fa, quasi ogni rustica dimora dei nobili in quei paraggi’ (*ibid.*).

Thus, Landolfi explicitly constructs the house as an equivalent of ‘the castles of Gothic romance’, which, as Joyce M. S. Tompkins claims, ‘are never new’, thereby ‘combin[ing] in their architecture the attractions of tyrannous strength and of melancholy’.<sup>220</sup> Indeed, the description of the manor presents several elements in common with Edgar Allan Poe’s description of the House of Usher:<sup>221</sup> ‘its [the house’s]

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schiarsi almeno la gola’) had been the theatre of dreadful past events; the property of a past nobility, the old owners, called ‘tirannelli’, were infamous in the village for the murder of a trusted fisherman (Tommaso Landolfi, *La pietra lunare*, pp. 41, 33, and 34 respectively).

<sup>220</sup> J. M. S. Tompkins, ‘The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800’ (London, 1932), quoted in Victor Sage and André Breton, ‘English Romans Noirs and Surrealism’ in *The Gothick Novel* ed. by Victor Sage (Houndmills and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990), pp. 80-98 (p. 87).

<sup>221</sup> A page from the autobiographic *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR* (1953) confirms the identification between the two manors in Landolfi’s imagination. There, Landolfi predicts the future of the semi-decaying abode in Pico Farnese through the end of Poe’s short story: ‘Oggi pioveva forte e insistente, non solo fuori, ma dentro da molte parti. Pioveva per la scala a chiocciola, dalla volta sotto la scala esterna, in alcune stanze; sulle pareti si espandevano grandi macchie, altre sulle tele delle soffitte, acqua grondava lungo il filo delle

principle feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves'.<sup>222</sup> As in Poe's tale, the degradation of the building mirrors the decadence of ancient nobility, confirmed by the owner's antiquated manners. Ancient fear linked to the feudal period resurfaces in the Gothic novel under the impulse of new and upsetting historical and social changes – a theme that, for Landolfi the aristocrat, might have deeper, personal resonances. Thus, the manor comes to epitomise the memory of both tyrannical and feudal ages, and, in addition, nostalgic signs of these lost eras. In addition, being insecure and decaying with age, the castles of Gothic fiction cannot protectively separate humans from the wild.

At the same time, the labyrinthine internal nature of the manor ('un laberinto di stanze e di passaggi e di ripostigli e corridoi e scale, alcune palesi, altre segrete o che lo erano state un tempo', 79) conveys dismay, disorientation and insecurity. In his attempt to move through the numerous chambers and passages of the manor, the protagonist describes its internal arrangement as follows: 'considerate altresì, in generale, la speciale disposizione dei vani nella casa, l'uno dentro l'altro, e dunque i continui e già accennati mutamenti di direzione e orientazione cui si era costretti nell'attraversarla' (59). Within this complex setting, the man is forced to wander in 'complicati e ciechi andirivieni per camere e corridoi e sale sconosciute' (72) and repeatedly tends to lose his way: 'Ma intanto, a mano a mano che mi allontanavo dal punto di partenza, mi riusciva più difficile mantenere l'orientamento' (60). Accordingly, Gothic's ambience is traditionally one of uncertainty, fluidity, and instability (5). Riddled with passages and chambers, dungeons, crypts, and attics hiding episodes of lust, violence, sorcery, and other kinds of corruption, the manor in *Racconto d'autunno*, like the castles of Gothic fiction, symbolizes the inadequate protection of rationality. The architecture of the manor provides no barrier against incarnations of both the sexuality and violence humans wish to repress. Indeed, in his wandering across the house, the protagonist will

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pareti, s'infiltrava di sotto e di tra le imposte. E penetrava fino a me sguazzante il grande scroscio, il rombo delle piene. Questa pioggia non era purificante, era corrompente; non scioglieva i pensieri, li inzuppava e appesantiva. Essa macerava fin nel midollo, scommetteva pietra per pietra quanto resta di questa vecchia casa. La quale un giorno non lontano si fenderà a mezzo e lentamente rovinerà seppellendo il suo solitario abitatore; e di tra la fenditura si sarà mostrata una luna rossa; insomma, come della casa di Roderigo Usher. Ebbene? Non è bello che io muoia con lei, o lei con me?'. Tommaso Landolfi, *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR* in *Opere I (1937-1959)* ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milan: Rizzoli, 1991), p. 668.

<sup>222</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other tales* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006), pp. 111-125 (p. 112).

later find ‘una porta di prigione’ (75), a place for torture and captivity, as shown by ‘un grosso anello di ferro da cui pendeva una catena massiccia e rugginosa’ (77). Similarly, in chapter XII, the protagonist will witness a ritual of necromancy in one of these chambers. The Gothic architecture of the manor shapes a perspective of instability by undermining traditional religious, social, and political institutions. Castles, symbols of aristocratic standing and power, are as decrepit and corrupt as the morality and legitimacy (literal and figurative) of their owners.<sup>223</sup>

Furthermore, again according to Gothic conventions, the manor is immersed in wild, menacing nature, and represents its very continuation. This element epitomises a harmonic relationship between man and nature that modernity – and the war in particular – has destroyed. Not only is the manor surrounded by craggy outcrops, but it is literally part of the mountain. Its foundations are made of tunnels and caves merging into the very core of the mountain: ‘Mi trovo dunque, nonché nelle viscere della casa, in quelle della montagna’ (75). The architecture of British Gothic novels explored the tensions between humans and the environment, the abandoning of the countryside and the changes undergone by natural landscapes in the age of the Industrial Revolution. Similarly, Gothic conventions are reactivated here in order to address concerns that relate to the wartime period in which the novella was written. Landolfi witnessed the impact of the Second World War. Pico Farnese and all the surrounding area, woods and villages were altered by the presence of regiments and by the Allied bombing. For both the Gothic novelist and Landolfi, the castles built on the slopes of the mountains, in harmony with the natural landscape, are just a memory. Furthermore, the vocabulary employed for describing the house tends to turn to manifestly corporeal metaphors (‘viscere’), raising doubts as to whether the manor is actually a living entity, participating in the rhythms of nature. This ambiguity of animate/inanimate that surrounds the house culminates at the end of the story, when Landolfi describes its structure destroyed by the bombs in terms of a human body, and implicitly builds a parallel with the attempted rape of the female protagonist, Lucia:

Essa [the manor] giaceva sventrata, mostrando le sue viscere, sorpresa dalla luce nei suoi più intimi segreti, nei suoi cunicoli, nei suoi passaggi un tempo nascosti entro lo spessore delle vecchie muraglie, in quanto rimaneva delle sue suppellettili, gelosamente sacre un tempo alcune, delle sue tapezzerie che ora pendevano come lembi di carne disseccata:

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<sup>223</sup> Yang and Healey, ‘Haunted Landscapes and Fearful Spaces’, p. 7.



lamentevolmente vuota nel suo mistero, che era come il suo sangue; trapassata dal cielo [...] (130)

In addition, other themes variously evoked by the novella, which maintains a connection with the clichés of Gothic novels, include a mysterious portrait, the double, black magic and necromancy. Indeed, once inside the manor, the protagonist will have to solve the enigma around a mysterious feminine presence he perceives but is not able to see ('[una] invisibile mano'<sup>43</sup>). He begins perceiving this presence through mysterious noises ('un mugolio di orrore', 'una porta sbatté', 39), steps ('mi parve d'udire un leggerissimo scalpiccio', 77) and breaths ('il sospiro d'una creatura vivente', 58) of an undefined origin. The protagonist feels as if he is being spied on by an invisible presence: 'ebbi l'impressione d'essere di continuo spiato; pure non si scorgeva alcuno alle finestre' (43). Afterwards, the signs of this presence acquire an undoubtedly feminine nature: 'un pezzo di stoffa preziosa e cangiante' (64), 'un violento segno d'unghia in margine a una lirica del Tasso'<sup>224</sup> (46), 'un lievissimo profumo' (65) and, most of all, a portrait: a blackened picture ('un olio alquanto annerito', 47), representing a woman dressed in nineteenth-century fashion ('la donna era vestita seconda la moda degli ultimi anni del secolo passato o dei primi di questo', 47). The painting fascinates the narrator in an indefinable way: 'un'alta virtù magnetica pareva in essi [in quegli occhi] contenuta e io non potevo staccarne i miei' (47). The painting seems at times capable of coming to life, which is due, the narrator argues, to a certain something possessed by its sitter:

Per quanto bella, colei era dopotutto una donna, che, soltanto, il maestro aveva saputo animare d'una vita forse al di là delle medesime forze di lei; e, o i miei nervi erano scossi davvero, o non vedevo perché dovessi tanto vivamente interessarmene. Che contano però in certi casi i ragionamenti? Io sentivo benissimo quanto fossero falsi i miei. Lungi dall'averne il pittore (che in verità non appariva appunto eccelso) magnificata l'immagine, pareva anzi ella medesima aver guidato la sua mano e aver impresso alla tela un suggello che non era quello dell'arte, sibbene quello della propria singolare natura; una natura, avrei detto, persistente oltre la presenza fisica. (52)

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<sup>224</sup> 'Un'unghia in margine a una poesia d'amore, quell'altra imagine può suscitare se non quella d'una donna?' (46).

The theme of the living portrait is a common cliché of Gothic literature from Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Gogol's *The Portrait* (1835), Poe's 'The Oval Portrait' (1842), and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).<sup>225</sup> In the Gothic tradition, the portrait usually represents the ancestor coming back to life. Its function was that of a warning against old usurpations, expressing the claim of an old aristocracy replaced by the emerging bourgeois classes.<sup>226</sup> It also raises the question of the border between animated and unanimated that, according to Jentsch, determines the real source of the uncanny.<sup>227</sup> However, its centrality in Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno* is indirectly confirmed by the novella's title, plausibly echoing Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, as mentioned above. Indeed, in the final act of Shakespeare's play, Hermione's statue, so excellently carved and faithfully reproducing the figure of the queen, comes to life upon the invocation of Paulina, while ambiguity is maintained as to whether the animation of the lifeless is due to an act of magic or to natural causes:

As she lived peerless  
So her dead likeness, I do well believe  
Excels whatever yet you looked upon  
Or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it  
Lonely, apart. But here it is. Prepare  
To see the life as lively mocked as ever  
Still sleep mocked death: behold, and say  
'tis well.<sup>228</sup>

By evoking this intertextual reminiscence of Shakespeare's play, Landolfi underlines one of the ambiguities characterising the female protagonist of *Racconto d'autunno*, Lucia; namely, the doubt as to whether she is a living person or an animated work of art, the reincarnation of the nineteenth-century lady, her ghost, or indeed the house owner's daughter (as the narrator will later discover), hidden by her father inside the manor.

Similarly, Landolfi employs the motif of the double in repeatedly doubling the figure of Lucia through multiple simulacra in the novella – the portrait, her mother's phantom.

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<sup>225</sup> See Francesco de Cristofaro, 'Grottesche da salotto. Sul ritratto animato nella narrativa dell'Ottocento', in *La scrittura e il volto. Figurazioni fisiognomiche in letteratura*, ed. by Stefano Manferlotti (Naples: Liguori, 2006), pp. 51-65.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>228</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (5, III), ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.113.

The trope assumed a peculiar form and centrality in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, from Matthew Lewis' figure of Father Ambrosio (from *The Monk*, of 1796), split between a public self of religious piety and a private self of blasphemy and illicit passion; E. T. A. Hoffman's Monk Medardus and his alter ego Count Viktorin (from *The Devil's Elixirs*, of 1814); up to Mary Shelley's creature, the monstrous externalization of its creator's own psyche (*Frankenstein*, 1818, 1831).<sup>229</sup> According to Freud and Rank, the theme of the double (*Doppelgänger*) originated in 'the dialectic between the drives of narcissistic self-preservation and of mortal aggression': the double, then, expresses the pathological fear of the loss of the self, ultimately the fear of death.<sup>230</sup> The ambiguity and the duplicity of the self in *Racconto d'autunno* is conveyed by the presence of two mysterious female figures with the same name: Lucia (the daughter) and Lucia (the mother). Until the last part of the story, the protagonist confuses the traces of the dead old woman (like the portrait and a fine woven she wears there) with the fresh traces of the young living Lucia (the smell, the unmade bed, the breath) believing that both figures coincide with one. Even after having found out that the idealized figure of the portrait is dead, the protagonist, seeing young Lucia finally free from the confinement of the house and her father, still confuses her with the woman of the portrait: 'Non pensai certo, in quel punto, che questa giovane donna non poteva essere l'originale dell'annoso ritratto, che cento altre ragioni mi smentivano; io, ormai a un passo da lei, soltanto la guardavo e non potevo parlare' (103). Lucia constantly struggles with the 'evil side' that her mother epitomises. It is only at the end that the two are finally separated, and for good ('Lucia! Costei sì era Lucia, non l'immonda larva di quella notte remota', 103).<sup>231</sup>

In addition, in the peculiarly 'dark' context of the novella, Lucia's name is particularly telling. Indeed, the name invests the female character with strong symbolic connotations, given that its root is the Latin noun *lux* (light). Moreover, this name has specific implications in relation to the Italian literary tradition. As critics have often highlighted, Manzoni's Lucia is a fully Gothic 'damsel in distress' and yet, in the

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<sup>229</sup> Dale Townshend, 'Doubles' in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, 2 vols (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), I, pp. 189-195 (pp. 190, 191).

<sup>230</sup> Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 31.

<sup>231</sup> The man refers to the ritual of invocation that he witnessed just before escaping from the house, when he was able to see the materialisation of Lucia's mother's spirit in the form of a dreadful entity created by the exhalations of the fire. At that moment, all his fantasies about the woman of the portrait disappear brutally (also justifying the sudden departure of the man - the quest is over, together with the reason that led him to stay).

reversal of Gothic conventions, her name announces that she is the ‘light-bearer’ in a world dominated by sin.<sup>232</sup> The allusion to Manzoni is confirmed by the fact that Landolfi quite inadvertently names the owner of the manor (and husband of the dead Lucia), Renzo.<sup>233</sup> By choosing such a name, Landolfi plays both with Gothic tradition and with the way in which it has been interiorised – and subverted – in the masterpiece of the Italian nineteenth century. However, this intertextual free-play is not deprived of ambiguous implications. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the arrival of the ‘liberators’ does not correspond to a happy ending for the narrator and for Lucia, whose ‘light’ is ultimately extinguished. Equally, in the conclusion, the opposition between inside (death) and outside (life) traditionally underlying Gothic novels<sup>234</sup> is completely reversed, as menace and death come precisely from the outside in the form of the ‘liberating’ forces.

The final aspect of the novella connected with Gothic strategies and atmospheres is the magic embodied in the figure of the two Lucias, the manor itself and Renzo. In particular, a long and captivating scene of necromancy occupies three chapters of the novella (XII, XIII, and XIV). The interest of this long sequence not only relies on the fact that necromancy is another recurrent motif in Gothic fiction.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, Landolfi draws inspiration here from authentic materials (a manual of magic) bypassing the intermediation of literary sources. In describing this long scene of magic ritual in all its phases and aspects, Landolfi paraphrases the French Kabbalist and occultist Éliphas Lévi’s *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*<sup>236</sup> (1854–1856).<sup>237</sup> In particular, in the

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<sup>232</sup> On Manzoni and the Gothic see Mariarosa Bricchi, “‘Come una magnifica veste gittata sopra un manichino manierato e logoro’: i *Promessi sposi*, il gusto gotico e Ann Radcliffe”, *Autografo*, 13, 31 (1995), 29-70. On Lucia’s name, see Rosamaria La Valva, ‘Lucia Mondello: lux mundi?’, *Paragone*, 44 (1993), 95-111.

<sup>233</sup> The character is actually unnamed throughout the whole novella, called by the narrator ‘un vecchio’, ‘uomo’, ‘l’ospite’ etc... When the narrator asks him about his name, he replies: ‘a che vi servirebbe il mio nome?’ (33). However, only on one occasion, in chapter XI, the narrator claims: ‘rammentai infatti vagamente d’aver veduto, nel giardino di Renzo davanti alla casa, due o tre di tali cespi (77). Landolfi never clarifies if the protagonist gave him this name, or if it was the real name of the old man.

<sup>234</sup> Alla forza centripeta del tiranno del castello (luogo immobile e stagnante, spazio di MORTE) si oppone quella centrifuga dell’eroe e dell’eroina verso l’esterno, in una dinamica – resa più significativamente ardua e qualche volta impossibile – verso la VITA’. Mirella Billi, *Il Gotico inglese: Il Romanzo del terrore, 1764-1820* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1986), p. 35.

<sup>235</sup> The fullest Gothic treatment of necromancy is *Der Geisterbanner* (1792) by Lawrence Flammenberg and Bernard Stein. Other examples of manipulation of dead matter and spirit include: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818); Rudyard Kipling’s *They* (1904) and *En-Dor* (1919); Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Professor Challenger Stories*; Agatha Christie’s ‘The Last Séance’ (1933); Noël Coward’s *Blithe Spirit* (1941). Carolyn D. Williams, ‘Necromancy’ in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 278 (p. 278).

<sup>236</sup> Éliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Cambridge University Press ebook.

thirteenth chapter of the second volume, Lévi provides precise instructions on how to perform a ‘love conjuration’ (*évocation d’amour*). Lévi claims: ‘Le motif louable d’une évocation peut être ou d’amour ou d’intelligence. Les évocations d’amour exigent moins d’appareil et sont de toutes manières plus faciles’.<sup>238</sup> I will now compare Lévi’s instructions with Landolfi’s description of the ritual.

The first of Lévi’s recommendations regards the location where the ritual must take place:

On doit d’abord recueillir avec soin tous les souvenirs de celui ou de celle qu’on désire revoir, les objets qui lui ont servi et qui ont gardé son empreinte, et meubler soit une chambre où la personne ait demeuré de son vivant, soit un local semblable [...].<sup>239</sup>

Similarly, in Landolfi, the room where the ritual takes place is described as follows:

Era una grande stanza matrimoniale [...], ogni cosa, il più piccolo ninnolo, le cortine del letto, le babbucce ricamate a piè di questo, lo sgabello imbottito davanti alla toletta, e cento altre (*les objets qui lui ont servi*), ogni cosa serbava viva la di lei impronta (*qui ont gardé son empreinte*) ed era rimasta, lo si vedeva bene, come quando ella aveva lasciato quel luogo l’ultima volta (*meubler soit une chambre où la personne ait demeuré de son vivant*). (85)

In order to begin the ritual, the conjurer must:

[...] Mettra son portrait, voilé de blanc, au milieu des fleurs que la personne aimait et que l’on renouvellera tous les jours.<sup>240</sup>

Likewise, in *Racconto d’autunno*:

In un angolo, e la stanza intera dominando dall’alto d’un prezioso tavolino laccato e intagliato col piano coperto da un drappo di cupo velluto rosso, era posto un grande ritratto

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<sup>237</sup> The intertextual play of the prayers to the four elements (see below) has been noted by Keala Jewell in ‘Gothic Negotiations of Power’. However, the scholar did not notice that all the other elements of the ritual are built step by step following Lévi’s instruction to realise a love invocation in the chapter ‘Necromancy’ (2<sup>nd</sup> volume).

<sup>238</sup> Lévi, ‘La nécromancie’ in *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, II, pp. 175-195 (p. 184).

<sup>239</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>240</sup> Ibidem.

(*son portrait*) dalla cornice bruna, ammantato d'un fitto velo nero (*voilé de blanc*)<sup>241</sup> [...]. Davanti a cui e ai cui lati [*au milieu des fleurs*] stavano quattro vasi violacei con grandi fasci di quelle medesime roselline d'autunno da me vedute nel giardino e nel sotterraneo (forse i suoi fiori preferiti [*fleurs que la personne aimait*] fra i pochi che l'aspra montagna produceva?) e alcuni oggetti [...]. Inoltre un pane spezzato (*on mettra deux couverts et l'on rompera une part du pain, qui devra être servi entier*); e un bicchiere a calice con un liquido roseo, che pareva vino annacquato (*quelques gouttes de vin dans le verre de la personne qu'on veut évoquer*). (85-86)

Lévi also provides indications on the preparation before the day of the ritual and the two weeks preceding it:

Le jour fixé pour l'évocation, il faudra se parer dès le matin comme pour une fête, n'adresser le premier la parole à personne de la journée, ne faire qu'un repas composé de pain, de vin et de racines ou de fruits.<sup>242</sup>

These are likewise paraphrased by Landolfi:

Notevole (fino a un certo punto, dato l'uomo) fu semmai il fatto che il mio ospite non prendesse cibo per tutto il dì, credo, quantunque non sembrasse malato; che almeno scomparisse all'ora dei pasti (*il faudra observer une chasteté rigoureuse, vivre dans la retraite et ne faire qu'un modeste repas et une légère collation par jour*); e, specie, che fosse stranamente parato a festa (*il faudra se parer dès le matin comme pour une fête*), ben rasato, ben pettinato, con indosso un abito dei suoi tempi, ma, a parte questo, assai elegante, sì ch'egli ne risultava un vero zerbinotto, anzi un vero lion findisecolo. [...] Venne finalmente la sera, quindi l'ora in cui il vecchio era solito assentarsi (*Tous les soirs, à la même heure, il faudra s'enfermer avec une seule lumière peu éclatante, telle qu'une petite lampe funéraire ou un cierge, dans la chambre consacrée au souvenir de la personne regrettée*). (82)

Finally, the magician illustrates the various steps of the core phase of the ritual:

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<sup>241</sup> Landolfi here replaces the colour white with black, perhaps to increase the demonic appearance of the ritual, as he will do by mixing the invocation of the four elements with the love invocation (which has nothing to do with the invocation of evil spirits, in Lévi's manual – indeed the two rituals are illustrated in different sections of the manual).

<sup>242</sup> Lévi, 'La nécromancie', p. 185.

Le soir, à l'heure de la visite habituelle, on se rendra dans la chambre en silence; on y allumera un feu clair avec du bois de cyprès, et l'on y jettera sept fois de l'encens en prononçant le nom de la personne qu'on veut revoir; on éteindra ensuite la lampe et on laissera le feu mourir. Ce jour-là on ne dévoilera pas le portrait. Quand la flamme sera éteinte, on remettra de l'encens sur les charbons, et l'on invoquera Dieu suivant les formules de la religion à laquelle appartenait la personne décédée et suivant les idées qu'elle avait elle-même de Dieu. Il faudra, en faisant cette prière, s'identifier à la personne évoquée, parler comme elle parlerait, se croire en quelque sorte elle-même.<sup>243</sup>

And Landolfi accurately follows them:

Quando, così proditoriamente, entrai, il vecchio aveva già composto e acceso nel camino un piccolo fuoco d'un legno che giudicai ginepro o cipresso (*avec du bois de cyprès*), il quale ardeva di fiamma chiara (*un feu clair*) e diffondendo un leggero aroma di resine. Ora egli, dati gli ultimi tocchi alla pira, fece due passi indietro e, ponendosi una mano sulla fronte, parve raccogliersi. Poi prese da un minuscolo tavolino lì accanto qualcosa che in capo a un istante riconobbi al profumo per incenso, e ne asperse il fuoco pronunciando sommessamente un nome, il nome che accolsi fremendo, il suo nome: Lucia! (*et l'on y jettera sept fois de l'encens en prononçant le nom de la personne qu'on veut revoir*)

Per sette volte (*sept fois*) ripeté l'operazione e l'appello, e la sua voce si fece gradatamente più ferma e più alta. Indi sedette su un seggiolone presso al medesimo tavolino, spense la lucerna su questo (*on éteindra ensuite la lampe*), e rimase del tutto immobile e silenzioso. [...] Passò un tempo, forse un gran tempo. La fiamma nel camino languiva, cessò del tutto (*et on laissera le feu mourir*); non rimanevano che i rossi carboni nel buio. Il vecchio si riscosse allora, gettò sui carboni altro incenso (*Quand la flamme sera éteinte, on remettra de l'encens sur les charbons*); e improvvisamente prese a parlare. [...] Era una preghiera, la sua, una lunga preghiera a un dio ignoto (o troppo noto?) (*et l'on invoquera Dieu suivant les formules de la religion à laquelle appartenait la personne décédée et suivant les idées qu'elle avait elle-même de Dieu*). [...] Ma la sua voce stessa, devo dirlo? Non sembrava la sua, e le sue parole egli sembrava cercare a fatica, quasi taluno glielo suggerisse e lui non intendesse bene; quasi [...], egli si studiasse con taluno di immedesimarsi; colla memoria, coll'essere o l'essenza di taluno (*Il faudra, en faisant cette prière, s'identifier à la personne évoquée, parler comme elle parlerait, se croire en quelque sorte elle-même*). Non so come giustificare questa ingiustificabilissima fra tutte le

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<sup>243</sup> Lévi, 'La nécromancie', pp. 186-187.

impressioni, ma so che accolsi le sue parole, e persino le udii, come di altri. Come di lei. (86-87)

In the next chapter of the novella (XIII), the prayer is transcribed almost in its entirety. The prayer is paraphrased again by Lévi's manual, this time from the chapter of *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* entitled 'La conjuration des quatres'. The four elements involved in the conjuration are the elementary spirits – sylphs of the air, undines of the water, fire salamanders and gnomes of the earth, and they are symbolized by the Tetragram.<sup>244</sup> The conjuration of the four elements was meant to govern elementary spirits and thus become king of the occult elements ('devenir ainsi le roi des elements occultes').<sup>245</sup> Lévi again provides precise instructions on how to carry out the conjuration, articulated in five phases: the exorcism of the air, followed by the prayer to the Sylphs; the exorcism of the water, followed by the prayer to the Undines; the exorcism of the fire, followed by the prayer to the Salamanders; the exorcism of the earth, followed by the prayer to the Gnomes; finally, the conjuration of the four, recited while holding the Pentacle of Solomon in one hand. Landolfi faithfully paraphrases the four prayers from Lévi's manual in the same order and also includes the incipit of the final conjuration (find in the appendix the two texts seen in parallel).

Finally, after pronouncing the invocation to the gods, in the instructions for the love invocation, Lévi suggests:

Puis, après un quart d'heure de silence, lui parler comme si elle était présente, avec affection et avec foi, en la priant de se montrer à nous; renouveler cette prière mentalement et en couvrant son visage de ses deux mains, puis appeler trois fois et à haute voix la personne; attendre à genoux et les yeux fermés ou couverts pendant quelques minutes en lui parlant mentalement; puis l'appeler trois fois encore d'une voix douce et affectueuse, et ouvrir lentement les yeux.<sup>246</sup>

Similarly, in *Racconto d'autunno*:

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<sup>244</sup> In alchemy they represent the magical elements salt, Sulphur, mercury and azoth; in mystic philosophy the ideas Spirit, Matter, Motion and Rest; in hieroglyphs the man, eagle, lion and bull. Lewis Spence, 'Magical diagrams' in *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism*, ed. by Lewis Spence (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1920), pp. 261-262 (p. 261).

<sup>245</sup> Éliphas Lévi, 'La conjuration des quatres' in *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, II, pp. 75-92 (p. 77).

<sup>246</sup> Lévi, 'La nécromancie', pp. 186-187.



Ora egli tacque per un tempo, che a me parve lunghissimo (*puis, après un quart d'heure de silence*); poi riprese a parlare, ma con mutata voce [...]. «Vergine,» diceva «vergine santa, mia piccolo, madre mia, perché m'hai abbandonato? Sono solo e ti aspetto: da tanto tempo ti aspetto. Mostrati, vergine mia. [...] Che io possa stringerti fra le mie braccia, o mia creatura infinita. Vieni, rugiada, pioggia d'oro. Lucia, Lucia, vieni!...» (*lui parler comme si elle était présente, avec affection et avec foi, en la priant de se montrer à nous*) [...]. E adesso quella voce s'era fatta sorda e uniforme, monotona; intollerabilmente monotona; e le parole erano da ultimo come soffocate, poiché egli doveva essersi coperta la faccia colle mani (*renouveler cette prière mentalement et en couvrant son visage de ses deux mains*) (93). [...] Vidi il vecchio in ginocchio e cogli occhi chiusi (*attendre à genoux et les yeux fermés ou couverts*) davanti al braciere medesimo. E d'un tratto suonò la sua voce, forte, ma dolce e amorosa (*d'une voix douce et affectueuse*), nel disperato triplice appello (*puis l'appeler trois fois encore*): Lucia! Lucia! Lucia! In quella il fumo ebbe un brivido, una brusca contrazione (94).

In the novella, the apparition of Lucia's spirit follows (in chapter XIV), in the shape of smoke rising from the fire:

Convolgendosi su se stesso e addensandosi il fumo dette luogo a una grande figura femminile staccata dal braciere, sospesa dunque a mezz'aria, che ancora fluttuava un poco, per largo e per lungo, ma si rapprese e fissò rapidamente in un'immagine precisa, percorsa, soltanto, da alterne correnti di luce, o piuttosto di fumo medesimo; come il fumo fosse, ripeto, il suo invisibile sangue (95)

Landolfi later defines the spirit as 'uno spirito d'inferno', '[una] immonda larva' (96), an expression probably derived again from Lévi who in *Histoire de la Magie* (1860) defines *larvae* as fluid elementary spirits whose evocation 'c'est avoir la puissance de coaguler les fluides par une projection de lumière astrale. Or cette puissance ainsi dirigée ne peut produire que des désordres et des malheurs'.<sup>247</sup> Landolfi's description of the spirit assuming shape from the smoke similarly seems to recall Lévi's description of the *larvae*:

Ces larves ont donc un corps aérien formé de la vapeur du sang. C'est pour cela qu'elles cherchent le sang répandu et se nourrissaient autrefois de la fumée des sacrifices. Ce sont les enfants monstrueux de ces cauchemars impurs qu'on appelait autrefois les incubes et les

<sup>247</sup> Éliphas Lévi, 'La saint Kabbale' in *Histoire de la Magie*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), I, pp. 105-117 (p. 114).

succubes. Lorsqu'ils sont assez condensés pour être vus, ce n'est qu'une vapeur colorée par le reflet d'une image; ils n'ont pas de vie propre, mais ils imitent la vie de celui qui les évoque comme l'ombre imite le corps.<sup>248</sup>

Therefore, Renzo's evocation of his beloved woman seems to turn into some unexpected invocation of evil forces ('era un'immagine perversa, terribile e cupa, e non aveva più nulla del di lei incantevole smarrimento', 96) that leads the protagonist, witnessing the scene from a concealed position, to interrupt the ritual. In Lévi's words, the magus attempting the conjuration assumes a terrible responsibility: 'Aussi le magiste qui emploie leur concours assume-t-il sur lui une responsabilité terrible, car il devra expier tout le mal qu'il leur fera faire, et la grandeur de ses tourments sera proportionnée à l'étendue de la puissance qu'il aura exercée par leur entremise'.<sup>249</sup> Renzo's sudden illness after the conjuration and his later death may be seen, therefore, as a consequence of his attempt to evoke dark forces while trying to summon his dead wife back to life.

To conclude, in this long sequence of necromancy, Landolfi employs authentic sources on magic rather than only literary materials. Moreover, the author merges two magic rituals (the love invocation and the conjuration of the four) which are separated in their original source. The choice to invoke the four elementary spirits in the course of the love invocation must be seen in response to one of Lévi's instructions for the love ritual, namely to invoke the gods in which the beloved dead person believed ('l'on invoquera Dieu suivant les formules de la religion à laquelle appartenait la personne décédée et suivant les idées qu'elle avait elle-même de Dieu'<sup>250</sup>). Landolfi is therefore confirming the unorthodox beliefs of Lucia and all her family. As the reader will later find out:

Coltivava inoltre, costei [Lucia the mother], l'arte magica, che trasmesse al marito e in parte alla figlia e in cui spiegava naturali e sorprendenti capacità; [...] I coniugi si giuravano fedeltà oltre la morte, facevano mille progetti per quella che sarebbe stata la loro vita nell'aldilà, della quale non dubitavano, si promettevano segni per il caso che uno di loro fosse morto anzitempo, eccetera (112).

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<sup>248</sup> Lévi, 'La saint Kabbale', p. 116.

<sup>249</sup> Lévi, 'La conjuration des quatres', p. 77.

<sup>250</sup> Lévi, 'La nécromancie', p. 186.

Indeed, young Lucia, whom the protagonist will meet after her father's death, will soon reveal her magical attributes: she is able to read other people's minds ('la sua sorprendente virtù di penetrare gli altrui pensieri', 109); she can see in the darkness ('ci vedo al buio', 108); she knows many languages and can read in each of them ('So tante lingue, sai? E so leggere tutti i libri, 107); she is in communication with the manifestations of nature ('Io sento in queste vene azzurre, [...] sento la pioggia e il bel tempo [...], sento se un albero è crollato per il peso della neve lassù nella foresta! E qui nelle tempie sento il vento, anche il vento lontano sulle cime, o su quelle altre montagne...106);<sup>251</sup> and with animals ('Lo sai che i topi non mi evitano? [...] Io parlo con loro, e a loro modo mi rispondono. Anche gli uccelli si lasciano toccare, non sarà poi perché anch'io sono maga come la mamma?' 119). Lucia's magical powers even allow her to foresee the tragic events to come. In an apparent epileptic fit ('Il suo fragile corpo vibrava, si contorceva, scattava, in preda alle più spaventose convulsioni, e io non riuscivo a dominarne la scatenata e, ancora una volta, sovrumana energia'123), traditionally associated with prophetic states of trance, Lucia will see a group of soldiers approaching the house ('Adesso lo sento bene: perché qualcuno s'avvicina. Sono loro, loro, i soldati! 124). This prophetic scene will mark the irruption of historical events in the story, events that will strike the old manor and all its mysteries and secrets.

*Conveying instability: a liminal text*

As previously illustrated, Gothic texts deploy conventions to create porous worlds where social, political, spiritual, physical, geographical, and personal boundaries are permeable and constantly shifting. The Gothic ambience of uncertainty and instability is created by means of several strategies. As an example, representing landscape and nature as dark and obfuscated by storms and fogs conveys disorientation and humans' inability to assert power and control over a shifting, even hostile, nature. Similarly, the shadowy depths of caves, forests, or tarns mirror the characters' dark and hidden thoughts or past.<sup>252</sup> At the same time, the impermeable structures of decaying castles

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<sup>251</sup> These words seem to bring the intertextual memory of D'Annunzio's 'Meriggio' (from *Alcyone*, 1904): [...] E il fiume è la mia vena,/ il monte è la mia fronte,/ la selva è la mia pube,/ la nube è il mio sudore./ E io sono nel fiore/ della stiancia, nella scaglia/ della pina, nella bacca,/ del ginepro: io son nel fuco,/ nella paglia marina,/ in ogni cosa esigua,/ in ogni cosa immane,/ nella sabbia contigua,/ nelle vette lontane (85-97).

<sup>252</sup> The latter are particularly recurrent in Landolfi's writing and particularly in the three novellas here analyzed.

and monasteries/abbeys seem to symbolize the inadequate protection of rationality against human violence, lust and the supernatural. All these elements shape a perspective of instability within many exemplars of Gothic fiction, as they do in Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno*. However, a further strategy here intervenes and relies on a textual and thematic ambiguity in the manor, characters and the narrator, which I analyze by adopting the anthropological notion of liminality.

Derived from anthropology, the category connotes transitional conditions in rituals.<sup>253</sup> In Victor Turner's terms, liminal entities, between a pre-ritual status and a new status, are 'neither living nor dead from one aspect and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories'.<sup>254</sup> The concept has lately been broadened to describe political and cultural change as well as rituals. During liminal periods of all kinds, social hierarchies may be reversed or temporarily dissolved, the continuity of tradition may become uncertain, and future outcomes once taken for granted may be thrown into doubt.<sup>255</sup> I will argue that in *Racconto d'autunno* a similar ambiguity connotes characters, settings, spatial dynamics, situations and narrative strategies creating a sense of instability that mirrors the fragile historical and political scenario of Italy in the 1940s.

Borders, thresholds, and doorways are crucial in rites of passage, as they determine an inversion of social roles and open up multiple possibilities. As Turner puts it, 'in this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen', so that 'liminality guarantees nothing' and 'merely occasions the freedom to imagine alternatives; it does not compel one to exercise that freedom or to imagine wisely and well'.<sup>256</sup> Set at a historical watershed moment (1943-44) and in a border-line area between two military fronts – on the so-called *Linea Gustav* (known in English as the Winter Line) – *Racconto d'autunno* is literally constructed as a descent into hell through the multiple thresholds and borders that lead from an outside space into the manor and its dungeons, tunnels and caves. In chapter X, in the attempt to escape from the old owner of the

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<sup>253</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

<sup>254</sup> Victor W. Turner, 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage', in Id., *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, pp. 93-111, p. 97.

<sup>255</sup> See *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, ed. by Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2015).

<sup>256</sup> Victor Turner, quoted in Robert Daly, 'Liminality and fiction in Cooper, Hawthorne, Cather and Fitzgerald', in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 70-85 (p. 71).

house, the protagonist progressively descends into the 'viscere' of the manor through a number of doors, secret passages, basements and multiple stairs, until he reaches an underground passage that turns out to be a kind of cave immersed in almost complete darkness. After taking another narrow passage ('un cunicolo', 74), the man realizes that the ground becomes progressively sloping:

Rimasi egualmente un po' sconcertato nel rendermi conto, dopo pochi passi compiuti appoggiandomi alla viscida parete, che il terreno cominciava a scendere; tirai avanti tuttavia, e non so dire quanto durasse la graduale discesa. In capo a un certo tempo [...], intravidi così una grotta abbastanza grande, una vera grotto con tanto di stalattiti. (74)

From this position, whose depth is revealed by the presence of stalactites, the protagonist will find other stairs and begin another long descent, immersed in a thicker darkness: 'Fu molto se vidi all'ultimo momento una terza scaletta che, due passi discosto, s'inabissava nel suolo; e l'oscurità mi riavvolse' (74). The destination point of this long descent is the prison where, as the reader will later discover, Lucia was imprisoned and tortured by her husband. In this respect, Valdine Clemens points out that 'the dark tunnels and underground passages of Gothic edifices represent descent into the unconscious, away from the socially constructed self toward the uncivilized, the primitive'.<sup>257</sup> In *Racconto d'autunno*, the deepest corners of the house seem to unearth precisely the moral darkness that the cultural elite attempt to hide and the unconscious thoughts, fears and desires of the author.

Characters too are located in a sphere of ambiguity and indeterminacy. First of all, the strongly symbolic value of the narrator's situation is not to be underestimated. His status actually recalls specific aspects of Turner and Van Gennep's concept of liminality, one which transforms his entrance in the manor as a transition from one status to another and therefore acts as a form of 'rite of passage'. In such rites, the initiate is primarily removed and isolated from the rest of society (-La guerra m'aveva sospinto [...] lontano dai miei abituali luoghi di residenza-, 11), as well as being dispossessed of all his belongings, including his identity. This state is described by Turner as 'sacred poverty'.<sup>258</sup> Lucia herself is invested with the same type of ambiguity. Her overall nature (dead or alive? hysterical subject or supernatural entity?) remains

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<sup>257</sup> Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey, 'Haunted Landscapes and Fearful Space', pp. 7-8.

<sup>258</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 99.

liminal until the end of the book, and beyond. Thus, doubt is systematically raised as to whether Lucia is a revenant, the reincarnation of her mother, or a hysterical subject. At the end of the novella, during an epileptic fit, she prophesises the arrival of the soldiers, further reiterating the hesitation as to whether she is a ‘damsel in distress’ or actually a supernatural being.

Hesitation and indeterminacy affect in turn both the main character (within the plot) and the reader (in a meta-textual dimension). By relying on his nineteenth-century sources, Landolfi amplifies elements of uncertainty, thereby creating a multi-levelled textual device in which the reader is endlessly left asking questions, and made to wonder about the tale’s very status, its reliability, and eventually its meaning itself. From this angle, *Racconto d’autunno* is really an ‘uncanny’ text, in that the literary uncanny, in Freud’s words, is intrinsically connected with treachery, and the very processes of literary fiction:

He betrays us to a superstition we thought we had ‘surmounted’; he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it. We react to his fiction as if they had been our own experiences. By the time we become aware of the trickery, it is too late: the writer has already done what he set out to do.<sup>259</sup>

On the one hand, hesitation in *Racconto d’autunno* is functional to the literary plot, and its slow construction of suspense is intensified by the use of a first-person literary mode. The whole narration is entrusted to the protagonist who is in a condition of cognitive inferiority towards the events, which are consequently presented as enigmas he has to solve. A good example of this is the protagonist’s encounter with the old manor, and his doubt as to whether it is empty or inhabited: at first glance, it seems to be an old, decaying manor; afterwards, the protagonist divines some human presence from the smoke coming from a chimney (‘la casa era sicuramente abitata, come provava a sufficienza il fumo che ne avevo veduto levarsi un quarto d’ora prima’, 16); finally, he concludes that the house must be empty (‘Per quanto, in una parola, si poteva giudicare alla prima, era quella una vecchia casa caduta in abbandono’, 16). In this way, Landolfi seems to question the inanimate status of the house, playing with the tension animate/inanimate that forms one of the most powerful sources of the uncanny (it should be noted that one of his sources was almost surely Poe’s *The Fall of the House of*

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<sup>259</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 157.

*Usher*).<sup>260</sup> At the same time, doubt is created about the house's inhabitants. The protagonist hears a strange noise coming from the inside, and discovers through the window a room 'piena di suppellettili' and 'nondimeno curiosamente nuda' (19): inside, the fireplace is still burning, a warm soup is on the table and a chair moved sideways, as if someone had left just a few minutes before. Soon afterwards, he meets two dogs displaying supernatural features.

Indeed, the supernatural is the main source of hesitation throughout the story, reaching its peak when the spirit of Lucia's mother finally materializes at the end:

Una grande figura femminile staccata dal braciere, sospesa dunque a mezz'aria, che ancora fluttuava un poco, per largo e per lungo, ma si rapprese e fissò rapidamente in un'immagine precisa, percorsa, soltanto, da alterni correnti di luce, o piuttosto di fumo medesimo; come il fumo fosse, dico, il suo visibile sangue. (95)

In spite of stressing the tangibility (*corporeità*) of the evoked being, underlining that 'non era peraltro trasparente, e oscurò un grande quadro sulla parete a me opposta' (95), the protagonist, a few lines below, subtly introduces the possibility of an illusion of the senses:

Avrei anche volute avvertire il vecchio: quel fantasma che egli non aveva cessato di pregare e chiamare coi più dolci nomi, non era se non uno spaventoso inganno dei suoi, dei nostri sensi sconvolti, eccitati da qualche infera potenza, posseduti; quella non era la donna che egli amava, che amavamo. (RdA 96)

Such narrative devices fully match Todorov's definition of the Fantastic, being an expedient aimed at blurring the borders between reality and the unreal.<sup>261</sup> At the same time, this legitimates a reading in the light of Freud's understanding of the uncanny, which is precisely grounded in the hybridization between familiarity and otherness, that is to say between rational explanation and the possibility of a supernatural intervention: several episodes of *Racconto d'autunno* may be interpreted in the light of Freud's essay of 1919, including Lucia's undergoing an epileptic fit, the theme of the double, and the phenomena of unintended repetition (with the protagonist occasionally finding himself back in the same place while exploring the manor). First and foremost, the choice itself

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<sup>260</sup> The influence of Poe is also clear in the episode of the portrait that is discussed in the section on Gothic repertoire. On the uncanny, see Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 150.

<sup>261</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.

of setting the whole novella in a (supposedly haunted) house goes in the same direction as Freud's interpretation of the uncanny, whose German equivalent, *das Unheimliche*, etymologically stresses its connection with the 'house/home' (*Heim*).

In this way, *Racconto d'autunno* starts revealing its 'uncanny' and liminal core; not only for its content, but rather in the way it questions the very process of reading and interpreting, by never fully confirming but rather confusing the reader's assumptions. There is even hesitation about the tale's status as a historical account. Is this story about a partisan? May we define it as a Resistance narration? Indeed, Landolfi's strategies determine an act of defamiliarisation on a political level, implicitly questioning univocal and pre-determined interpretations of the civil war. By leaving the reader the choice, Landolfi mimetically reproduces the uncertainty of such a fluid moment as that of 1943, when everyone could opt to 'organizza[re] [...] una resistenza armata' or 'resister[e] almeno passivamente', or even 'badar[e] soltanto a togliersi dal folto della mischia' (11).

#### *Giving voice to the victims*

History reappears, as we have said, in the last chapter of the novella, putting a firm end to the brief harmony reached, thanks to the two lovers' vicissitudes ('fu quella, quelle ingenua espansioni, la nostra breve felicità', 122). The impact of the war on the lives of the civilian population is vividly epitomised in the novella by the image of the arrival of a *goumier* (colonial Moroccan soldiers who served in auxiliary units attached to the French Army), the killing of Lucia and of the two fierce dogs (the supernatural guardians of the manor) and, finally, the ruin of the ancient house. Therefore, there is also a sense of defamiliarisation in the notion of 'liberation' that is ironically evoked in the very opening of the novella, when Landolfi mentioned two armies fighting: the 'esercito invasore', referring to the German army, and the 'esercito detto liberatore' (the 'so-called' bearer of freedom), referring to the Allied armies. The use of 'detto' questions the value of the liberation phase from the beginning, adopting the point of view of the civilian population of Ciociaria hit by the bombings, raids and mass rapes following the Battle of Monte Cassino in 1944. Indeed, after the Allies' capture of Monte Cassino, thousands of *goumiers* and other colonial troops battered the slopes of



the hills surrounding the town and the villages of Ciociaria (in southern Lazio). The mass rapes and killings committed have been given the term ‘marocchinate’.<sup>262</sup>

In *Racconto d'autunno*, the irruption of Moroccan soldiers is introduced through an episode involving an apparent epileptic fit. In a trance-like state, Lucia foresees the arrival of the soldiers, thus investing the event with magical-symbolic value. At the same time, the description of the troops does not provide a specific determination, but rather focuses on elements – uniforms, complexion, hair, accessories – that vaguely suggest an idea of alterity, even of the supernatural variety:

Raggiunti l'esterno, e precisamente il terrazzo posteriore, che già vi sopravvenivano tre soldati d'una razza e d'un corpo a me sconosciuti [...]. Bruni di carnagione e d'uniforme, parendo alle labbra e agli occhi gente d'Affrica, avevano lunghi capelli inanellati sotto l'elmetto e cerchi d'oro alle orecchie. [...] È inutile soggiunga che nulla di buono presagivano i loro ceffi, i quali avevano alcunché di crudele, di belluino e persino di diabolico (125-26).

Literary theory has extensively explored the role of blackness in Gothic literature, negotiating cultural, geographical, and racial alterity in the age of slave trading and colonial explorations.<sup>263</sup> In Landolfi's novella, however, the association between blackness and diabolism does not only express a kind of post-colonial anxiety, even if Landolfi makes it explicit.<sup>264</sup> It also expresses the feeling of displacement experienced by civilian populations in wartime. Let us revisit the passage quoted above by taking account of the following victims' accounts, as reported by Tommaso Baris:

Nui aspettavamo gli liberatori, arrivettero chigli de n'auta razza. Erano brutti. Parevano gli diavuli. [...] Erano niri con gli occie rusci, con gli 'recchini agli u nase... na montagna piena, sbucavano da tutte le parti, pigliavano tutte le donne che incuntravano e se le

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<sup>262</sup> Andrea Cionci, ‘La verità nascosta delle ‘marocchinate’, saccheggi e stupri delle truppe francesi in mezza Italia’, *La Stampa*, 16 March 2017.

<sup>263</sup> See especially Kari J. Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992). The ‘black monster’, D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf argue, is often a case of -empire biting back to the centre: Introduction to Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. by D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Toronto: Broadview, 2004), pp. 9-26, (p. 17).

<sup>264</sup> ‘Ma essi, che in tempi precedenti avevano avuto a subire gravi torti, nel loro paese medesimo, dai nostri connazionali, giungevano ora qui colla sete della vendetta e l'animo dei saccheggiatori e degli stupratori’ (126).

portavano alla bosaglia...<sup>265</sup>

Erano niri, brutti, vestuti con tutti chigli panni lunghi, con gli ‘recchini come le donne. Certi c’avevano gli ‘recchini pure agliu nase e i capigli lunghi a treccia. [...] La vallata era tutto nu pianto e nu lamento...<sup>266</sup>

Baris remarks that the elements conveying alterity, such as the earrings (gli ‘recchini agli u nase’), the long tresses (‘i capigli lunghi a treccia’), the skin colour (‘erano niri’), the uniform (‘panni lunghi’) and, especially, the diabolical appearance (‘parevano gli diavuli’) were deeply engraved in the memories of the victims and resurfaced in their oral accounts.<sup>267</sup> Landolfi’s description precisely focuses on the same elements of alterity: race (‘d’una razza e d’un corpo a me sconosciuti), skin colour (‘bruni di carnagione’), hair (‘lunghi capelli inanellati sotto l’elmetto’), earrings (‘cerchi d’oro alle orecchie’) and diabolical appearance (‘avevano alcunché di crudele, di belluino e persin di diabolico’). In doing so, Landolfi – a native of the same area struck by the tragic events and witness of those horrors – mimetically reproduces the perception on the part of local inhabitants of the troops’ war crimes. The very mention of the ‘devilish’ appearance of the invaders, although referring back to the magical element that pervades the whole novella, directly accounts for an association that was plausible in its immediacy for the people of the Ciociaria area.

In the same way, the reiterated ambiguity concerning the Allies and the Axis Powers (here, we again find the attributes ‘liberatore’ and ‘invasore’), testifies to the manner in which the mass rapes and killings were interiorised by the civilian population. The war crimes, then, determined the mixed and traumatic feelings concerning how ‘liberation’ had taken place, as clearly shown by one of the victim’s words: ‘Nui aspettavamo gli liberatori, arrivettero chigli’ (‘we were waiting for the liberators, those arrived’). Similarly, Landolfi cryptically refers to the significance of the liberation when he writes in reference to Lucia: ‘La libertà ora acquistata le pareva inutile e tardiva, sgomentevole piuttosto che benefica’ (RdA 114). As Baris writes:

L'impossibilità di una qualsiasi difesa dinanzi al dispiegarsi di una ferocia animalesca (più

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<sup>265</sup> Interview with Giovannina M. (born 1921), countrywoman, Esperia, 12 September 1999, in Tommaso Baris, *Tra due fuochi. Esperienza e memoria della guerra lungo la linea Gustav* (Bari: Laterza, 2003), p. 95.

<sup>266</sup> Interview to Angela C., in *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

volte richiamata dall'accostamento dei goumier alle bestie), così feroce da fuoriuscire dalla sfera umana (indemoniati e diavoli sono infatti definiti ripetutamente i marocchini), l'abbandono subito dalle autorità alleate in cui avevano riposto tanta fiducia, segnarono in maniera indelebile la memoria dei giorni di guerra.<sup>268</sup>

The arrival of colonial troops also puts an end to the mystery of the novella. By swiftly killing the two 'infernal' dogs who had been guarding the manor's entrance, the soldiers clearly demonstrate that the horrors of the war can definitely surpass all that horror literature could otherwise imagine:

[...] i cani, che dovevano trovarsi per la campagna all'arrivo di coloro, accorrevano tempestosamente girando un angolo della casa; un soldato si fece loro incontro e li stese in terra ambedue con una raffica del proprio fucile a ripetizione. (127)

The manor itself, in the conclusion of the novella, appears disintegrated by bombs that reveal all its secrets in the open air. Here, Landolfi returns again to using vibrant bodily metaphors:

Essa giaceva sventrata, mostrando le sue viscere, sorpresa dalla luce nei suoi più intimi segreti, nei suoi cunicoli, nei suoi passaggi un tempo nascosti entro lo spessore delle vecchie muraglie, in quanto rimaneva delle sue suppellettili gelosamente sacre un tempo alcune, delle sue tappezzerie che ora pendevano come lembi di carne disseccata: lamentevolmente vuota del suo mistero, che era come il suo sangue; trapassata dal cielo. (129-130)

The vocabulary used to convey the image of the manor destroyed by bombings and raids belongs more specifically to a delicate feminine sphere (which seems to mirror the parallel attempted rape suffered by Lucia before being killed). As Cecchini argues, the manor embodies a maternal, protective and living entity, meaning that its profanation is experienced as a traumatic event and the account of its destruction cast in terms of a rape, the historical event reverberating in the intimate dimension of loss.<sup>269</sup> Thus, the image of the manor voices the experience of the war both as a disruption of daily life and as the suggestion of the powerlessness of the individual face to face with history. As

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<sup>268</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>269</sup> Cecchini, *Parlare per le notti*, pp. 103-104. The image of the raped and dying house also recurs in other writings by Landolfi, particularly in 'Quattro casce', in *Ombre* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1954) and in *Il tradimento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1977).

Baris argues, in the wartime accounts

Rimane impresso nella memoria soprattutto lo stravolgimento della vita quotidiana. La frantumazione dell'ambiente fisico non consente vie di fuga. Emerge allora la -paradossale vicinanza della violenza e del disastro alla sicurezza, al buon senso e all'amore- come già ha notato Paul Fussell per la prima guerra mondiale.<sup>270</sup>

Likewise, the irruption of the soldiers in the novella can be literally interpreted as an aggression, from the outside, on the intimate and familiar space of the *Heim*.

In this sense, *Racconto d'autunno* can be read as a very personal account of war, which is even more urgently felt because of the physical (and emotional) impact caused by the bombing and raids of Landolfi's family manor, in Pico Farnese (FR). Located close to the area of Monti Aurunci, at the centre of the conflicts that affected the whole area from 1943 onwards, Landolfi's family home was subject to several incursions by soldiers and suffered great damage to its structure:

Il palazzotto seicentesco nella parte più alta del paese fu una dimora confortevole [...] fino al momento in cui gli eventi bellici non fecero proprio di questi luoghi il principale teatro dell'azione: e ai notevoli danni (un'intera ala crollata) non si fu in grado che di porre un parziale rimedio. E mentre altrove, subito fuori delle mura del giardino, ricominciava la vita, nella nostra casa il tempo parve essersi fermato.<sup>271</sup>

Such an account, on the part of Idolina Landolfi, the daughter of Tommaso Landolfi, invites an autobiographical reading of the novel; in this light, the liminality, hybridism and Gothic strategies of the novella appear as a complex response to an event experienced in a deeply emotional way. As Ernesto Ferrero points out, Landolfi's 'funambolismi' and his 'ricorrere a stili diversi mescolandoli tutti' can be seen as

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<sup>270</sup> Baris, *Tra due fuochi*, p. 61.

<sup>271</sup> Idolina Landolfi, 'Mio padre, tra il Casinò e la solitudine in campagna' *La Stampa*, 9 Maggio 1987. See also Giovanna Ghetti Abruzzi, *L'enigma Landolfi*, p. 24 ('La casa era stata occupata, prima, per gli alloggiamenti tedeschi che la razziarono e, in seguito, dalle truppe di colore degli Alleati. Fu certo un vero sacrilegio per Pasquale Landolfi, il padre di Tommaso, che la considerava un sacrario della giovane moglie perduta. Ma il senso del sacrilegio colpì anche Tommaso che più di una volta trova l'occasione per ricordarlo nei suoi scritti') and Leonardo Cecchini, *Parlare per le notti*, p. 102 ('Durante la Guerra, Pico – a pochi chilometri da Cassino – fu a lungo al centro di aspri combattimenti, il palazzo dei Landolfi fu bombardato e danneggiato; servì poi da rifugio agli sfollati e da sede del commando, prima delle truppe tedesche e poi degli alleati i quali lo saccheggiarono degli arredi e dei libri più preziosi della vasta biblioteca. È del trauma che la 'profanazione' della casa natale suscita in lui che parla Landolfi quando, nelle ultime righe del racconto, il protagonista descrive lo stato in cui gli appare l'antica dimora al suo primo ritorno dopo la morte di Lucia').

un atto di totale fiducia nella capacità della Finzione di bruciare ogni residuo autobiografico, e, insieme la terribile serietà del gioco, la necessità di apparire ‘altro’, di trasformare i sensi di colpa, le ambiguità, le doppiezze, la duplice identità di persecutore e vittima in una sublimazione affidata alla parola.<sup>272</sup>

From this perspective, the double temporality located by Idolina Landolfi between the interior of the Pico Farnese house and the outside space (respectively the ‘tempo [...] fermato’ and ‘la vita’) would be reflected in the external-internal dichotomy delineated by *Racconto d’autunno*. As opposed to an external world dominated by the war, entering the enclosed perimeter of the house enables us to enter a different realm of temporality. The novella would therefore be a way of negotiating the lacerations opened up by the war in the *heimlich* space of the house:

Dopo la guerra, e con l’animo da essa profondamente segnato, e mutato, [Landolfi] ha scritto di getto, tra il settembre e l’ottobre 1946, il *Racconto d’autunno*: autunno è il periodo in cui lo scrive, è altresì il periodo in cui la vicenda si svolge; autunno in quanto fine di un’intera stagione, legata ai tempi belli della dimora degli avi, vera e propria figura familiare nella vita di Landolfi (e come creatura viva sempre ne parla), alla quale tanta parte della sua scrittura si abbevera; ed ora prostrata, con ‘vaste piaghe aperte’. (Questo aspetto della biografia, le conseguenze dell’esperienza bellica sulla sua scrittura – che come sappiamo è ovunque scrittura autobiografica – la critica a mio avviso non ha indagato abbastanza).<sup>273</sup>

The omnipresent image of autumn, with which *Racconto* concludes (‘il silenzio di sempre era tornato a distendersi sul luogo che un tranquillo e brillante sole autunnale illuminava’, 128), much as the story had begun (‘un certo giorno dell’autunno inoltrato’, 12), operates as a seasonal metaphor for describing the ephemerality of life and happiness. At the same time, the metaphor invests the events related in the final part of the story – the mass rape and crimes committed by the French-Moroccan colonial troops, following the battle of Monte Cassino – with a strong element of indeterminacy, as well as with a strong symbolic value.

The historian Tommaso Baris, investigating the perception of the events of the war along the Winter Line on the part of the civilian population, has stressed how oral

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<sup>272</sup> Ernesto Ferrero, ‘Landolfi, la parola come sfida’, *La Stampa*, 10 July 1979, p. 12.

<sup>273</sup> Idolina Landolfi, *Il piccolo vascello solca i mari*, II, p. 88.

narratives deconstruct the artificial order imposed by historiography.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, these accounts replace the alleged objectivity of historical analysis with accounts in which subjectivity is central, and events, dates and temporalities are strongly manipulated by the very structure of narration:

Proprio la dimensione narrativa dei racconti, con le sue peculiari caratteristiche (manipolazione creativa del rapporto fra tempo della storia e tempo del racconto; uso consapevole dei simboli; punto di vista circoscritto, insieme limite di prospettiva e difesa della presenza del narratore), si rivela uno straordinario meccanismo di accesso alla sfera della soggettività, ovvero ai meccanismi individuali e collettivi di attribuzione di significato agli accadimenti.<sup>275</sup>

In this sense, oral testimonies suggest the same ambiguity and unreliability of literary works,<sup>276</sup> a connection that was already evident for Walter Benjamin:

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. [...] The chronicler is the history teller. If we think back to the passage from Hebel, which has the tone of a chronicle throughout, it will take no effort to gauge the difference between the writer of history, the historian, and the teller of it, the chronicler. The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the historians of today.<sup>277</sup>

At the same time, however, oral accounts and storytelling may allow us, in Benjamin's terms, to 'brush history against the grain', and to focus on the emotional impact upon people's lives, and on events that may run the risk of being underestimated by the necessarily detached and abstract perspective of the historiographer. Such is the case of

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<sup>274</sup> Paolo Jedlowski, 'Storiografia e narrazione', in Id., *Storie comuni* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2000), pp. 189-198 (p. 195).

<sup>275</sup> Tommaso Baris, *Tra due fuochi*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>276</sup> Alessandro Portelli, quoted in Tommaso Baris, *ibidem*.

<sup>277</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The storyteller' in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* ed. by Michael McKeon (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2000) pp. 77-93.

the so-called *marocchinate* who, at the time Landolfi was writing, had not yet entered official narrations of the Liberation war, nor had become the object of literary or cinematic works (they would later inform Alberto Moravia's novel *La ciociara*, of 1957, and Vittorio De Sica's film of the same name in 1960). Through *Racconto d'autunno*, therefore, Landolfi questions the very idea of 'liberation', in the same way as – two years later – Curzio Malaparte would do in regard to the 'Liberation' of Naples in his novel *La pelle* (1949). However, what is most important is that such an effect is precisely reached by Gothic means; that is, through Gothic and Fantastic strategies and the liminality of his work, Landolfi produces a powerful account of a minor, albeit traumatic event of the war.

### *Conclusions*

From the perspective of a reflection on the legacy of Italian Gothic and Fantastic, the destroyed manor seems to epitomise the vanity of Gothic literary conventions at a time when reality had surpassed all possible imagination. Although some scholars, such as Biondi and Cecchini, view the historical scenario as a mere pretext for the development of the novella's Gothic plot, given the unbalanced relationship between the two in terms of length,<sup>278</sup> it instead seems that the stark contrast between the two spheres possesses a certain political value, shaping an oblique but effective 'critique of the real'.<sup>279</sup> This 'critique of the real' takes the form of a liminal novella in which no coordinate is given, and which, precisely because of this absence, manages to grasp the deflagration of everyday life experience caused by the war, as well as the confusion and defamiliarisation it created within a given community ('we' and the 'others', 'liberators' and 'invaders'). At the same time, the image of the eviscerated house – which, in the

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<sup>278</sup> Alvaro Biondi remarks that the book opens and closes with precise historical references but 'nel suo nucleo, evade dalla realtà storica, non solo della Guerra, ma della comune umanità con l'attrattiva del mistero e della magia, verso il segreto di una vita chiusa e bizzarra, di una preziosa e dissimulata presenza femminile'. He concludes that Landolfi uses the Gothic to express his 'polemica perpetua con la modernità'. Alvaro Biondi, 'L'Italie magique,' il surrealismo italiano e Tommaso Landolfi' in *Una giornata per Landolfi. Atti del convegno, Firenze, 26 marzo 1979* edited by Sergio Romagnoli (Florence: Vallecchi, 1981), pp. 28-88 (pp. 86, 87). Cecchini speaks of a 'pretext', but argues that the destruction of the manor is a symbol of the destruction brought about by the war. Cecchini, *Parlare per le notti*, p. 96.

<sup>279</sup> Keala Jewell stresses how the discrepancy between the historical scenario and Gothic plot precisely creates the conditions for the novella's oblique commitment: 'Failing modernity, failing freedom, and failing democracy have to be set against magical, alchemical love and beauty so that they become things bereft of an aura. This is more effective than leaving them out. Paradoxically, the supernatural thematics allow Landolfi to create a specific, politicizing critique of the "real"'. Keala Jewell, 'Gothic Negotiations of History and Power in Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno*', p. 22.

end, becomes a mound covered by grass, bearing no trace of its previous nature – works as a powerful metaphor for the way the themes and motifs of the Gothic tradition (dungeons and sorcery, ghosts and *Doppelgänger*, black magic and torture) have been surpassed by history. In a sense, *Racconto d'autunno* is a crepuscular answer to the question about writing books after the war; a homage paid to a genre that history has ultimately defeated.

As illustrated in the introduction, such considerations have led most scholars to reiterate Landolfi's ultimate lack of faith in the possibility of reproducing a work of the Fantastic in twentieth-century Italy, and to define his poetics, following Contini's and Calvino's canon, with the label of an intellectual/ironic Fantastic widely based on a rational use of intellect and irony. The novella analyzed here, however, explicitly resorts to magic, while the use of irony is only marginal or not present at all; the Fantastic is by no means a source of knowledge, but rather of displacement and defamiliarisation as happened with nineteenth-century literature of the supernatural; moreover, *Racconto d'autunno* deliberately avoids themes and strategies of the surrealist tradition, avoiding, for example, every dream-like representation of reality or the use of automatic narrative techniques. In fact, the devices adopted by the author date back much earlier than the birth of surrealism, determining the untimely flavour of *Racconto d'autunno* and its unique strangeness. Landolfi's models include a varied cluster of authors, moving from German Romanticism to such Russian authors variously influenced by Fantastic literature as Puškin and Gogol, and to the British Gothic.<sup>280</sup> By combining all these references, *Racconto d'autunno* is first of all a quintessentially intertextual writing experience, displaying, in particular, a remarkable presence of themes belonging to the Gothic tradition.

As a consequence, not only can *Racconto d'autunno* not be easily framed within the rationalist and domesticated framework postulated by Contini, but rather it goes to the most 'irrationalist' and Gothic core of nineteenth-century literature in order to portray and interrogate a crisis that is peculiarly modern. In a sense, Landolfi's operation

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<sup>280</sup> Landolfi's predilection for foreign authors (mainly German and Russian) was doubtlessly a marginalized and nonconformist choice during the years of Fascism. But also when, after the liberation, American literary models started to gain hegemony in the Italian literary scene, Landolfi's model remained original and unconventional. 'Landolfi si muove verso le grandi esperienze europee in polemica con la cultura ufficiale del regime, e cerca non tanto i propri modelli, quanto le indicazioni di fondo degli scrittori più tormentati come Kafka, Puskin, Gogol, lontano dalle esperienze di scrittori coetanei che riconoscevano, invece, i propri modelli italiani soprattutto in Verga e in Svevo, o nella letteratura americana dove reperivano un grande esempio di arte realistica e democratica'. Giovanna Ghetti Abruzzi, *L'enigma Landolfi*, p. 34.



recuperates the Gothic (a genre – or anti-genre – that had stemmed from the crisis of Western sensibility in the eighteenth century) in order to mirror the defamiliarisation of the Western subject after the trauma of the war. Landolfi's use of Gothic themes therefore becomes a powerful mode to express suppressed anxieties about historical and political events. These anxieties are connected to human violence unleashed by the Second World War and particularly to some of its controversial episodes. For instance, the Liberation phase is called into question in contrast to most post-war literature by telling the arrival of the Moroccan troops in the manor, the killing of Lucia and the Ally bombing that will definitively destroy that enchanted world; the occupation of Italian territory by foreign armies, historically representing a major problem for the construction of Italian identity is problematized by ambiguously addressing the Ally army as 'esercito detto liberatore'; post-colonial anxieties are disclosed as they were in the Gothic tradition and its treatment of blackness,<sup>281</sup> as exemplified by the author's description of the *goumiers*' alterity. As illustrated by David Punter, the Gothic has the power 'to speak the unspeakable and imagine the unimaginable'. While it is generally agreed by scholarship that the Gothic originated as a reaction against eighteenth-century Enlightenment views of the world as possible to be organized and defined by reason, logic, and categorization, its reactivation in twentieth-century Italy, when the genre was not as popular and widespread, aims at unsettling mainstream literary trends, social and political transformations, and all prevailing assumptions about civilized superiority.

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<sup>281</sup> See note 255.

## Chapter 4: Cancroregina: A Journey from the Moon to Madness

### *Introduction*

Landolfi wrote his novella *Cancroregina* in a renewed historical context: the aftermath of WWII and the reconstruction phase, which has been defined by Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann as a story of ‘life after death’.<sup>282</sup> Indeed, all of Europe struggled to create a sense of stability and normality after the terrible events and experiences that dramatically affected an unprecedented number of civilians during the war.<sup>283</sup> The end of the 1940s is considered a watershed moment. This is not only because it saw the beginning of the Cold War, the division of the world into two hostile blocs and the establishment of a new economic order that brought unprecedented prosperity to an exceptional number of people in the wake of war, but also because it marked a profound transformation of social discourses, practices, and behaviours.<sup>284</sup> The apparent ‘normalization’ and stabilization of political, social, and cultural relationships, that is, concealed a collective struggle to negotiate the wartime experiences.<sup>285</sup>

Landolfi wrote *Cancroregina* between August and September 1949, again in his family manor in Pico Farnese. The novella was published the same year in the fourth issue of *Botteghe Oscure*, an international literary journal published and edited in Rome by Marguerite Caetani and Giorgio Bassani from 1948 to 1959.<sup>286</sup> One year later, in August 1950, it was published as a single volume by Vallecchi.<sup>287</sup> The novella recounts a journey to the moon undertaken with the help of an insane scientist. By choosing to merge science-fiction patterns, Gothic ambiances and the intimistic dimension of the diary in the same novella, Landolfi found an idiosyncratic way of conveying the transitions of the time. On the one hand, the recourse to science fiction mirrors the introduction of technoscientific developments into most people’s lives;<sup>288</sup> on the other

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<sup>282</sup> Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, ‘Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe’ in *Ibid.*, *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-13 (p. 4).

<sup>283</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>286</sup> Idolina Landolfi, ed., *Opere I (1937-1959)*, pp. liii, liv.

<sup>287</sup> The publication is preceded by a tense correspondence between author and editor, relating to the delay in the publication. Landolfi’s works are often published by Vallecchi in the ‘dead season’ of the summer, and in spite of several requests from Landolfi to publish *Cancroregina* earlier in the year, the novella is published precisely in August, when it went particularly unnoticed. Idolina Landolfi, *Opere I (1937-1959)*, p. 1009.

<sup>288</sup> Sherryl Vint, ‘Semiotic ghosts and broken dreams: science fiction and cultural theory’, in *Ead.*, *Science Fiction and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-10 (p.1).

hand, the fragmentary diaristic writing and the portrayal of the gradual loss of rationality of the two main characters express the intimate dimension of loss caused by the wartime events, and reflect the fragmentation of the self and the spread of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder originating from traumatic wartime experiences.<sup>289</sup>

Moreover, the lunar imagery that so consistently had shaped *La pietra lunare* is here transfigured. In the years in which WWII rocket artillery was perfected and opened up the possibility of manned spaceflight, Landolfi's moon, a diaphanous entity in the earlier story, now becomes a material destination and an escape route from the dreariness of earthly life. No longer a mysterious entity governing natural cycles or the rituals of festivity, the moon is here called 'nostro satellite' (18) by the unknown scientist: 'Guardate la nostra meta: non passerà molto tempo che l'avremo raggiunta. La luna sarà nostra. E noi, ci pensate? Saremo stati i primi ad aver toccato quelle remote sponde' (23). The means to grasp the mystery of the moon does not lie with poetry and the imagination, but rather with science, or, rather, pseudo-science. As a consequence, desire for romantic contemplation is here replaced by one for technical achievement.

The veil of science fiction, however, turns out to conceal another central theme in the novella: madness. Indeed, the theme of the dream, often used in pseudo-scientific treatises in connection with the lunar journey, is replaced by insanity in Landolfi's *Cancroregina*. The journey to the moon is the product of the hallucinated imagination of a man hospitalized in an asylum (as revealed by the appendix omitted by the author in the volume edition). Connected to the moon motif by traditional notions of 'lunacy', madness is present in the text as both a theme and a narrative strategy. It slowly and silently develops in the story, as a sneaky force contaminating the narrator himself – his perception and narrating strategies – as well as the spacecraft and its itinerary. In order to describe this process, moved by his usual taste for intertextuality, Landolfi draws inspiration from authentic sources (i.e. non literary sources): particularly, from a nineteenth-century psychiatry manual, which I will compare and contrast with some sections of the novella.

Additionally, liminality informs this text as a pervading principle: the outcome of the voyage will be, in fact, an eternal orbiting between earth and moon, life and death; madness, particularly the type depicted here, 'follia ragionante', represents a borderline

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<sup>289</sup> Birgit Beck and Alice Förster, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and World War II. Can a Psychiatric Concept Help Us Understand Postwar Society?' in *Life after death: approaches to a cultural and social history during the 1940s and 1950s*, pp. 15-35.

experience between reason and unreason. The spacecraft *Cancroregina* stands at the crossroads of multiple entities: animal, human and machine, allowing an interpretation in light of recent theorising on posthumanism. The novella itself appears undefinable in terms of genre, presenting features of Science Fiction, Fantastic and diaristic writing. Landolfi's receptiveness to the contemporary cultural climate is clearly perceivable. Receiving inputs from popular literature (Verne and Wells, among others) and the press, the novella anticipates by a few years the development of science fiction in Italy. In addition, Landolfi's interest for the irrational side of humans testified by the novella, and its ethno-anthropological connections, represent a cultural phenomenon exemplified, in Italy, by the *Collezione di studi religiosi, etnologici e psicologici* edited by Cesare Pavese and Ernesto De Martino. Among other works, the two editors published in 1948 C.G. Jung's *L'io e l'inconscio*.

The first part of this chapter provides a general overview of the novella and an attempt to individuate how Landolfi accepts, and, at times, questions the moon motif as it appears in the Western literary tradition; the second section discusses the declinations of liminality in the text in relation both to the multiple identities of 'Cancroregina' and to madness; at the same time, it looks at the way Landolfi adopted descriptive techniques and vocabulary from Kraepelin's psychiatry manual. The conclusion will bring back these themes to the broader question of the Fantastic in mid-twentieth century Italy.

#### *Cancroregina and the Tradition of the Cosmic Journey in Western Culture*

*Cancroregina* opens with an unnamed protagonist telling his story in a suspended condition: underneath is the earth, with its monotonous, customary appearance; above is the moon, with its romantic and yet dreadful surface ('la terra e' sotto di me; sopra di me, la luna, la romantica luna...' 11, 12). The narrator, a melancholic individual who is tired of the world ('il mondo mi appariva privo di senso', 13), tells of a night when a man burst into his old manor, promising him hope for change. The unnamed man, nicknamed 'Filano' by the narrator, is a scientist who confesses to having escaped from an asylum. He tells of a creature that could change the destiny of humanity: 'Io li supplicavo di cercarla, di darne pubblica notizia per il bene della restante umanità', se non per il mio...' (16). However, mistrusted by everyone, the scientist could not find any remedy other than escaping from the asylum. The creature he talks about is a

machine with a specific mission: ‘Una macchina cioè, o veicolo o comunque vogliate chiamarla, capace in teoria di varcare qualunque spazio interplanetario e, perché no? Intersiderale: nel fatto e positivamente, di coprire la distanza che ci separa dal nostro satellite’ (18). The man finally declares: ‘Mi dispongo ad andare nella luna; per numerose ragioni non posso andarci da solo: non vorreste accompagnarci?’ (18).

The motif of the journey to the moon recurs extensively in Western literature. First examples of it date back to the second century B.C.: Lucian’s *Icaromenippus* and *True History*. The moon has always exercised an intense fascination over philosophers, scientists, and men of letters such as Plutarch, Ludovico Ariosto, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei, and Leopardi. Scholars have already individuated some of Landolfi’s sources.<sup>290</sup> One model he certainly had in mind is the literary and scientific thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Particularly in the latter, in fact, the invention of the telescope nurtured the popular idea of the moon as a site of destination and/or a mirror of the earthly world.

Galileo’s *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610) is the earliest scientific treatise based on observations through a telescope. Landolfi’s debt to, and admiration for, Galileo is well known from Landolfi’s own words, as well as from the title of his first short-story collection, *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* (1937). In *Cancroregina*, the scientist Filano compares himself to Galileo: ‘[...] e, pari a Galileo, io per due anni porsi loro invano un cannocchiale a cui non vollero metter l’occhio’ (15 -16). The allusion made by the narrator to a ‘message’ to be sent to the world (‘A chi, dico, dovrei inviare questo messaggio? E supposto anche che raggiungesse gli uomini, quale utilità potrebbero essi ricavarne?’), (12) may be an implicit homage to Galileo’s work, the title of which means ‘The Starry Messenger’. In addition, the disenchanting view of the moon in *Cancroregina* – ‘che non mai spirò tanto orrore dalla sua faccia risucchiante, bianca e nera, dai sui spalancati gurgiti di pietra calcinata’ (12) – is also connected to Galileo’s discoveries. The scientist was, after all, the first to deduce the cause of the different waning of lunar surface as light occlusion from lunar mountains and craters. The moon rediscovered by Galileo was not the perfectly rounded, smooth and translucent sphere previously conceived by scientific works and common imagery from Aristotle onwards.

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<sup>290</sup> In particular, see Emanuele Zinato, ‘Landolfi e la tradizione del viaggio immaginario’, *Chroniques italiennes*, 81-82, 2-3 (2008), 1-10, and ‘Il riuso del viaggio lunare seicentesco: Solmi e Landolfi’ in *Moderno e modernità: la letteratura italiana. Atti del XII Congresso dell’Associazione degli Italianisti, Roma, 17-20 settembre 2008*, ed. by Clizia Gurreri, Angela Maria Jacopino, Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Università Sapienza, 2008), <<http://www.italianisti.it/upload/userfiles/files/Zinato%20Emanuele.pdf>> [accessed 15/05/17].

With Galileo, the moon's newly revealed irregular surface starts being described in comparison to the earth and its imperfections.<sup>291</sup>

In the tradition of treatises on the moon, scientific speculations often appear blended with elements of the dream and the imagination. Fictional and scientific discourse appear intrinsically related and dreams (*somnium*) are often understood as a gateway for the knowledge of some enigmatic truth,<sup>292</sup> as, for example, in Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1634). In this work, Kepler explains his astronomical theories through the story of an Icelandic voyager transported to the moon by aerial demons. *Somnium* presents a detailed description of what the earth might look like when viewed from the moon, a perspective also adopted by Landolfi, when the protagonist of *Cancroregina*, suspended halfway between the earth and the moon, dwells more on the contemplation of the abandoned earth than of the moon, where he is headed. Kepler dramatizes the Copernican model, in which the sun, and not the earth, is the center of the universe, thereby undermining anthropocentric perspectives of creation. Moreover, Filano's considerations on the existence of a lunar atmosphere agree with Kepler's arguments in the last note of *Somnium* (223) in which he presents several proofs in favour of the existence of such an atmosphere.

A similar perspective of the earth seen from the moon is to be found in Giordano Bruno's earlier work *De immenso* (1591), also a dramatization employed in order to disseminate heliocentric theories. Bruno makes use of certain 'imaginings' of his own as a young man in order to support his scientific arguments. Through these imaginary visualizations, Bruno clarifies the relationship between the sun, the earth and the moon in the course of the solar year.<sup>293</sup> In so doing, he also describes a journey to the moon, from whence he is able to see the resplendent face of the earth.

One last possible source worthy of mention is a less canonical one, also standing at the crossroads between scientific discourse and imaginary fiction: Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovsky's *On the Moon* (*Ha Луне*, 1893). Tsiolkovsky, a Russian scientist, is still known as the 'father of rocketry' in his country. His contribution was essential in the context of the Russian space race, inspiring a number of young Russian

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<sup>291</sup> Eileen Adair Reeves, 'Galileo Galilei' in Gaetana Marrone and Paolo Puppa, eds, *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies: A-J* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), pp 801-805.

<sup>292</sup> Gaspare Polizzi, 'Il fascino della luna tra scienza e letteratura', *Scienza in Rete*, (2015) <<http://www.scienzainrete.it/contenuto/articolo/gaspare-polizzi/fascino-della-luna-tra-scienza-e-letteratura/aprile-2015>> [accessed 05/04/2017].

<sup>293</sup> Hilary Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science: Broken Lives and Organizational Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999) pp. 29-33.

experimenters.<sup>294</sup> Tsiolkovsky laid down the theory of rocket flight and derived the most important mathematical formula used in rocket design, the ‘Tsiolkovsky Equation’. In his *On the Moon*, the journey is again assimilated to the experience of dreaming. The protagonist wakes up one morning in his house, discovering a gravity force much lower than usual. Opening the curtain, he is surprised to find that he has been carried to the moon. After a series of experiments, explorations, and scientific speculations, the protagonist finds himself in a bed surrounded by a doctor and his familiars after a prolonged sleep in which the ‘body remained here, the idea flew to the moon’. The narrator adds: ‘they were afraid of madness’.<sup>295</sup>

In Landolfi’s *Cancroregina* we find a variation on the dream theme, as the imaginary journey to the moon seems to be occasioned by hallucinatory conditions produced by mental insanity, rather than by mere dreaming. In the ‘wake-up scene’ – in the original appendix to the text, later removed in the volume edition – the protagonist finds himself in an asylum, and not in a house bed. While symptoms of mental instability are alluded to from the beginning of the story, the attempt to reach the moon’s surface occasions an onset of these pre-existing symptoms, first on the part of Filano and then on the part of the protagonist himself. The theme of insanity, in connection with the journey to the moon, has one illustrious antecedent: Ariosto’s lunar sequences in *Orlando Furioso* (1516, 33. 93 – 35. 31) as well as his *Third Satire* (1518, 214-25). In *Orlando Furioso*, the English knight Astolfo travels to the moon on the *ippogrifo*, where he finds Orlando’s wits, together with everything that was lost on earth. He collects them in a bottle and returns to earth, restoring Orlando’s sanity.<sup>296</sup> Landolfi, thus, reverses this trope: whereas, in Ariosto, the journey to the moon was a way to restore sanity, in *Cancroregina* it causes the brutal explosion of implosive insanity. The moon and its illusory diaphane beauty, soon revealing itself to be an irregular, dreadful, stony surface, is nothing but an element fomenting and nurturing the narrator’s folly.

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<sup>294</sup> Nola Taylor Redd, ‘Konstantin Tsiolkovsky: Russian Father of Rocketry’ (2013), <<http://www.space.com/19994-konstantin-tsiolkovsky.html>> [accessed 02/05/2017].

<sup>295</sup> Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovsky, ‘On the Moon’ (Ha Jlyne) in Robert Magidoff, ed., *Russian Science Fiction. An Anthology* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 246-272.

<sup>296</sup> Simonetta Bassi, ‘The Lunar Renaissance: Images of the Moon in Ludovico Ariosto and Giordano Bruno’ in Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson, eds, *Science and Literature in Italian Culture. From Dante to Calvino* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), pp. 136-150.

*An Italian Aspiration to 'Map the World'*

Following Ariosto, the motif of the lunar journey extensively pervades Italy's literary tradition. Scholars have recently individuated a long-lasting Italian trend that blends science and fiction in order to build literary works as maps of the world, namely to give shape and order to the universe. Pietro Greco<sup>297</sup> and Giuseppe Sandrini<sup>298</sup> have extensively explored this theme, finding it in the works of a series of authors such as Dante Alighieri, Galileo Galilei, Bruno, Ariosto, Leopardi, Calvino, and Landolfi himself. Among them, we find both men of science drawing on fictional forms of writing in order to explain scientific theories, as in the case of Galileo, and poets and writers, like Dante, who have recourse to scientific language in order to give plausibility to their fictional cosmos.

In particular, this constellation of authors and works employ the moon theme in order to address issues of anthropocentrism. In the Middle Ages, the need to schematize and classify the universe was deeply connected with religious beliefs: thus, heaviness and deepness were associated with evil and sin, elevation and aerial environments with spiritual salvation. While the earth was seen as a world of sin and corruption, and its center as the devil's abode, the moon represented an intermediary passage-, or gateway, to a world of purity and perfection. This view is fully embodied by the Dante-the-character, who, as Greco shows, reaches the moon guided by Beatrice as a preliminary step to Paradise. There he develops, through Beatrice's words, his own cosmological theory of the Universe (*Par. II*), based on the natural philosophy of Aristotle and Ptolemy. Dante's view of the universe is expressed in a highly rational discourse, following a hypothetic-deductive logic that, as Greco remarks, makes *Par. II* one of the most difficult cantos in the *Comedy*.<sup>299</sup>

According to Pierpaolo Antonello, such intertwinement of literature and science is an idiosyncratic component of the Italian literary culture that has so far been overlooked in scholarship. Antonello attributes this gap to historical and cultural reasons, particularly to Croce's equation between science and positivism, and the idealistic rejection of materialistic visions of reality. As a consequence, the preeminence of *crocianesimo*

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<sup>297</sup> Pietro Greco, *L'astro narrante. La Luna nella scienza e nella letteratura italiana* (Milan: Springer, 2009).

<sup>298</sup> Giuseppe Sandrini, *Le avventure della luna. Leopardi, Calvino e il fantastico italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014).

<sup>299</sup> Pietro Greco, 'Dante, "che n'ha congiunti con la prima stella"' in *L'astro narrante*, pp. 3-20.



evolved into an open diffidence towards science and technology on the part of many philosophers and intellectuals. The relation between literature and science was therefore perceived as a marginal aspect, and scholars felt that the purity of the literary text had to be preserved from any interference with other external disciplines.<sup>300</sup>

Some twentieth-century authors have actively tried to fill this gap. Italo Calvino played an important role in highlighting the contaminations between literature, science, and natural philosophy in Italy's literary tradition. In Calvino's view, the philosophical and aesthetic separation that modernity, and particularly Romanticism, has operated between nature and culture has distanced nature as an object of literary representation and encouraged to consider as 'minor' any representation having at its centre the natural world (instead of the individual sphere). On the contrary, the aim of literature in dialogue with natural philosophy is to consider the human not only in its subjectivity but as part of the natural world. This lack of separation between disciplines belongs to a pre-modern epistemological tradition, implying that the effort of twentieth-century Italian authors such as Carlo Emilio Gadda, Primo Levi, Leonardo Sinisgalli, and Calvino himself to recover this interdisciplinary dialogue, can be considered as a sort of return to cosmology (i.e. an ideological system in which Nature and Humanity belong to a common order). These authors' fiction reveals the intrinsic and pre-modern (or a-modern) hybridity of the Italian literary tradition.

Sandrini's analysis, on the other hand, focuses particularly on Leopardi and the great importance and influence he had on the twentieth-century literature of the imagination. In this respect, the encounter between literary and scientific discourses is perceived, more specifically, as an equivalence between the philosophical and the Fantastic tale ('*conte philosophique*' and '*conte fantastique*'): only literature, thanks to its intrinsic imaginative nature, is able to outline that 'map of the world' that has been recognized as one of the highest ambitions of the Italian tradition. For this reason, Sandrini explores the heritage of Leopardi as a poet-philosopher in authors such as Calvino, Landolfi, and Antonio Delfini. Sandrini's remarks are important for redefining both the status of the Italian Fantastic in the twentieth century and its sources. The original nucleus of the twentieth-century Italian Fantastic, characterized, in Calvino's terms, by a rational control of the mind over the unconscious and a refined use of style, is, precisely, to be

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<sup>300</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello, 'Letteratura come filosofia naturale' in *Il ménage a quattro: scienza, filosofia, tecnica nella letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Grassano, Florence: Le Monnier Università, 2005), pp. 4-21.

found in Leopardi. Hence, Calvino claims that the authentic Italian Fantastic arises in the twentieth century as soon as authors start to dialogue with Leopardi's heritage and his 'limpidezza di sguardo disincantata, amara, ironica'.<sup>301</sup>

Sandrini also considers Leopardi an anticipatory figure for twentieth-century Fantastic literature, in that he expresses the inadequacy of modern literature to perform pure art, after the disappearance of the 'favole antiche' and the impracticality of the imagination.<sup>302</sup> In this sense, the impact of technological development and scientific discourse with respect to the possibilities of the imagination, is seen differently by Leopardi and Calvino. While in Calvino's opinion, imagination and scientific knowledge may coexist and interact, according to Leopardi, imagination and hope perish with the development of scientific knowledge. Consequently, Leopardi perceives technological progress as a threat, and the journey to the moon as a desire for possession, as it appears in 'Dialogo della terra e della luna'.

Landolfi's position, particularly if we look at *Cancroregina*, seems to be closer to Leopardi's than to Calvino's. While, at first glance, he seems to have created a science fiction work, he ultimately reveals not only the inadequacy and illusoriness of technological development, but even its potential for driving men to madness and for fragmenting language. The scientist's insanity, in fact, dramatically increases once in the spacecraft, and so does the protagonist's, whose madness is a rupture of both perceptive and discursive schemes. This is embodied, at the very level of style, by a language that becomes more and more disjointed, incongruent, and, we might say, visionary (see some examples at p. 138). In this sense, *Cancroregina* stands in continuity, at a decade of distance, with the philosophical discourse implicit in *La pietra lunare* on the inadequacy of modern literature to create art. At the same time, it also reflects the contemporary uneasiness produced by a gradual introduction of technological devices to everyday life (i.e. radio, cinema and the sale of music) already in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Giuseppe Sandrini, *Le avventure della luna*, p. 44.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>303</sup> David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

## *Cancroregina and Popular Culture*

*Cancroregina*'s connections with the earlier cultural tradition of lunar journeys are not limited to 'high' literature but also extend to so-called 'popular culture'. From the end of the nineteenth century, this topic began to be connected to a merely entertaining, rather than didactic, purpose, aiming to instill curiosity and the pleasure of wonder in the reader, as was the case with the development of nineteenth-century British, German and French Gothic fiction. In addition, as a result of technological and scientific improvements, the theme of the journey to the moon is often reinforced by technical descriptions aimed at increasing plausibility, as is the case with Verne (in France) and Salgari (in Italy).

Jules Verne clearly influenced *Cancroregina*. First of all, unlike the majority of narratives of journeys to the moon, in Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (*De la terre à la lune*, 1865) and *Around the Moon* (*Autour de la lune*, 1870) the moon is ultimately not attained, as happens in Landolfi's text. While Verne's first novel tells the story of the preparation of the mission and the construction of the Columbiad cannon – which later launches a projectile containing three astronauts and two dogs – the second book tells the men's adventures during the journey. The encounter with an asteroid makes the projectile deviate from its course and enter the lunar orbit, rather than landing on the moon. This is precisely what happens in *Cancroregina*, with the difference that the spacecraft in Landolfi's novella enters, similarly by accident,<sup>304</sup> the orbit of the earth, so that the astronaut is deprived even of the pleasure of observing the moon from a relative distance, as was the case with Verne's astronauts (although, in a later scene, when the narrator has become insane, he sees, or imagines, marvelous creatures on its surface). Besides, Verne's characters fear the same risk of orbiting eternally and finally dying of hunger or asfixia as *Cancroregina*'s protagonist. However, the former are able to react and decide to use a rocket fixed to the bottom of the projectile to propel the spacecraft towards the moon. The projectile, instead, begins a freefall descent towards the earth and the characters are finally rescued from the sea and celebrated as the first men to leave the earth. On the contrary, Landolfi's character does not have enough vital impulse nor the scientific knowledge to think of any possible solution. In addition, the

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<sup>304</sup> The cause of the incident remains, though, mysterious. One possibility is that Filano intentionally condemned the protagonist to eternal suspension by activating a lever that changed *Cancroregina*'s course.

spacecraft *Cancroregina*, not entirely machine but featuring also animal and human inclinations, opposes its own will to the protagonist's attempts to gain control over it and the story concludes with the protagonist orbiting eternally, until the desired arrival of death.

Another point of conjunction regards a disturbing scene in Verne's text, where the corpse of one of the two dogs on board is thrown outside the spacecraft and, on account of gravitational attraction, continues to follow it for the rest of the journey: En effet, cet objet déformé, méconnaissable, réduit à rien, c'était le cadavre de Satellite, aplati comme une cornemuse dégonflée, et qui montait, montait toujours!<sup>305</sup>

A similar scene is to be found in *Cancroregina* when the scientist's corpse, pushed out of the spacecraft by the protagonist, remains bounded to it with his horrified expression visible to the man inside. The similarity between the two passages is also evident in Landolfi's lexical choices:

Filano non era affatto precipitato, ma seguiva la sua creatura nello spazio fedelmente, oh fedelissimamente. Filano, cioè il suo cadavere rasciugato, svuotato senza dubbio, come preparato nello spirito o piuttosto nell'aria liquida, fragile per avventura come un vetro di Bologna, ma infine esteriormente intatto; che, rappigliato nel suo ultimo atteggiamento, ben visibile attraverso il cristallo posteriore, contro il cielo nero, al tenue riflesso cui ho precedentemente accennato, cogli occhi sbarrati, recando, dico, ancora sul volto l'orribile, la feroce smorfia che era stata l'ultima espressione di lui vivente, seguiva, segue *Cancroregina* nello spazio; segue nello spazio infinito e nell'eternità me, suo uccisore (59).

Later on, observing the dog's remains still floating around the spacecraft, Michel Ardan – one of the three passengers of Verne's spacecraft – imagines a scene like that of Filano's death: Savez-vous, mes amis, disait Michel Ardan, que si l'un de nous eût succombé au contrecoup du départ, nous aurions été fort gênés pour l'enterrer, que dis-je, pour l'« étherer », puisque ici l'éther remplace la Terre ! Voyez-vous ce cadavre accusateur qui nous aurait suivis dans l'espace comme un remords!<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Jules Verne, *Autour de la lune* (Paris, Hachette, 1966), p. 101. English translation: 'So in fact it was. That shapeless, unrecognizable mass, melted expunged, flat as a bladder under an unexhausted receiver, drained of its air, was poor Satellite's body, flying like a rocket through the space, and rising higher and higher in close company with the rapidly ascending Projectile!'

<sup>306</sup> Jules Verne, *Autour de la lune*, p. 89. English translation: 'I tell you what, dear boys'; observed Ardan, commenting on this curious phenomenon; 'if the concussion had been a little too violent for one of us that night, his survivors would have been seriously embarrassed in trying to get rid of his remains. With no

In the light of Landolfi's fascination with Verne, we can add a further hypothesis regarding the origin of the name Filano. Several scholars derive it from an anagram of Landolfi's surname, the word's meaning of 'any man' ('un tale qualsiasi'), or Filoteo, protagonist of Giordano Bruno's *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*.<sup>307</sup> However, the name Filano is, probably, also a homage to Phileas Fogg, protagonist of *Around the World in Eighty Days* (*Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, 1873).

Influences from film may also be taken into consideration, as one of the first masterpieces in the history of cinema, Georges Méliès' silent movie *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902), had been inspired by Verne and Wells and similarly showed a journey to the moon.<sup>308</sup> As soon as it was released, the film entered the collective imagery, especially the iconic scene of the rocket crashing into the moon's eye, and may thus have been another cultural source for Landolfi's novella.<sup>309</sup>

In *Cancroregina*, we can also detect an echo of Edgar Allan Poe's stories about cosmic or earthly Fantastic journeys. Filano's question to the protagonist 'Dove sono i vostri creditori? (ma come faceva costui a sapere che io avevo dei creditori – e numerosi?)' (32), seems to evoke *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* (1835), published as a hoax in the *Southern Literary Messenger* and based on the plausible story of a man reaching the moon in a revolutionary balloon to escape his creditors. Other stories of cosmic journeys written by Poe include *The Great Moon Hoax* and a series of articles on the supposed discovery of life and civilization on the Moon by the famous contemporary astronomer John Herschel, published in the American newspaper *The Sun* from 1835 onwards. The difference with Landolfi's novella is that the discovery of Fantastic creatures on the Moon in *The Great Moon Hoax* did not happen through a journey, but by means of an immense and innovative telescope.

To sum up, while the motif of the moon develops in conjunction with philosophical reflection in a poet like Leopardi, it is also present in a branch of popular adventure/fantastic literature. Texts in this tradition were divulged mainly through

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earth to cover him up, no sea to plunge him into, his corpse would never disappear from view, but would pursue us day and night, grim and ghastly like an avenging ghost!

<sup>307</sup> Zinato, 'Landolfi e la tradizione del viaggio immaginario', p. 4.

<sup>308</sup> See Ian Christie, 'First-Footing on the Moon. Méliès's Debt to Verne and Wells, and His Influence in Great Britain' in Matthew Solomon, ed., *Fantastic voyages of the Cinematic Imagination: Georges Méliès's Trip to the Moon* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), pp. 65-79.

<sup>309</sup> Brian Taves, *Hollywood Presents Jules Verne. The Father of Science Fiction on Screen* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 9.

journals and magazines which, according to Fabrizio Foni, represent an important and widespread cultural phenomenon in Italy from the 1899 to 1930s.<sup>310</sup>

Landolfi's story comes at the end of this trend, at a moment when the Italian Fantastic is acquiring its specific shape. Although *Cancroregina* seems to foreshadow the imminent explosion of science fiction in Italy, which began in 1952, it was actually preceded by a number of stories by both foreign and Italian authors which were divulged in Italy through journals and magazines such as the weekly *Domenica del Corriere*. As an example of the interest for and fascination with cosmic journeys in popular press, in the same year as *Cancroregina*, *Il Corriere della Domenica* published a special section entitled 'Terra-Luna: Si avvererà il vecchio sogno?' (1949, 5). This reportage also included an overview of literary journeys to the moon, including 'Il volo di Luciano' (On Lucian of Samosata's *Icaromenippus* and *True History*), 'Cyrano de Bergerac' (on the author's *L'Autre Monde: ou les États et Empires de la Lune*), 'L'Ippogrifo' (On Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*), 'Micro-Megas' (on Voltaire's short story *Micromégas*), 'I cigni di Gonzales' (On Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone*), 'Il cannone di Giulio Verne', and concluded with the prophetic section 'Un razzo del 2000'. This last paragraph reflected on the technological progresses made in the fields of rocket-launching, atomic energy, and radio waves, prophetically concluding that 'forse, quindi, noi stessi vedremo realizzato il sogno'.

As Foni highlights, while this type of literature is usually included under the label of 'paraletteratura' or 'cultura popolare', the commercial success of these magazines and books is revelatory of its general appreciation by a large audience of readers, to the point of becoming a real cultural phenomenon in the first thirty years of the twentieth century.

### *Behind the Scenes of Science Fiction*

Having explored some of the possible sources of and influences on Landolfi's *Cancroregina*, we need to address the question of its identification as a work of science fiction. After all, this work figures in various anthologies and articles on Italian science

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<sup>310</sup> Fabrizio Foni, *Alla fiera dei mostri. Racconti pulp, orrori e arcane fantasticherie nelle riviste italiane 1899-1932* (Latina: Tunué, 2007), pp. 6, 7.

fiction.<sup>311</sup> Among the elements that seem to justify this identification are the motif of the trip to the moon; some sparse theoretical reflections on the cosmos (including one that seems to resemble space/time theory);<sup>312</sup> descriptions of the mechanical functioning of the rocket; and technical details concerning the astronauts' survival inside the spacecraft. This section, however, will show that in spite of these apparent connections with the science fiction genre, the core of Landolfi's novella actually lies elsewhere. Landolfi sets his novella in an atemporal and illogical dimension, by mentioning scientific theories that appear obsolete and by blending the scientific/technological with the hallucinatory and implausible. This is, precisely, the opposite of what a work of modern science fiction, set in a technically advanced future, would normally try to achieve.

*Cancroregina* appears immediately before the development of science fiction in Italy, where the genre was to arrive later than in the Anglo-American countries. The modern concept of 'fantascienza' was introduced in 1952 by Monicelli and was spread by the magazine *Urania* (with its parallel collection of science-fiction novels, *I Romanzi di Urania*), later developing through *Galassia* (with *I Romanzi del Cosmo*), *Futuro* in the 1960s and *Robot* from 1976 onwards. Furthermore, when it arrived in Italy, science fiction was dismissed as popular literature. In its initial stage, Italian science fiction was mainly based on translations of Anglo-American works. Italian authors were not considered attractive enough, because of what Fruttero (editor of *Urania* after Monicelli) considered 'difficoltà oggettive'. Among these was the lack of a suitable imaginary in Italy comparable to that of Anglo-American authors. Italy's very landscapes looked inadequate as a possible setting for science-fiction stories if compared to the desolate lands of the USA where the genre first arose.<sup>313</sup> The narrow circle of Italian authors who engaged in this genre in its initial phase had to write under English pseudonyms to be taken into consideration by readers. Nonetheless, the genre flourished, in terms of both production and reception, in Italy and elsewhere after the launch of the first Sputnik in 1957 and Yuri Gagarin's flight around the earth in 1961: two global events that saw the century-old dreams of writers and scientists finally

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<sup>311</sup> See Arielle Saiber 'Flying Saucers Would Never Land in Lucca: The Fiction of Italian Science Fiction' *California Italian Studies*, 2, 1 (2011); Carlo Pagetti, 'Science-Fiction Criticism in Italy, in and out of the University', *Science Fiction Studies*, 14, 2 (1987), 261-266.

<sup>312</sup> The idea of a unified spacetime is also stated by Edgar Allan Poe in his essay on cosmology titled *Eureka* (1848) ('space and duration are one') as well as in 1895 Wells' novel *The Time Machine*.

<sup>313</sup> Giulia Iannuzzi, *Fantascienza Italiana. Riviste, autori, dibattiti dagli anni cinquanta agli anni sessanta* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 77, 78.

realized. Science fiction may therefore be considered as an emerging social and historical phenomenon that was further driven by scientific and technological advances occurring during the same years. When considered from this perspective, one may ask what scientific and technological developments influenced Landolfi's work prior to the arrival in Italy of science fiction as a recognized genre.

For instance, the history of powered flight started much earlier than the late 1950s and this factor may have played a role in Landolfi's choice of subject. At the beginning of the twentieth century, rocketry based on gunpowder was already well established and the many experiments on rockets realized since then had offered methods for navigating space at high altitudes. Military and technological needs in WWI drove aircraft development, both during and after the War. Airplanes were transformed into effective military machines used for reconnaissance, air defense, and attack.

Rocketry societies were created in the US, Germany, and Russia. Such groups began to conduct experiments and to conceive several prototypes for rocket-propelled planes.<sup>314</sup> Germany – and particularly the Wasserkuppe plateau – was a focal point for building, testing, and flying gliders. Inspired by the developments in Germany, other countries also made attempts at flying gliders fitted with black powder rockets. In Italy, Ettore Cattaneo flew the 'RR' from Milan airport in June 1931. In the US, William Swan's 'Steel Pier Rocket Plane', a simple high-wing glider, was the first American rocket aircraft to actually fly. In 1926, American Robert H. Goddard flew the world's first liquid propellant rocket, an event now recognized as historic.

In Germany, during WWII, the Army undertook an enormous rocket development effort, which soon became the Third Reich's most expensive project. The result was the development of the A4 rocket, a 14-meter machine. In 1942, the A4 reached an altitude of 80 km, thus becoming the first vehicle to reach the edge of space and opening a new era in transportation: that of space travel.

Based on the design of the A4 and on insights gained from experts captured after the war, both the US and the USSR developed an arsenal of intercontinental ballistic

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<sup>314</sup> Cars and railcars played an essential role in the initial spaceflight achievements. In collaboration with Fritz von Opel, space enthusiast Valier was protagonist of the first rocket car run in 1928, issuing the RAK 1, the first car with propellant rockets in the back. The prototype was perfected leading the bullet-shaped RAK 2, RAK 3 and RAK 4 models. At the same time, both Von Opel and Valier were also planning to fly a rocket propelled airplane. The Wasserkuppe society furnished Von Opel, Valier and Sander with one of Alexander Lippisch's revolutionary, tailless gliders, called the 'Ente' (German for 'Duck'). By fitting two black powder rockets to the Ente, the world's first rocket plane took off on 11 June 1928.



missiles that would lead to the 1960s Moon Race.<sup>315</sup> These achievements reinforced the general impression that the world had entered a new era of space conquest, years before the launch of the Sputnik in 1957 and the beginning of the Moon Race. As evidenced by Goddard's 1919 report 'A Method of Reaching Extreme Altitudes' and by David Lasser's first non-fiction book on spaceflight, *The Conquest of Space* (1931), the possibility of a journey to the moon came to be seen as more and more realistic as the century progressed. Such developments may have driven Landolfi's imagination towards the topic of space conquest before the genre of science fiction flourished in Italy or elsewhere.

Nonetheless, Landolfi's work presents other elements that do not fit the genre of science fiction. First of all, unlike science-fiction authors such as Verne, Landolfi does not make use of contemporary scientific and technological discoveries as a base for his fiction. *Cancroregina's* technological and scientific components can be, instead, categorised as a 'Fantastic technological', that is to say a technological mixed with implausible and imaginary elements. Indeed, the ingenuity and lack of knowledge of the protagonist/narrator are frequently invoked to justify scientific gaps in the story. When Filano outlines some scientific notions, he often reverses well-known modern scientific assumptions by drawing on views of early astronomers. By way of example, Filano's considerations on the surface of the moon correspond to the ancient view of astronomers who confused the dark areas of the moon surface – large basaltic plains formed after ancient volcanic eruptions – with seas, and called them 'maria'.<sup>316</sup> 'A proposito, dove vi piacerà stabilire la vostra prima dimora, nello Stagno dei Sogni o nel Mar del Nettare? Scherzo, si capisce, tanto più che codesti mari e stagni lunari non son per nulla, come ognun crede, asciutti bacini, ma vere e proprie distese di acque' (23) Landolfi's use of such terminology is alternatively imaginary and realistic. 'Stagno dei sogni', for example, reflects the real Latin name attributed to one of these basaltic plains, of a smaller size than the 'maria': *Lacus Somniorum*, which can be translated as Lake of Dreams.

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<sup>315</sup> Michel van Pelt, 'Introduction' in Id., *Rocketing into the future: the history and technology of rocket planes* (New York, NY: Springer, 2012), pp. 1- 27.

<sup>316</sup> 'Near full Moon, the naked eye sees a contrast between dark and light surfaces (of low and high albedo, respectively) that has been fancied as a "man in the Moon" or other configurations (fig. 1.1). In 1609, Galileo noted that the dark spots are smooth and the brighter areas rugged (Whitaker, 1978). These terrain types are still designated by their seventeenth-century names *maria* (singular, mare) and *terrae* (singular, terra; commonly known as uplands or highlands)'. Donald Wilhelms, *The Geologic History of the Moon*, USGS Numbered Series, 1348 (1987), online: [http://ser.sese.asu.edu/GHM/ghm\\_allx.pdf](http://ser.sese.asu.edu/GHM/ghm_allx.pdf), [accessed 18/03/17], p. 3.

The same reversed scientific approach obtains in relation to the absence of atmosphere on the moon. Filano mocks this idea: asserting the existence of such an atmosphere, he hypothesizes the presence of a flourishing civilization on the satellite:

Egli venne fra l'altro aggiungendo alcunché sulla costituzione fisica della luna, e ridendosi appunto dell'universale opinione degli astronomi che tale corpo celeste fosse privo di atmosfera. Sulla cui esistenza egli stesso non nutriva invece dubbio alcuno, pur ammettendo che la medesima potesse, anzi dovesse presentarsi grandemente rarefatta. [...] Accennò anche alla sua speranza, suffragata, diceva, da solidi dati, di trovare lassù una fiorente civiltà (24).

Furthermore, technical explanations of the nature of the spacecraft *Cancroregina* are not plausible. Its mechanical components and functioning are described as organic: the machine is called 'creatura'; its source of energy are dark granules ingested by its 'mouth' ('la sua forza motrice si deve periodicamente alimentare per una sua interna e vorace bocca, con altri granuli, bruni questi', 41); its internal parts are called 'organi' and 'viscere'; its mechanical functioning eventually becomes a matter of mood.<sup>317</sup>

As previously anticipated, *Cancroregina* soon becomes a story about insanity. This hypothesis is reinforced by the reading of the original appendix of the text, which Landolfi decided to eliminate in the second edition of the story (published in the volume *Racconti*, 1961).<sup>318</sup> This appendix presents the story of the journey to the moon as the product of the imagination of the narrator, who finds himself in an asylum.

The links between the theme of insanity and the lunar journey are numerous. The moon's physical and geological toponymy is described in terms of emotional and mental states. Many of the names of the basaltic plains called *maria* are generally modelled after psychic states of mind: for instance, *Mare Serenitatis*, *Mare Tranquillitatis*, *Mare Crisium*, *Mare Ingenii*. The same is true for the majority of the *lacus* (smaller basaltic

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<sup>317</sup> 'Cancroregina brontolò un poco, sternutò, sbadigliò pigramente, come non le quadrasse d'andare a giro per semplice esibizione, quindi si levò, ancora di malavoglia; ma presto fece udire il suo sibilo e prese a volteggiare per la grotta. Salì a pochi centimetri dalla volta, girò bellamente attorno a una colonna, infilò d'impeto uno strettissimo passaggio tra due, eseguì varie altre evoluzioni, e infine si riposò leggermente a terra... (42)'

<sup>318</sup> The author repeatedly recommends to Vallecchi: «{...} l'ultima parte (dialogica) di *Cancroregina* deve saltar via»; «[...] in questa montagna di bozze non trovo assolutamente nulla da fare (nel senso da te indicato), salvo un'annotazione in margine che preghi non so chi di /SOPPRIMERE LA TERZA E ULTIMA PARTE DI CANCROREGINA». 'Letters from Sanremo', 21 December 1960-1 January 1961 in Idolina Landolfi, 'Note ai testi' in *Opere I (1937-1959)*, p. 1013. A possible reason for Landolfi's choice to remove the appendix may be his willingness to maintain the Fantastic tension of the text, which, instead, disappears once the whole story is interpreted, through the appendix, as the imaginings of a mad man hospitalized in an asylum.

plains): for example, *Lacus Felicitatis*, *Lacus Gaudii*, *Lacus Oblivionis*, *Lacus Odii*, *Lacus Solitudinis*, *Lacus Somniorum*, *Lacus Spei*, *Lacus Timoris*.<sup>319</sup>

Furthermore, the full moon has long been considered to provoke madness: one of its most legendary effects is that of making people howl at its luminous presence. Licanthropy has often been associated with being possessed, murderous, or mad. Consequently, individuals in the past suffering from what we would now consider psychosis were, at times, considered werewolves. Ancient authors such as Aristotle and Galen theorized the link between the moon and madness in terms of the regulation of fluids, as they considered the moon responsible for the balance of liquids and energies both in the earth and in human minds and bodies. Insanity, in their view, was determined by excessive moisture in the brain. In the Middle Ages, Sprenger and Krämer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) included a catalogue of psychopathological symptoms of madness and crimes of witchcraft; they called the insane 'lunatics' and believed them to be victims of the Devil and affected by certain phases of the moon.<sup>320</sup>

The idea survived through the so-called 'Age of Reason' into modern society. Psychiatric practice began as asylums for 'lunatics'. The archaic notion of lunacy ('intermittent insanity under the influence of the full moon') has been repeated in many cultural variants, particularly in popular culture, and still lingers on in the common use of the word 'lunatic' to denote insanity.<sup>321</sup> With all of this in mind, it is worth looking at how Landolfi problematizes the topic of madness in *Cancroregina* and makes it the central theme of his novella.

#### *On the Border between Mania and Melancholia*

In tackling the problem of madness in the novella, Landolfi addresses, more specifically, the fragile boundary between madness and reason. This aspect becomes evident already in the first encounter between the protagonist of *Cancroregina* and the scientist Filano, when the latter states: 'Signore, io sono pazzo. Lo sono per gli altri. Spero di non sembrar tale a voi'(15). The reader is thus immediately led to doubt the character's mental stability. Indeed, Filano alternates between moments of lucidity and confusion. He appears to have an unstable perception of himself and a self-contradictory

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<sup>319</sup> D. Wilhelms, *The Geologic History of the Moon*, p. 3.

<sup>320</sup> Lillian Feder, *Madness in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 112.

<sup>321</sup> Niall McCrae, 'Preface' in *The Moon and Madness* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), pp.vii-x.

attitude. For instance, he alternatively declares: ‘giacché non son pazzo, l’ho detto’ and ‘giacché son pazzo, l’ho detto’. Besides, he alludes to some unspecified act of violence (‘qualche gran violenza’) that may have been the cause of his admission to the asylum, but of which he only has sparse memories.

When Filano advances his proposal of a journey to the moon, the narrator reflects: ‘Orbene, era evidente che avevo davanti a me un pazzo, e della specie più pericolosa: quella dei pazzi ragionanti’ (18). Nonetheless, the protagonist is persuaded by the scientist’s words and attitudes and is won over by a feeling of confidence towards the peculiar individual:

Del resto, era poi tanto evidente che era un pazzo? Per verità non aveva ancora dimostrato irrefutabilmente di esserlo. E tutti gli uomini di genio, gli arditi iniziatori, non dovevano alla prima essere apparsi pazzi quanto lui se non di più? Comunque, dei savi o cosiddetti tali era ben certo che non potevo aspettarmi nulla di buono: se avessi provato coi pazzi? (19)

Both Filano and the protagonist/narrator testify to the thin boundary between madness and reason (not to say genius), which can be traced back to the ancient idea of the madman as a bearer of truth.<sup>322</sup> In ancient Greek society, madness was considered a blessing and a stimulus to prophecy and poetry, granting the individual a unique perception of reality. The mad prophet served a social function, which seems mirrored in Filano’s insistence on the importance of his discovery for the rest of humanity (‘Io li supplicavo di cercarla, di darne pubblica notizia per il bene della restante umanità [...]’, 15).<sup>323</sup> However, in order to interpret the visionary apparitions and hallucinations correctly, the intervention of reason was believed to be necessary: prophecy resulted from the application of conscious processes to the products of unconscious ones. This dynamic (well exemplified in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, an insane character who observes and comments on his own mental functioning),<sup>324</sup> may in part explain Landolfi’s use of the definition of ‘pazzi ragionanti’.

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<sup>322</sup> Here, one is again reminded of *La pietra lunare*, in which, the etymology of ‘verania’ (name attributed to the weregoats) contains the element of truth. The initiation journey of the protagonist, indeed, could also be conceived of as a journey to the discovery of truth. Ultimately, the element of truth in Landolfi seems to link directly to liminal creatures which function as intermediaries between the writer and other worlds.

<sup>323</sup> Feder, *Madness in Literature*, pp. 85, 86.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Another possible source of inspiration for the phrase ‘*folia ragionante*’ comes from the language of psychiatry. ‘*Folie raisonnante*’ was a term used in nineteenth-century French psychiatry to designate the so-called *mania sine delirio*, a concept introduced by Philippe Pinel (1745-1826). Pinel, one of the most influential figures in the emerging psychiatry of the period,<sup>325</sup> used this expression to refer to a form of insanity affecting the temperament of the individual but leaving his or her intellectual faculties unaffected. In his *A Treatise on Insanity* (1801), Pinel discussed the case of a vehement young man confined at the Bicêtre asylum, who, though ‘unmoved by passions, possessed a perfectly sound judgment’.<sup>326</sup> Pinel also reported on a mechanic’s suffering from irregular ‘paroxysms of maniacal fury, unaccompanied by any lesion of the intellect’.<sup>327</sup> In these moments of vehemence, the individual was alternatively possessed by reason and by the need to commit cruelties. Pinel concluded that mania without delirium ‘may be either continued or intermittent. No sensible change in the functions of the understanding; but perversion of the active faculties, marked by abstract and sanguinary fury, with a blind propensity to acts of violence’.<sup>328</sup> Pinel’s concept of ‘*folie raisonnante*’ was used to describe a group of pathologies that, later in the twentieth century, became known as psychonevrosis and constituted a new object of attention for modern psychiatry.<sup>329</sup>

Landolfi, then, borrows this expression from psychiatry and uses it to describe his characters and their behaviours. The description of Filano’s growing mental instability, in particular, seems to fit Pinel’s clinical concepts, as becomes clear from a comparison between the two texts. Pinel defines anger attacks as ‘paroxysms of maniacal fury’ (152); Landolfi similarly speaks of ‘*forme parossistiche*’ (51) and ‘*parossismo*’ (55). In his account of a clinical case of mania without delirium, Pinel writes:

The first symptom which manifested itself was a burning heat in the abdominal region; [...] It extended itself, by degrees, to the chest, neck, and face, of which it heightened the complexion. [...] At length, the brain itself was affected, when the maniac was seized by an irresistible

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<sup>325</sup> Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 204.

<sup>326</sup> Philippe Pinel, ‘Mania without delirium’ in *A Treatise on Insanity, in Which are Contained the Principles of New and More Practical Nosology of Maniacal Disorders Than Has Yet Been Offered to the Public* (Sheffield: W. Todd, 1806), pp. 150-159 (p. 151).

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>329</sup> Beatrice Catini, ‘Una ragionevole follia: la mania senza delirio’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, (2015) <<http://tyasm.org/folia-mania-delirio/>> [accessed 21/05/17].

propensity to sanguinary deeds: and could have possessed himself of an instrument of offence, he would have sacrificed to his fury the first person that came in his way.<sup>330</sup>

Landolfi describes Filano's paroxysm in similar terms, focusing, like Pinel, on the skin's tone and on his irresistible drive towards physical aggression:

Quasi nel medesimo punto si volse e, digrignando mutamente i denti e tremando per tutto il corpo di eccitazione, di odio, di epilessia, paonazzo, cianotico in volto, mi si getto' addosso e tento' di prendermi alla gola (57)

Pinel remarks that during these attacks the subject maintains some degree of rationality:

In other respects, however, he enjoyed the free use of his reason, even during the paroxysms. He answered without hesitation the questions that were proposed to him, and evinced no incoherence in his ideas, nor any other symptom of delirium (153)

Similarly, *Cancroregina's* narrator stresses that, just before Filano turns violent, his voice appeared 'calma, gelida, agghiacciante' (56).

If Landolfi's consultation of Pinel's manual cannot be definitively proven, it is certain that he knew another important and influential psychiatric manual of the end of nineteenth century, that of the German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin. In a fragment from the first of his diaries, *LA BIÈRE DU PECHEUR* (1953), Landolfi recounts of a time in which, returning from Forte Dei Marmi, he was absorbed in the reading of a manual of psychiatry:

Intrattenni uno stretto commercio con un personaggio non vivente e neppur morto, non di carne e d'ossa per quanto peso e parlante, col libro infine del signor Kraepelin.<sup>331</sup> Era fatale che un

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<sup>330</sup> Philippe Pinel, 'Mania without delirium', pp. 152-153.

<sup>331</sup> Kraepelin's work, identifying the origin of psychic diseases in biological and genetic factors, was very influential across the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had a strong influence on the birth of eugenics and racial hygiene (first conceptual nucleus of the later spread of racial theories across Europe), shaping the intellectual debate from the '20s onwards. His major contribution was the *Compendium der Psychiatrie zum Gebrauche für Studierende und Ärzte* (*Compendium of Psychiatry: For the Use of Students and Physicians*), first published in 1883. The first Italian edition was published only two years later, in 1885, under the title *Compendio di psichiatria ad uso dei medici e degli studenti*, 2 vols (Milan: Vallardi, 1885). The volume created a real fracture within the psychiatric environment in Italy, as Kraepelin's theories on dementia and maniac depression were essentially based on the direct observation of patients and underlined the importance of taking into account the great impact of the environment. The traditionalist Italian academics were quite diffident and tried to contain the general enthusiasm for his theories. On the

ammalato della mia specie cascasse su qualche trattato di psichiatria, e io mi trovavo a possedere questo vecchio e ottimo del professore monacense, cui solo si potrebbe rimproverare una antiquata terminologia. Ma che possedere: ben presto esso libro, o piuttosto egli, possedette me, m'ebbe in sua piena mercé, risultato del pari fatale.

It is interesting to note that in the fragment, Landolfi personifies the book, identifying it with the figure of its author and establishing a dialogue with it. Landolfi is particularly impressed by this manual as he finds traces of his own behaviour in the symptomatology described ('le quali facevan sì che tra le sue pagine o braccia io trovassi invariabilmente tutto quanto si adattava al caso mio, anche in fatto di minuti particolari'). Dr Krapelin becomes a living figure who provides a diagnosis on Landolfi's own mental health ('le sue prognosi erano sempre infauste e, venuti al capo del «trattamento», egli si limitava ad avvertire con più o meno parole che non ve n'era alcuno'). Landolfi concludes: 'per costui non correva ombra di dubbio che io fossi un infermo, e per giunta inguaribile'.

In the remainder of the fragment, Landolfi goes through a number of his own habits and fantasies, which he then recognizes in several of the case studies discussed by Kraepelin. Among them, the dream of designing and building marvellous castles in beautiful landscapes (as in the case of 'il rampollo degenerato di un'antica famiglia' reported by Kraepelin); and the sudden impulse to kill someone very close, such as a relative. The resulting diagnosis is that of an unstable personality, with a strong tendency to misanthropy, a propension for the arts, and very weak willpower: 'rinunziano sempre più ad ogni seria attività, lasciano, fiacchi e senza volontà, che tutto vada come vuole'. The same weak willpower and disillusionment for life – both listed as symptoms of manic depression by Kraepelin – characterizes the protagonist of *Cancroregina* ('la mia impotenza profonda mi impediva ogni genere di lavoro' (13)), and are the reasons behind his acceptance to leave the world on Filano's spacecraft.

This analysis of Landolfi's diary supports the hypothesis that the author read Kraepelin's manual before writing *Cancroregina*,<sup>332</sup> and that the psychiatric text may

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other side, his enthusiast supporters, the so-called 'Krapeliani', particularly gathered around the psychiatric hospital in Ferrara directed by Clodomiro Bonfigli, editor of one of the Italian editions of Kraepelin's manual. The eighth edition of the manual published between 1910 and 1915 was expanded in a multivolume text entitled *Ein Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie (A Textbook: Foundations of Psychiatry and Neuroscience)*.

<sup>332</sup> This assumption is made possible by the consultation of Idolina Landolfi's 'Cronologia', in *Opere I*, in which Landolfi's stays at Forte dei Marmi are recorded in the years 1940, 1943 and 1946.

have influenced the composition of the novella. Landolfi seems to have used the psychiatric manual as a source of medical terminology and as a framework to describe the gradual emergence of symptoms affecting first Filano, and then the protagonist himself. In *Cancroregina*, indeed, Landolfi mentions several psychiatric conditions discussed by Kraepelin, using similar terminology. In the appendix, set in an asylum, the doctor describes the condition of immobility of the protagonist in terms of ‘catatonia’, which in Kraepelin’s treatise is presented as one of the manifestations of the *dementia praecox*. *Cancroregina*’s mad protagonist is described as follows: ‘[...] tiene con una mano, un pò più alta del capo, un paio di pantofole ospitaliere, di cuoio, e le fissa intensamente, in perfetta immobilità. Ha i piedi giunti e in generale, salvo il braccio levato, rigida posizione di “attenti”. In tale atteggiamento rimarrà per tutta la durata della scena’ (1010). The doctor then labels his condition as ‘catatonia’ and defines it as ‘uno stato di immobilità e di indifferenza agli stimoli esterni’(1012).

Kraepelin offers a similar clinical description for ‘stupore catatonico’:

Lo stupore catatonico è caratterizzato principalmente dai fenomeni del negativismo e dell’automatismo al comando. Gli infermi diventano laconici, s’interrompono a mezzo nella pronuncia di una parola o di una frase, giungono a poco a poco a non parlare affatto (mutacismo), oppure bisbigliano a volte alcune parole inintelligibili [...]. Essi non alzano più lo sguardo se si parla loro [...]. Del resto essi sono completamente inaccessibili ad ogni influenza esterna, non reagiscono alle chiamate, al tocco, e anche alle punture di spilli [...] (173)

Landolfi also borrows the terms ‘lipemania’ (or ‘malinconia’) and ‘psicosi maniaco-depressiva’ from the manual, which appear in the doctor’s diagnosis: ‘Si tratta qui di una grave, anzi (non ho il diritto di nasconderglielo) gravissima forma, emh, di lipemania, cioè di, ehm ehm, psicosi maniaco-depressiva, con complicazioni, ehm ehm ehm schizofreniche, aspetti dissociativi... in parole povere, una specie di pazzia malinconica’ (1012, *Opere I*). ‘Psicosi maniaco-depressiva’ is a category that Kraepelin describes extensively in the manual. Within this larger category, Kraepelin identifies two groups of individuals, the manic and the depressive, corresponding to the two categories of mania and melancholia. While the origin of the pathology, as well as some of the symptoms are shared between the two groups, the first group (‘eccitazione maniaca’) is characterized by a general excitement in mood, body movements, and verbal expression, while the second group is characterized by a more calm and



melancholic attitude, eventually resulting in the cessation of psychological and corporeal functions ('arresto psico-motorio').<sup>333</sup>

As illustrated by Jennifer Radden, until the nineteenth century melancholia and mania were classified as two detached disorders. However, while Romanticism valued melancholy as a sign of sensibility and artistic inclination, psychiatry started emphasising the cyclical nature of mental disorders. In 1806, Pinel wondered whether long-lasting melancholia may not degenerate into mania; in 1854, J. Baillarger and J. P. Falret theorized a new type of disorder, characterized by the alternation of cyclical melancholic and manic states: *la folie à double forme* or *la folie circulaire*. The category, also known as 'circular insanity', was to play a central role in the second half of the nineteenth century. Kraepelin, in the sixth edition of his treatise (1899), acknowledged the centrality of circular insanity by labelling it 'manic-depressive insanity'.<sup>334</sup> In *Cancroregina*, both the duality and the circularity of the manic-depressive insanity, as outlined by Kraepelin, are embodied by the two main characters. Filano's mental instability seems to fit the category of 'mania' as it erupts in the form of a progressive bodily and emotional excitement, resulting in a final outburst of physical aggression. The narrator, instead, is defined from the beginning of the story by weak willpower, disillusionment with life, and artistic inclination, and his insanity eventually culminates in 'catatonia', a state of immobility and indifference to external inputs. His profile, therefore, seems to fit the category of the 'melancholic'. Additionally, both characters show elements of circularity in the progression of their illness. Filano alternates between moments of reasoning and self-control and moments of unpredictability and aggressiveness; the narrator himself, before reaching the final stage of 'catatonia', suffers from hallucinations, agitated behaviours, and attempts at self-harming.

Finally, Kraepelin attributes great importance to the description of spoken and written language disturbances linked to mental disorder. Based on his analysis of the writings of some patients with maniac depression, Kraepelin observes:

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<sup>333</sup> 'La psicosi maniaco-depressiva decorre, come il nome stesso indica, in singoli attacchi, i quali offrono o i segni della cosiddetta eccitazione maniaca con fuga delle idee, umore elevato, e impulso ad agire, o quelli di una disposizione d'animo particolarmente triste, con difficoltà del pensiero ed arresto psico-motorio, o infine un miscuglio di ambedue questi stati', Kraepelin, *Compendio di psichiatria ad uso dei medici e degli studenti*, II, pp. 408, 409.

<sup>334</sup> Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*, pp. 15, 16.

La deviabilità e l'aumento di eccitabilità sogliono manifestarsi col fatto che le prime parole o le prime linee sono per lo più scritte con coerenza, mentre il contenuto ulteriore è composto da una serie confusa di racconti, di reminiscenze, di frammenti di versi, di assonanze e di rime [...]. Gli infermi non hanno più, scrivendo, alcun riguardo per chi legge [...] (419)

Kraepelin's considerations are enlightening if we look at the linguistic features of the last part of *Cancroregina*, which describes the narrator's descent into insanity. Left alone in the spacecraft after Filano's death, the protagonist is absorbed in increasingly rambling reflections on death, life, and society, which he notes down in his diary. His thoughts, perceptions, and linguistic faculties become scattered and incoherent, as if he were lacking an organizing central faculty.

Kraepelin specifically describes the way in which the degeneration of mental processes alters linguistic expression, resulting in the use of wordplays, repetitions and distortions:

Non raramente però si può dimostrare l'influenza sul decorso ideativo del suono verbale sotto forma di «giuoco di parole». Si tratta qui di sdoppiamenti forzatamente spiritosi e di contorcimenti di singole parole e di singole frasi (162).

Nel caso presente si ha una ripetizione completamente priva di senso dei medesimi elementi con piccolissimi cambiamenti come giuochi di suono... (163)

Such alterations of words and sentences also abound in *Cancroregina*: playful expressions ('patatì patatà', 68), repetitions ('le fasi della luna, quelle della terra, novilunio, noviterrio, luna piena, terra piena...', 71; '[...] ce la vedremo con Cancroregina, Cancrore, Cancroprincipessa, Cancrofamigliareale, Cancroecceteraeccetera; Cancrocancero'), distorted words ('culidride carbonica', 86; 'deopercolazione di Praga', 87; 'Inghilmare', 93; 'vipistrello', 86) multiply in the text as the narrator's insanity progresses.<sup>335</sup>

Both the evidence from Landolfi's diary and the comparison between *Cancroregina* and Kraepelin's *Compendio di psichiatria* support the hypothesis that Landolfi was

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<sup>335</sup> Other similar examples follow: 'Eh no, qui c'è la mano di mascalzoni, o almeno di mascalzi, di inaczati, di macabbassati, insomma d'una spudorata genia; questa è l' opera di persecutori, o di persecumucche'; Mangiato serqua (n.12) palle gomma, martellantimi cervello loro incessante saltellamento'. For more comparative examples, see the appendix, where fragments from *Cancroregina* describing the gradual eruption of Filano's mental disorder are compared with observations from Kraepelin's treatise.

familiar with this manual and that he used its medical terminology and clinical observations to depict his characters' development. The mental deviations described in the novella ultimately affect the literary language, which becomes a vehicle for the madman's deformed perception at the very formal and narrative level.

### *Cancroregina: a Liminal Entity*

While madness, one of the major themes of the novella, expresses a liminal condition between mania and melancholia, reason and unreason, life and death, the spacecraft *Cancroregina* combines in its very nature an intersection of different entities, without fully belonging to any of them. During the first dialogue between Filano and the narrator, the spacecraft is described as: 'Una macchina cioè, o veicolo o comunque vogliate chiamarla, capace in teoria di varcare qualunque spazio interplanetario e, perché no? Intersiderale: nel fatto e positivamente, di coprire la distanza che ci separa dal nostro satellite' (17-18).

The scientist repeatedly calls it 'la mia creatura'<sup>336</sup> and later on even 'la mia figlia viscerale' (33), thus incorporating an emotional component in the way he addresses it. This strategy immediately introduces an ambivalence with respect to the nature of the spacecraft, which leads the narrator to ask: 'Ma... per cominciare, dov'è codesta vostra creatura, o macchina?' (21).

The ambivalence regarding the liminal nature of the spacecraft is reinforced by its brief description. While calling it 'oggetto', the author uses 'accosciato' to describe its posture and 'tranquillamente' for its temperament; he then concludes by mentioning its 'mille occhi'. Its internal mechanisms are called 'viscere', and 'uno sguardo tra ottuso e metafisico, duro e opaco il più delle volte, paragonabile a quello delle cavallette' is attributed to it.<sup>337</sup> In order to activate its engine, it must be fed with dark grains ('la si deve periodicamente alimentare, per una sua interna e vorace bocca'). In addition, a whole series of actions incompatible with its mechanical nature are attributed to the spacecraft. *Cancroregina* sneezes, grumbles, yawns, gets rest, moans, and manifests

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<sup>336</sup> In the first section the expression is used on pages: 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, and 30.

<sup>337</sup> 'Era essa una macchina di umor bizzarro, tale almeno sembrava a me dai suoni che emetteva [...], dai suoi sbuffi e dalle sue varie reazioni; a me, dico, che poco o punto conoscevo le sue multiformi e complicate viscere. Ma in complesso mi appariva allora come una potenza benefica e propizio sebbene metallico il suo scintillio; avevo persino fatto l'abitudine al suo sguardo «di demone che sogna», sguardo tra ottuso e metafisico, duro e opaco il più delle volte, paragonabile a quello delle cavallette'. (39)

happiness. This entity thus appears undefinable in terms of its identity. Is it a machine, an animal, or a human? This section will suggest that the essence of Cancroregina is to be found at the crossroads of these three spheres. Even though hybridization is not a new tool in Landolfi's fiction, the multiple essences of Cancroregina further challenge the unity of the self and can be seen as a symptom of the need to redefine the human formulated by posthuman theorists since the 50s. In this sense, the novella reveals, again, Landolfi's perceptiveness of cultural changes, since it was published in 1950, precisely the moment that scholars take to mark the end of the humanist paradigm.<sup>338</sup>

Not only is Cancroregina's nature ambivalent, but so is the type of relationship it has with both Filano and the narrator, which involves feelings like jealousy, attachment, irritation and hatred. Similar connections with non-human entities can be traced back to ancient mythology, particularly to Ovid's Pygmalion. Nonetheless, it is also anticipatory of what Turkle calls the 'robotic moment', a situation marked by increasingly disembodied relations on account of the effects of technology, leading to the acceptance of robots as romantic partners.<sup>339</sup> Raya Jones reports how visions of intimacies with robots are increasing nowadays, leading to the creation of so-called 'lovotic robots', anthropomorphized technologies emulating human affections.<sup>340</sup> Cancroregina can be considered as one of their literary ancestors. It also prefigures another famous character in Landolfi, Caracas, the inflatable doll created by the Russian writer Gogol to fulfill all the functions of a perfect wife ('La moglie di Gogol', 1954). Like Cancroregina, the doll starts showing unpredictable signs of independence and even a personality of her own, driving her husband to the fatal decision to make her burst. Similarly, Lazzarin defines Cancroregina 'un animalaccio spaziale', adding '[...] questa non è, o non è soltanto, un'astronave, quanto un'inedita casalinga cosmica: procace, cocciuta e dispettosa...'. The scholar underlines how the dialogue (dated '23 May') between the narrator and the spacecraft assumes the form of an argument between husband and wife:

Del resto il narratore, impegnato in una vera e propria scène de ménage con la sua ospite, non si perita di coprirla di ingiurie, come farebbe, verosimilmente, con una moglie dispettosa, o forse

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<sup>338</sup> Maria Cristina Iuli, 'Per una narratologia postumanista. Bruce Clarke, Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems', *Enthymema*, 2 (2010), 428-434 <<http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema>> [accessed 17/08/2017]>

<sup>339</sup> Raya Jones, 'Archaic Man Meets a Marvellous Automaton: Posthumanism, Social Robots, Archetypes', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 62, 3 (2017), 338-355, p. 348.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

con una gatta che si è resa colpevole di qualche malefatta: ‘Maledetta baldracca, puttana guercia, ora vedrai!’.<sup>341</sup>

Indeed, while the nature of Cancroregina remains ambivalent, the same cannot be said of its gender, which is continually reaffirmed. The feminine nature of the spacecraft is stressed through the use of the feminine pronouns ‘essa’ (21), ‘costei’ (31) and ‘ella’ (33), and through the portrayal of its fickle behaviours. The spacecraft is, in addition, repeatedly described in terms of ‘utero’ and ‘ventre’. Also, the spatial environment in which it is kept and the journey undertaken by the protagonists to reach it evoke sexual and maternal symbolism. The interior of the mountain where it is located is reached through a big entrance (‘un largo varco nella parete rocciosa della cresta’, 31) and then a very dark and narrow passage. The passage is defined as ‘fessura’ (33), ‘buco’ (33), ‘buia fogna’ (34), ‘cunicolo’ (34). In order to go through it, the two men have to slither like worms (‘strisciammo così per breve tratto come due veri lombrichi’, 34) a feeling of near suffocation (‘non vedevo fil di luce e quasi soffocavo’, 34). The narrow passage ends in a huge cave where the laboratory of Filano is situated:

Nel mezzo della grotta avevo veduto alla prima e ora contemplavo con orrore più che con stupore, un grande oggetto di bizzarra forma, diversamente lucente; il quale, se devo riferire senza commenti la mia prima impressione, stava lì accosciato e tranquillamente ci guardava con mille occhi. (36)

The insistence on the split, which slightly enlarges before giving way a huge space, seems to symbolize the access to the maternal womb in which the spacecraft, previously called ‘figlia viscerale’, is safely contained. The cave can, in this light, be seen as one of the ‘vessels’ that, according to Jung, stand for fertility and protection, and are associated with the mother archetype.<sup>342</sup> Oreste Macrí describes the spacecraft as the object of the crazy and jealous love of Filano, who, in turn, symbolizes the figure of the absolute father/dictator. This allows Macrí to associate the spacecraft with the female character of *Racconto d'autunno*, Lucia, object of her father’s love, and with the other liminal

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<sup>341</sup> Lazzarin, ‘Parole viticci: bestiario e onomastica di Tommaso Landolfi’, p. 324.

<sup>342</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *The collected works of C. G. Jung*, 20 vols (London: Routledge, 1968), IX, p. 81.

female figure of Caracas. The assembling of female organic elements with mechanic inorganic components is considered by Macrí an aspect of Landolfi's surrealism.<sup>343</sup>

However, if a connection with Jungian maternal archetype exists here, it is its negative side, that is 'anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate' (82), as the spacecraft Cancroregina exercises a progressively increasing power over the protagonist imprisoned in it: 'Io sono solo qui dentro, solo e senza speranze [...]. Solo, oltrech  con me stesso e in me stesso, nel ventre di questa, ormai, odiata e beffarda nemica della quale non posso in alcun modo sperare di modificare il corso' (62); 'essa mi avvelena, mi soffoca coi gas del suo intestino; o piu' classicamente, coi vapori dei suoi ipocondri' (77).

Cancroregina's name provides further evidence of its liminal nature. Lazzarin analyzes the words 'cancro' and 'cancrena', claiming that the semantic association with cancer as an illness plays a bigger role than the association with the crustacean. The choice of name, therefore, denotes the corrosion of reality, like a cancer corroding the human body. This role is shared by the post-Freudian creatures called 'animali viticci' by Lazzarin, such as 'il porrovio' and 'il vipistrello'.

Con la sua «[p]roliferazione incontrollata, irreversibile e progressiva», il cancro manifesta la stessa qualit  invasiva della verruca o della tenia, soltanto mille volte pi  fatale; alla necrosi verrucosa del porrovio, all'infestazione larvale della tenia mistica, Cancroregina risponde con un contagio tumorale generalizzato.<sup>344</sup>

The destructive power of cancer is echoed in the proliferation of tiny monsters emerging from the narrator's body. In Lazzarin's opinion, these symbolize a large group of other 'devouring' illnesses.

Lazzarin's assumptions are convincing and helpful for the interpretation of the novella. However, the astronomic and astrological connotations of the word 'cancro' should not be downplayed. Cancer, one of the least bright constellations of the Zodiac, was first identified by Galileo in *Sidereus Nuncius*. There is a strong connection between the astrological constellation and ideas of death and a passage to the underworld. While the Chinese depicted it as an 'exhalation of heaped corpses', the

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<sup>343</sup> Oreste Macr , *Tommaso Landolfi. Naratore poeta critico artifice della lingua*, pp. 58, 59.

<sup>344</sup> Lazzarin, 'Parole viticci: bestiario e onomastica di Tommaso Landolfi', p. 326.

Romans associated it with the gate through which humans enter the other world, *janua inferni*, gate of hell, which opens from the Milky Way to earth.<sup>345</sup>

In astrology, Cancer, together with Scorpio and Pisces, belongs to the so-called triangle of water, which symbolizes the wet and the female. Astrologers, describing the constellation as a she-crab, saw the animal ‘grasping a ball of fertilized eggs in a protective claw’, as is possible to observe in ancient iconography. As a feminine symbol, Cancer governs gestation, baptism and rebirth.<sup>346</sup>

The sign and constellation, finally, may have taken their names from the crab’s sidestep motion, given that in midsummer, the sun appears to change direction. In ancient times, the crab’s perverse movements suggested duplicity, also because the crab sheds its shell. Comic playwright Aristophanes claimed: ‘You cannot teach a crab to walk straight’.<sup>347</sup> Aristophane’s assumption is telling in relation to the sudden change of direction operated by the stubborn spacecraft *Cancroregina*. As a consequence of Filano’s act of lifting a lever, the spacecraft, whose target was to reach the moon, interrupts its itinerary and starts orbiting around the earth. In addition, its movement, from the beginning of the journey, had been already described as a spiral, not as a straight movement (‘essa si andava avvitando verso la luna secondo una spirale di breve, ancorché variabile, passo’, 44).

As shown in this section, the spacecraft *Cancroregina* possesses a strong feminine essence, but it also reveals a more complex, liminal nature, which emerges from various aspects of its physical appearance and behaviour. Hints at its liminal nature are also present in its name, ‘*Cancroregina*’, which conveys both the medical acceptance of the devouring illness and the astrological one of a sidestepping creature deviating in its course from both normative nature and straight itineraries.

### *Conclusions*

In conclusion, we can observe that liminality is the pervading principle informing the text. This is the case, first of all, on a thematic level, as evidenced by the orbiting of the spacecraft between earth and moon; the oscillation between reason and unreason experienced by the two main characters; and the borderline nature of the spacecraft

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<sup>345</sup> Snodgrass Mary E., Raymond M. Barrett, eds, *Signs of the Zodiac* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), p. 124.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Cancroregina, which is animal, human, and machine at the same time. However, liminality is also present at a narrative level, as the novella appears undefinable in terms of genre, combining features of Science Fiction, Fantastic, and diaristic writing. While Landolfi has often been depicted as an aristocratic and isolated author, his literary works reveal a receptiveness towards cultural and historical phenomena. In *Cancroregina*, for instance, Landolfi draws inspiration from both ‘high’ literature (e.g. Galileo) and ‘low’ literature (e.g. Verne), thus challenging the very distinction that is often established between these two categories. Additionally, Landolfi’s attempt to link scientific and literary discourses allows us to add him to a line of authors (from Galileo and Leopardi to Calvino) who share one of the highest ambitions of the Italian tradition, that of outlining a ‘map of the world’. What distinguishes Landolfi’s approach, however, is that it treats scientific and technological themes in a Fantastic vein, and that it uses the representation of future technological achievements as a springboard for describing processes of mental degeneration. This difference can be related to a general transformation in twentieth-century Fantastic fiction. Traditional sources of fear, such as vampires, phantoms, and werewolves, lost their force as they were led back to their original source, the human mind; other horrors originating from within the human mind took their place, horrors that inspired even more dread, since no magic ritual can protect man from his own obsessions and neuroses.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Ferdinando Amigoni, ‘La bestia folgorosa’ in *Fantasmismi nel Novecento* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2004), pp. 66-94.



## Conclusions

Commenting on the exceptional popularity of Italian Gothic movies, TV series, and popular fiction in the 1960s, Fabio Camilletti argues that Italian audiences did not appear, on this occasion, too dissimilar from their French, English, and American counterparts, traditionally considered to be more attracted by supernatural, Gothic, and horror scenarios.<sup>349</sup> This argument challenges the consolidated idea of a lack of appeal of the supernatural in Italy. Moreover, the peculiarity of this Italian ‘Gothic season’ – a mass phenomenon involving cinema, television and magazines – was that Gothic patterns were transplanted into an Italian context, challenging the cliché of Italy as the country of sun, as opposed to the foggy and spectral Northern countries populated by ghosts and mysteries. Films and TV series such as *Il Segno del Comando* (1971) proves, instead, that Italy possessed its own creepy atmosphere and repertoires of mysteries and spectres: in *Il Segno del Comando*,

Noi in Inghilterra’, commenta Powell, funzionario dell’ambasciata britannica a Roma, ‘abbiamo dei buoni fantasmi’: ‘Sì,’ gli risponde la sua segretaria italiana, ‘ma non sono prodotti di esportazione. [...] L’aria di Roma è troppo limpida per ospitare certe fantasie nordiche’ (D’Agata 1987: 95). Tocca a Forster, suo malgrado, scoprire che non è vero, e che Roma – e l’Italia in genere – possiede spettri decisamente autoctoni. Di giorno, forse, ammette Forster, l’aria di Roma può essere limpida; di notte, però, ‘pare che sia una città piena di presenze, di vibrazioni...’<sup>350</sup>

As I have shown in this thesis, a similar approach characterizes Landolfi’s use of Fantastic and Gothic paraphernalia. Whereas scholarship has widely recognized that Landolfi draws inspiration from nineteenth-century French, Russian and German classics in the genre,<sup>351</sup> I have drawn attention to the way Landolfi negotiates this (mainly Northern) traditional repertoire through inputs from both Italy’s ‘high’ literary tradition (Dante, Leopardi, Manzoni, D’Annunzio) and the Italian corpus of folklore and popular beliefs. This has, above all, emerged from the analysis carried out in chapters I

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<sup>349</sup> Fabio Camilletti, ‘Introduction’ in *Italia lunare. Gli anni Sessanta e l’occulto* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018).

<sup>350</sup> Camilletti, ‘Introduction’, p. 6.

<sup>351</sup> On this topic, see Idolina Landolfi, ‘Landolfi e il mondo francese’ (pp. 77-90), Cristina Terrile, ‘Flautisti e assiuoli: Tommaso Landolfi tra i russi e i francesi’ (pp. 99-116), Monique Baccelli ‘Uno sguardo sui rapporti di Landolfi con la Francia (pp. 163-170), all collected in *Gli ‘altrove’ di Tommaso Landolfi. Atti del convegno di studi, Firenze 4-5 dicembre 2001* ed. by Idolina Landolfi and Ernestina Pellegrini (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004). See also Monique Baccelli, ‘Landolfi e il romanticismo tedesco’ in *Le lunazioni del cuore: saggi su Tommaso Landolfi*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996), pp. 205-232.

and II, which illustrate how Landolfi, through the model of Leopardi, rediscovers and reshapes the folklore of Lazio as a source for literary production. Chapter II, in particular, has explored Landolfi's strategy to merge stereotyped Fantastic settings and clichés with local traditions, landscapes, and myths, in order to situate the repertoire of the Northern European Gothic in the context of provincial Italy. In analyzing the case of Landolfi, I have highlighted the possibility of an indigenous Italian Fantastic, which draws on sources of imagery neglected by 'high-brow' culture.

Furthermore, this thesis has situated Landolfi in his cultural context, reflecting upon the author's strategies for problematizing contemporary historical and cultural issues by means of a fiction only apparently detached from reality. Chapter I has illustrated how Landolfi's montage of fragments from Leopardi's *Zibaldone* provided readers with a dissimulated anti-Fascist reading of Leopardi, and employed Leopardi's legacy in order to address the problem of the survival of the imagination in modernity. As the chapter has discussed, similar operations of cutting and pasting from the *Zibaldone* had been attempted for different purposes, in the years preceding the publication of *La pietra lunare*, both by the poetic movement of 'La Ronda' and by the Fascist journal *La difesa della razza*. While, in the first case, Leopardi had been adopted as model and as a theorizer of stylistic perfection, in the second, passages from the *Zibaldone* had been accurately selected to convey Leopardi's alleged racist views.<sup>352</sup> Landolfi challenges these predominant views of Leopardi as the poet of formal refinement and rationality, representative of nationalistic and racist values, by putting the 'irrational' and 'marginal' components of his inspiration in the spotlight. In my interpretation, Landolfi's use of the *Zibaldone* delineates the irreducible opposition between reason and imagination by reiterating Leopardi's understanding of 'illusions' as the only legitimate source of literature.

Similarly, chapter II has shown how *La pietra lunare* incorporates several tensions underlying the socio-political structures of Fascist Italy, by detecting in the text subtle references to Fascist symbols, systems of values and bio-political interventionism. For instance, by setting one of the crucial scenes of the novella (the apparition of the three Mothers and Giovancarlo's initiation) in a ditch, Landolfi implicitly addresses the way Fascism intervened to raze to the ground wetlands like the Pontine Marshes, considered

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<sup>352</sup> See Riccardo Bonavita, 'Ma Silvia era ariana? Quando Leopardi fu arruolato a 'difesa della razza'' in *Leopardi, descrizione di una battaglia*, ed. by Giuliana Benvenuti (Turin: Nino Aragno, 2012), pp. 209-227.

a sacred venue of a pre-Classical religion in the tradition.<sup>353</sup> In doing so, Landolfi problematizes most of the values of the Fascist regime: the countryside as a fruitful site embodying all the moral principles of the traditional family; the Fascist man as emblem of virility and strength; notions of beauty corresponding to classicist aesthetic ideas of bodily harmony; views on racial purity relying on the belief in an Aryan-Mediterranean dynasty.

Chapter III, along the same line, has shown how the literary fiction of *Racconto d'autunno* negotiates the traumas of war, enlightening its 'unspeakable' elements by means of a meticulous pattern of intertextual and interdiscursive references. Chapter III has offered an interpretation of *Racconto d'autunno* as an oblique way of employing fiction and its deceptive strategies to express the feeling of displacement induced by traumatic war events, such as the mass rapes and killings affecting central Italy in 1944. In this light, Gothic and Fantastic patterns, in *Racconto d'autunno*, represent a strategy for bypassing the limits of historical realism and voicing the emotional lacerations of the individuals experiencing such traumas.

Finally, chapter IV has exemplified how *Cancroregina*, through its simultaneous use of science fiction, Gothic and diaristic modes of writing, incorporates some of the tensions characterising post-war Italian society. The blending of *Cancroregina*'s human and mechanic natures points to an uneasiness caused by the entrance of techno-scientific developments into most people's lives. The lunar journey appears as symptomatic of a contemporary atmosphere in which the possibility of manned spaceflight was perceived as imminent, based on contemporary experiments on rockets regularly reported on in the press. The description of the two main characters' gradual loss of rationality implicitly expresses contemporary concerns about the irrational side of human beings, as revealed by the entrance and popularity of psychoanalytic and psychiatric studies in post-war Italy, in parallel with the spread of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders originating in traumatic wartime experiences.

From this new perspective, aimed at situating Landolfi's fiction in his historical and cultural context and at detecting its non-literary sources, the three novellas analyzed (though the analysis could be extended to a wider portion of the author's oeuvre) do not fit the predominant critical views of Landolfi's Fantastic. As illustrated in the

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<sup>353</sup> Rodney James Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 228. On the long debate on the alleged insalubrity of the Pontine Marshes, see also Sara Miglietti, 'Wholesome or Pestilential? Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647) and the Dispute on Roman Air', *NeMLA Italian Studies*, 38 (2016), 203-220.

introduction, the debate on the Italian Fantastic fully develops in the 1980s (and more precisely from 1983 and 1988) and sees the elaboration of three predominant theoretical models, influencing each other: the ‘cultured Fantastic’ theorized by Ghidetti and Lattaruolo; Calvino’s ‘intellectual Fantastic’; the ironical and rational magic-surrealism canonized by Contini’s *Italie magique* (1946; 1988). The three models had in common the notion of ‘high’, intellectualised and literate writing modality. In Contini’s opinion, the rational use of intellect was the distinctive feature of Italian magic-surrealism, as opposed to French surrealist modalities of irrational and automatic writing. All three models used Landolfi as one of the highest representatives of this highly intellectualised Fantastic, with solid argumentations, and have classed his work within rigid categories.<sup>354</sup> This thesis has demonstrated, however, that Landolfi’s three masterpieces of Fantastic fiction do not completely match any of these categories, as they neglect an important component of his poetics. These three predominant critical contributions on the Fantastic, because they emphasize its intertextual, rational and intellectual components, ignore what lies outside of them: the contamination of the Fantastic with other, ‘lower culture’, or less canonical, sources, such as the occult, folklore, oral culture, and psychiatric language, as this thesis has attempted to show with respect to Landolfi’s early Fantastic. In this sense, Camilletti remarks:

e si può, certo, ammonire di non mescolare la letteratura fantastica ‘con una quantità di altri prodotti letterari, anche della letteratura più bassa e di consumo’ che ne inquinerebbero l’identità’ (Ceserani 1996: 10); ma con la consapevolezza, così facendo, di perdere di vista la complessità di un fenomeno caratterizzato proprio dal suo costante muoversi tra ‘basso’ e ‘alto’, nutrendosi di suggestioni esterne anche, e spesso, delle più triviali. Ciò è tanto vero per il ‘fantastico romantico’ di cui parla Ceserani – le cui origini si intersecano con quelle della stessa, moderna industria culturale – quanto per il Novecento: il ‘nuovo interesse’ per il gotico e il fantastico che, sostiene Marco Belpoliti, attraversa l’Italia degli anni Ottanta come peculiarissimo sintomo di riflusso e disimpegno (2001: 173), appare nuovo solo quando si considerino esclusivamente autori ed editori illustri e canonizzati.<sup>355</sup>

The multiform and hybrid nature of the Fantastic, able to combine different codes and languages and to draw on sources of a different nature has been neglected by this

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<sup>354</sup> See, in particular, the case of Calvino’s anthology *Le più belle pagine di Tommaso Landolfi* (1982) and its influence on later anthologies of the Fantastic discussed in the introduction.

<sup>355</sup> Camilletti, pp. 6, 7.

critical school. In this light, Lazzarin's remarks on the reception of Landolfi's Fantastic appear telling: 'Ora, è curioso constatare come Landolfi, che era stato soprattutto un autore di racconti fantastici, sia stato canonizzato in primo luogo quando aveva praticamente smesso di scriverne, e in secondo luogo dopo la morte, cioè quando aveva raggiunto l'impossibilissimo stato di cui parla *Cancroregina*.'<sup>356</sup>

A deeper attention to the irrational and hybrid components of Landolfi's Fantastic has been the focus of chapter I, where I show that Landolfi has recourse to a model of Leopardi distant from his recurrent canonization in the early twentieth century. Particularly, the model in Landolfi's work has been shown to be characterised by spontaneity, irrationality, hybridity, ancestrality, and stylistic blending. In this sense, art and reason in *La pietra lunare* prove to be instruments to reach the irrational and go back to the original nucleus of poetry, namely an archetypical and astonished observation of nature, as theorized by Leopardi.

Chapter II has looked in detail at the ways *La pietra lunare* reveals this type of multifarious and irrational Fantastic in a general absence of boundaries between the human and the inhuman, the aesthetic categories of beauty and ugliness, Christian and pagan instances. The absence of structures and rigid rules appeared in *La pietra lunare* also at a stylistic, linguistic and thematic level. In this text, different sources (from high literature to popular folklore and legends; from foreign literature to autochthonous traditions) and registers (precious archaisms and latinisms versus dialectal forms and proverbs) are mixed. In my analysis, I underlined that all these operations challenge Croce's 'ritorno all'ordine' as well as the Classicist principles of unitarism and later formulations of the rational twentieth-century Fantastic. Finally, Landolfi exemplifies the self-sufficiency of the Italian Fantastic, against predominant views of Italy as a country naturally deprived of imagination and appeal for the supernatural.

Similarly, chapter III has analyzed the way in which Gothic elements enter into tension with the sphere of history in *Racconto d'autunno* and shown how Landolfi's portrayal of the war seems directly influenced by the oral memories of its victims. In addition, this chapter has underlined *Racconto d'autunno*'s intertextual relationship with Occult sources. *Racconto d'autunno*, in this light, echoes the most 'irrationalist' and Gothic aspects of nineteenth-century literature in order to portray and interrogate a crisis that is peculiarly modern.

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<sup>356</sup> Lazzarin, 'Dissipatio Ph.G. Landolfi, o l'anacronismo del fantastico', p. 237.

Chapter IV has illustrated how *Cancroregina* merges different codes belonging to Science Fiction, Fantastic and diaristic writing and intertwines a (pseudo-)scientific discourse with literary imagination. Furthermore, Landolfi appears to have drawn inspiration from both ‘high’ literature (e.g. Galileo) and ‘low’ literature (e.g. Verne), thus challenging the very distinction that is often established between these two categories. The chapter has also underlined how, in the novella, irrationality becomes a theme as well as a narrative strategy, resulting in a gradually disjointed and visionary language. Finally, the chapter has focused on the contamination between literary and psychiatric language by looking at some of Landolfi’s non-literary sources. Rosemary Jackson, rooting modern fantasy in the carnivalesque, similarly reassesses this multifarious nature of the Fantastic. Considering the *menippea*, a traditional form of satire, as an ancestor of fantastic art, she links its celebration of misrule with the carnival and its festive disorder. Likewise, modern fantasies retain many carnivalesque features, as they ‘invert rules, introduce the unexpected, tell of ‘abnormal’ psychological states, descend into a social underworld’.<sup>357</sup>

The thesis has also considered Landolfi’s work from fresh angles, applying recent Anglophone theoretical frameworks to his writing and probing his portrayals of dynamics and tensions that continue to challenge us today. For instance, recent theories of posthumanism have served to enlighten some of the many episodes in Landolfi’s fiction of hybridization between human and animal (as shown in Chapter II) and human, animal and machine (as shown in Chapter IV). These reflections support the view of a strong critique of anthropocentrism and a deep interest for alterity in Landolfi. Landolfi’s interest in otherness, in the years of Italian racial laws and imperialistic campaigns, has been proven to include a problematization of principles of race and canonical beauty. At the same time, the peculiar relation between the scientist Filano and his highly femininized spacecraft (see Chapter IV) prefigures the so-called ‘robotic moment’,<sup>358</sup> a situation marked by increasingly disembodied relations due to the effects of technology. This is particularly striking if one compares Caracas, the inflatable doll of the short story ‘La moglie di Gogol’ (1954), which Gogol ‘gonfiava più o meno, le cambiava parrucca e altri velli, la ungeva con suoi unguenti e in varie maniere ritoccava; di modo da ottenere press’a poco il tipo di donna che gli si confaceva in quel

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<sup>357</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the literature of subversion*, p. 16.

<sup>358</sup> Raya Jones, ‘Archaic man meets a marvellous automaton: posthumanism, social robots, archetypes’, p. 348.

giorno o in quel momento',<sup>359</sup> and the growing interest in the technology of sex robots. Furthermore, recent contributions on the subversive value of fantasy have guided my reading of Landolfi's texts in an historical perspective.<sup>360</sup> Jackson's study, for instance, reiterates how Fantastic texts are determined by a number of forces which require to place authors 'in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy'.<sup>361</sup> In this sense, Jackson believes fantasy to be a strategy for compensating for a lack, resulting from cultural constraints. She thus defines it a literature of desire, seeking to express what is experienced as absence and loss. As a result, the Fantastic seems to trace the unsaid and the unseen and permits 'ultimate questions' about social and political order.<sup>362</sup> On the same line of thought, I have had recourse to David Punter's reflections on the function of Gothic literature. While Fantastic and Gothic literature characteristically recombine and invert the real, for these two scholars, they do not escape the real. On the contrary, both the Gothic and Fantastic are linked to the real by a symbiotic relation and cannot exist independently of the 'real' world they originate from. These considerations have invited me to begin the analysis of my four case studies with a historical and cultural contextualization of the works, to highlight some of their complexities in relation to the reality they are immersed in. Finally, I have made use of the anthropological notion of 'liminality' to underline the intrinsic thematic, textual and narrative ambiguity of the three novellas. I claim that liminality – involving slippery entities, settings, situations and narrative modalities that do not fit any precise category (they are 'in between') – voices the cultural and political instability of the decade under analysis.

Commenting on the impact of the war on Landolfi's life and writing, Idolina Landolfi – Landolfi's daughter, and the main editor of his works – asserts that 'le conseguenze dell'esperienza bellica sulla sua [Landolfi's] scrittura – che come sappiamo è ovunque scrittura autobiografica – la critica a mio avviso non ha indagato abbastanza'.<sup>363</sup> In the attempt to detect some of the historical and cultural dynamics that have shaped Landolfi's early Fantastic fiction, I have contributed to filling the scholarly gap indicated by Idolina Landolfi. Having prepared the ground for a new historical

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<sup>359</sup> Tommaso Landolfi, 'La moglie di Gogol', in *Opere I (1937-1959)* ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milan: Rizzoli, 1991), pp. 679-689 (p. 680).

<sup>360</sup> The term 'fantasy' is used by Jackson to address a vast domain including the marvellous, the uncanny, horror and science fiction.

<sup>361</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 3.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>363</sup> Idolina Landolfi, *Il piccolo vascello solca i mari*, II, p. 88.

approach to Landolfi's fiction, future research could extend it to the repertoire of short and long stories produced in the same time span,<sup>364</sup> which I have not included here in order to privilege an in-depth textual approach.

The investigation could also be extended to subsequent years, including the tensions present (even though to a lesser extent) in Landolfi's work of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>365</sup> Fantastic and Gothic patterns recurring in works of the period could be analyzed in the perspective of the Cold-War environment, the Italian second modernization,<sup>366</sup> and the so-called 'anni di piombo'.<sup>367</sup> New research in this direction has already begun to be undertaken, with scholars investigating, for instance, the way a growing interest for occultism, Gothic cinema and fiction, from 1958 to 1972, mirrored and incorporated political and social tensions of the time.<sup>368</sup> In this sense, C. G. Jung's study *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1958) provides useful insights, as it interestingly sees the growing apparitions of flying saucers all over the world since the 1950s as involuntary, automatic projections provoked by a situation of psychic distress connected to the historical instability of the Cold War environment. In his essay, Jung attempts to solve the mystery of the collective tendency to believe in saucers, in spite of the lack of empirical proofs for their existence. Jung thus wonders: 'why should it be more desirable for saucers to exist than not?'<sup>369</sup> The answer he provides links human fantasies to historical instability. Jung reports that the first inspiration for the Ufo stories was given by mysterious projectiles seen over Sweden during the final two years of WWII, which were later attributed to the Russians and called 'Foo fighters' (lights that accompanied the Allied bombers over Germany) in official reports. Jung claims that 'the impossibility of finding an earthly base for the Ufos and of explaining their physical peculiarities soon led to the conjecture of an extra-

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<sup>364</sup> I refer to the collections of short stories *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* (1937), *Il mar delle blatte e altre storie* (1939), *La spada* (1942) and the long story *Le due zittelle* (1946). I believe that also the understudied volumes for children – *Il principe infelice* (1943) and *La raganella d'oro* (1954) – would benefit from a similar approach. Even though I have drawn connections with these works from time to time, their organic analysis was not possible in this occasion for problems of space and internal coherence.

<sup>365</sup> Landolfi's death will occur in 1979 and the last volume published in life is the collections of elzeviri *Del meno* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1978).

<sup>366</sup> See Giacomo Manzoli, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi. Cinema popolare e società italiana dal boom economico alla neotelevisione* (Rome: Carocci, 2012).

<sup>367</sup> The expression 'Anni di piombo' refers to a period of social and political turmoil, from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, marked by a wave of both left-wing and right-wing political terrorism.

<sup>368</sup> I refer again to Fabio Camilletti's study, *Italia lunare. Gli anni Sessanta e l'occulto*.

<sup>369</sup> Carl Gustav Jung study *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 4.



terrestrial origin'.<sup>370</sup> The later sightings were all based on an impressive collection of mistaken observations and conclusions, which Jung defines as 'rumors' into which subjective psychic assumptions have been projected.<sup>371</sup> According to the scholar, these rumors must have been generated by 'a psychological situation common to all mankind' and, particularly, a situation of collective distress or danger, or of vital psychic need:

This condition undoubtedly exists today, in so far as the whole world is suffering under the strain of Russian policies and their still unpredictable consequences. In the individual, too, such phenomena as abnormal convictions, visions, illusions, etc., only occur when he is suffering from a psychic dissociation, that is, when there is a split between the conscious attitude and the unconscious contents opposed to it. Precisely because the conscious mind does not know about them and is therefore confronted with a situation from which there seems to be no way out, these strange contents cannot be integrated directly but seek to express themselves indirectly, thus giving rise to unexpected and apparently inexplicable opinions, beliefs, illusions, visions, and so forth.<sup>372</sup>

In the threatening situation of the Cold War, people saw the world split into two halves and everything at stake and they could not see how the situation could resolve itself.<sup>373</sup> The feeling of uneasiness produced by such events cannot, for Jung, find any other way to express itself than by means of oblique, indirect fantasies, expressions of archetypal instincts. Jung claims that the round shape of the flying saucers, archetypal symbol of totality, can be found in all epochs and in all places, always with the same meaning, namely the 'protective or apotropaic circle, whether in the form of the prehistoric 'sun wheel', or the magic circle, or the alchemical microcosm, or a modern symbol of order, which organizes and embraces the psychic totality'.<sup>374</sup> The particularly important role of this 'vision of the rotundum' (mandala form) relies on its function as regulator and orderer of chaotic states. Jung concludes that the archetype represents a pattern of order which is superimposed on the psychic chaos, so that the content falls into place and the weltering confusion is held together by the protective circle.<sup>375</sup> Such reflections, if extended to the expression of fantasies in literary fiction, provide an enlightening perspective and encourage us to extend the research on the symptomatic nature of the Fantastic to other authors active in periods of general

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<sup>370</sup> Jung, *Flying Saucers*, p. 9.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

confusion and perplexity. For instance, a similar approach could be extended to an author like Giorgio Manganelli who, since the mid-1960s, has populated his fiction with bizarre animals, speaking and dancing corpses, descents into hell and spectres.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Florian Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts: Giorgio Manganelli and the Afterlife of the Avant-Garde* (Bern and New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2010).

**Appendix 1: Table showing Landolfi's cuts (indicated in bold) from *Zibaldone*<sup>377</sup>**

From *Zibaldone*, edizione Flora (1937)

I

Ricadute le nostre lettere, (nella imitazione e studio degli stranieri) son comparsi nella seconda metà del settecento e principio dell'ottocento i nostri [4] ultimi lavori d'arte. Questi sono di quegli scrittori che nella corruzione si conservano illesi, non possono essere stimati da molti ec. Ma **adesso l'arte è venuta in un incredibile accrescimento, tutto è arte e poi arte, non c'è quasi più niente di spontaneo, la stesa spontaneità si cerca a tutto potere, ma con uno studio infinito** senza il quale non si può avere, e senza il quale a gran pezza l'aveano (specialmente nella lingua) Dante il Petrarca l'Ariosto ec. e tutti i bravi trecentisti e cinquecentisti.

Zibaldone, p. 7 [4, 1]

Polizzone: in nessuna

II

**In molte opere di mano dove c'è qualche pericolo (o di fallare o di rompere ec.), una delle cose più necessarie perché riescano bene è non pensare al pericolo e portarsi con franchezza. Così I poeti antichi non solamente non pensavano al pericolo in cui erano di [10] errare, ma specialmente Omero, appena sapevano che ci fosse, e però franchissimamente si diportavano, con quella bellissima negligenza che accusa l'opera della natura e non della fatica. Ma noi timidissimi, non solamente sapendo che si può errare, ma avendo sempre avanti gli occhi l'esempio di chi ha errato e di chi erra, e però pensando sempre al pericolo (e con ragione perché vediamo il gusto corrotto del secolo che facilissimamente ci trasporterebbe in sommi errori, osserviamo le cadute di molti che per certa libertà di pensare e di comporre partoriscono mostri, come sono al presente, per esempio, i romantici), non ci arrischiamo di scostarci non dirò dall'esempio degli antichi e dei Classici, che molti pure sapranno abbandonare, ma da quelle regole (ottime e Classiche, ma sempre regole) che ci siamo formate in mente, e diamo in voli bassi, né mai osiamo di alzarci con quella negligente e sicura e non curante e dirò pure ignorante franchezza, che è**

<sup>377</sup> The numbers in brackets indicate the original page in Leopardi's manuscript, followed by an indication of paragraph (the numbers after the comma). For example, [4,1] indicates the fourth page of Leopardi's manuscript, first paragraph. The following Roman numerals in parenthesis indicate the order of the fragments as in Landolfi's selection.

necessaria nelle somme opere dell'arte; onde pel timore di non fare cose pessime non ci attendiamo di farne delle ottime, e ne facciamo delle mediocri, non dico già mediocri di quella mediocrità che riprende Orazio, e che in poesia è insopportabile, ma mediocri nel genere delle buone, cioè lavorate, studiate, pulitissime, armonia espressiva, bel verso, bella lingua, Classici ottimamente imitati, belle immagini, belle similitudini, somma proprietà di parole (la quale soprattutto tradisce l'arte), insomma tutto, ma che non son quelle, non son quelle cose secolari e mondiali, insomma non c'è più Omero Dante l'Ariosto, insomma il Parini il Monti sono bellissimi, ma non hanno nessun difetto. Vedi p. 461.

Zibaldone, pp. 13, 14 [9, 2; 10, 1]

Polizzina: *Teorica delle arti, lettere ec. Parte pratica, storica ec.*

VIII, III, IX

E non si avvedono i romantici che, se questi sentimenti son prodotti dalla *nuda* natura, per destarli bisogna imitare la *nuda* natura, e quei semplici e innocenti oggetti, che *per loro propria forza, inconsapevoli*, producono nel nostro animo quegli effetti, bisogna trasportarli come sono né più né meno nella poesia, e che così bene e divinamente imitati, aggiuntaci la meraviglia e l'attenzione alle minute parti loro, che nella realtà non si notavano e nella imitazione si notano, è forza che destino in noi questi stessissimi sentimenti che costoro vanno cercando, questi sentimenti che costoro non ci sanno di grandissima lunga destare; e che il poeta quanto più parla in persona propria e quanto più aggiunge di suo, tanto meno imita (cosa giù notata da Aristotele, al quale volendo o non volendo senz'avvedersene si ritorna) e che il sentimentale non prodotto dal sentimentale, ma dalla natura, *qual ella è*, e la natura *qual ella è* bisogna imitare, ed hanno imitata gli antichi, onde una similitudine d'Omero semplicissima senza spasimi e senza svenimenti, e un'ode d'Anacreonte, vi destano una folla di fantasie, e vi riempiono la mente e il cuore senza paragone più che cento mila versi sentimentali; perché quivi parla la natura, e qui parla il poeta: e non si [17] avvedono che appunto **questo grand'ideale dei tempi nostri, questo conoscere così intimamente il cuor nostro, questo analizzarne, prevederne, distinguerne ad uno ad uno tutti i più minuti affetti, quest'arte insomma psicologica, distrugge l'illusione senza cui non ci sarà poesia in sempiterno, distrugge la grandezza dell'animo e delle azioni** (*vedi quel che ho detto in altro pensiero*) e che (IX) mentre l'uomo (preso in grande) si allontana da quella puerizia in cui tutto è singolare e meraviglioso, in cui l'immaginazione par che non abbia confini, da quella puerizia che così era propria del mondo al tempo degli antichi, come è propria di

ciascun uomo al suo tempo, perde la capacità di esser sedotto, diventa artificioso e malizioso, non sa più palpitare per una cosa che conosce vana, cade tra le branche della ragione, e se anche palpita (*perché il cuor nostro non è cangiato, ma la mente sola*), questa benedetta mente gli va a ricercare tutti i segreti di questo palpito, e svanisce ogn'ispirazione, svanisce ogni poesia; e non si avvedono che s'è perduto il linguaggio della natura, e questo sentimentale non è altro che l'invecchiamento dell'animo nostro, e non ci permette più di parlare se non con arte, e che quella santa semplicità, che dalla natura non può sparire perché la natura coll'uomo non invecchia, e la qual sola ci può destare quei veri e dolci sentimenti che andiamo cercando, non è più propria di noi come era propria degli antichi, e che però per parlare come questa semplicità parla e come insegna la natura, e destare quei sentimenti che la sola natura può destare, è forza in questo tristissimo secolo di ragione e di lume, che fuggiamo da noi stessi, e vediamo come parlavano gli antichi che erano ancora fanciulli, e con occhi non maliziosi né curiosacci ma ingenui e purissimi vedevano la santa natura e la dipingevano: e insomma non si avvedono che essi amici della natura sola, vengono in effetto a predicar l'arte, e noi amici dell'arte veniamo verissimamente a predicar la natura.

Zibaldone, pp. 23, 24 [16, 17]

Polizzina: Nessuna

#### IV

Quanto all'arte di poetare e di scrivere che il Breme pare che disprezzi per la maggior parte, mi sbrigo in due parole. Questo imitar la natura questo destare i sentimenti che voi altri volete, è facile o difficile? Ognuno che li sente è sicuro purché si metta a scrivere di comunicarli subito agli altri, o no? Se sì, me ne rallegro, e avrò piacere di vederne l'esperimento; se no, se questa cosa è tra le difficili difficilissima, [20] **se quand'uno ha concepito non ha fatto appena metà del cammino, se mille e centomila che provando affetti e sentendo vivamente hanno scritto non sono riusciti a muovere negli altri gli stessi affetti, e non si leggono da nessuno, se infiniti esempi e ragioni provano quanto sia la forza dello stile, e come una stessa immagine esposta da un poeta di vaglia faccia grand'effetto e da un inferiore nessuno, se Virgilio senz'arte non sarebbe stato Virgilio, se in poesia un bel corpo con vesti di cencio, dico, bei sensi senza bello stile, ordine, scelta ec. non si soffrono e non si leggono e sono condannati non mica dai pregiudizi ma dal tempo giudice incorrotto e inappellabile, se colla proprietà, eleganza, nobiltà ec. ec. ec. delle parole e della lingua e delle idee, colla scelta, coll'ordine, colla collocazione ec. ec. infinite necessarissime doti si procacciano alla**

**poesia; c'è bisogno dell'arte, e di grandissimo studio dell'arte, in questo nostro tempo massimamente**, per le ragioni che più volte in questi pensieri ho scritto.

Zibaldone, p. 28 [20, 1]

Polizzina: *Romanticismo*

V

**[8] Provatevi a respirare artificialmente e a fare pensatamente qualcuno di quei moltissimi atti che si fanno per natura; non potrete, se non a grande stento e men bene. Così la tropp'arte nuoce a noi; e quello che Omero diceva ottimamente per natura, noi pensatamente e con infinito artificio non possiamo dirlo se non mediocrementemente, e in modo che lo stento più o meno quasi sempre si scopra.** Vedi p. 461.

Difficoltà d'imitare: più facile il far più che quel medesimo: quanto sia difficile l'essere uguale: quanto rara in natura l'uguaglianza perfetta: quindi la meraviglia nata dall'imitazione e il diletto nato dalla meraviglia. Vedi QUINTILIANO, 1. 10, c. 11. Quindi la maggior facilità di esprimere un bello ideale che il proprio bello naturale anche minore dell'ideale.

Zibaldone, p. 11 [8, 1]

Polizzina: *Teorica delle arti, lettere, ec. Parte Pratica, storica, ec.*

VII, VI

Gran verità, ma bisogna ponderarle bene. **La ragione è nemica d'ogni grandezza; la ragione è nemica della natura: la natura è grande, la ragione è piccola. Voglio dire che un uomo tanto meno o tanto più difficilmente sarà grande, quanto più sarà dominato dalla ragione; ché pochi possono esser grandi (e nelle arti e nella poesia forse nessuno) se non sono dominate dalle illusioni.** Queste viene che quelle cose che noi chiamiamo grandi, per esempio un'impresa, d'ordinario sono fuori dell'ordine, e consistono in un certo disordine: ora questo disordine è condannato dalla ragione. Esempio: l'impresa d'Alessandro: tutta illusione. Lo straordinario ci par grande: se sia poi più grande dell'ordinario astrattamente parlando, non lo so: forse anche qualche volta sarà più piccolo assai in riga astratta, e quest'uomo strano e celebre messo a tutto rigore a confronto con un altro ordinario ed oscuro si troverò minore: nondimeno, perché è straordinario, si chiama grande: anche la piccolezza quando è straordinaria si crede e si

chiama grandezza. Tutto questo la ragione non lo comporta: e noi siamo nel secolo della ragione: (non per altro se non perché il mondo più vecchio ha più esperienza e freddezza) e pochi ora possono essere e sono gli uomini grandi, segnatamente nelle arti. **Anche chi è veramente grande, sa sperare adesso e conoscere la sua grandezza, sa sviscerare a sangue freddo il suo carattere, esaminare il merito delle sue azioni, pronosticare sopra di se, scrivere minutamente colle più argute e profonde riflessioni la sua vita: nemici grandissimi, ostacoli terribili alla grandezza: che anche l'illusioni ora si conoscono chiarissimamente esser tali, e si fomentano con una certa [15] compiacenza di se stesse, sapendo però benissimo quello che sono.** Ora come è possibile che sieno durevoli e forti quanto basta, essendo così scoperte? E che muovano a grandi cose? E, senza le illusioni qual grandezza ci può essere o sperarsi?

Zibaldone, pp. 19, 20 [14, 2]

X

Come i fanciulli e giovinetti benché di una indole pure per la malizia naturale, di quando in quando scappano in qualche difetto e non per tanto sono differentissimi dagli uomini grandi e cattivi, così gli antichi senza conoscere né amare i vizi delle arti, per la naturale tendenza dell'ingegno alla ricercatezza e cose tali di quando in quando vi cadeano non riflettendo che fossero vizi, e non per tanto infinitamente differivano dagli adulti artefici del seicento e settecento radicati nella corruzione. E adesso chiunque, per pochissimo che abbia studiato a prima giunta vede che quelli sono errori e che gli antichi hanno errato. Per esempio, chi non vede adesso che è cosa ridicola e affettatissima il lamento d'Olimpia ec. nell'Ariosto, quello d'Erminia ec. nel Tasso? E pure questi grandissimi poeti perché l'arte era giovane e senza esperienza in buona fede cascavano in questi errori, e noi perché siamo vecchi nell'arte col nostro senno e coll'esperienza de' tempi corrotti, ce ne ridiamo e li fuggiamo. **Ma questo senno e questa esperienza sono la morte della poesia.** Come però si dovrà dire che l'Ariosto per esempio avesse somma arte se cadeva spessissimo in difetti che il più meschino artefice d'oggi conosce a prima vista? Non avea somma arte ma sommo ingegno, pulitissimo, ma non corrotto e meno poi ripulito.

Zibaldone, p. 8 [5, 1]

**Appendix 2: *Racconto d'autunno* and 'La conjuration des quatres'**

<p><b>Tommaso Landolfi's <i>Racconto d'autunno</i></b></p> <p><i>Racconto d'autunno</i>, pp. 88-89.</p> <p>«Spirito di Luce », diceva il vecchio  «Spirito di Saggezza, il cui soffio dà a ogni cosa la sua forma e la riprende; o tu dinnanzi al quale la vita degli esseri è ombra che passa; tu che ascendi le nubi e muovi sull'ala del vento; tu che quando spiri, si popolano gli spazi infiniti; che quando ispiri ogni cosa, la quale viene da te, a te ritorna; o moto sempiterno nella sempiterna stabilità; sii benedetto!</p> <p>«Ti lodo e ti benedico nel mutevole impero della luce creata, delle ombre, dei riflessi e delle immagini, e senza posa aspiro alla tua immutabile e imperitura chiarezza. Fa' che fino a noi penetri il raggio della tua intelligenza e il calore del tuo amore; ciò che è mobile diverrà allora stabile, l'ombra sarà un corpo, lo spirito dell'aria un'anima, il sogno un pensiero. E noi non saremo più trascinati dalla</p>	<p><b>Éliphas Lévi' 'La conjuration des quatres'</b></p> <p><i>Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie</i>, II, pp. 75-92</p> <p>'Prayer of the Sylphs'</p> <p>Spirit of Light, Spirit of Wisdom, Whose breath gives and takes away the form of all things; Thou before Whom the life of every being is a shadow which transforms and a vapour which passes away; Thou who ascendest upon the clouds and dost fly upon the wings of the wind; Thou who breathest forth and the limitless immensities are peopled; Thou who drawest in and all which came forth from Thee unto Thee returneth; endless movement in the eternal stability, be Thou blessed for ever!</p> <p>We praise Thee, we bless Thee in the fleeting empire of created light, of shadows, reflections and images; and we aspire without ceasing towards Thine immutable and imperishable splendour. May the ray of Thine intelligence and the warmth of Thy love descend on us: that which is volatile shall be fixed, the shadow shall become body, the spirit of the air shall receive a soul, and dream be thought. We shall be swept away</p>
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<p>tempesta, ma terremo le briglie dei cavalli alati del mattino e modereremo il corso dei venti serali per volare incontro a te.»</p> <p>«O Spirito degli spiriti, o eterna anima delle anime, o soffio imperituro della vita, o sospiro creatore, o bocca che ispiri e spiri l'esistenza di tutti gli esseri nel flusso e riflusso del tuo eterno verbo, il quale è l'oceano del moto e della verità! Amen.</p>	<p>no more before the tempest, but shall bridle the winged steeds of the morning and guide the course of the evening winds, that we may flee into Thy presence.</p> <p>O Spirit of Spirits, O eternal Soul of Souls, O imperishable Breath of life, O Creative Sigh, O Mouth which dost breathe forth and withdraw the life of all beings; in the ebb and flow of Thine eternal speech, which is; the divine ocean of movement and of truth! Amen.</p>
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<p><i>Racconto d'autunno, (89-90)</i></p> <p>«Re terribile, o tu che tieni le chiavi delle cateratte del cielo e imprigioni le acque sotterranee nelle caverne della terra; re delle piogge fecondanti di primavera; tu che schiudi le fonti delle sorgenti e dei fiumi; tu che imponi all'umido, che è come il sangue della terra, di diventare la linfa delle piante; tu il cui ineffabile nome ha sette lettere; ti adoro e t'invoco!»</p> <p>«A noi, tue mobili e mutevoli creature, parla; parla, re divino, nei grandi commuovimenti del mare, e noi tremeremo davanti alla tua maestà; ma parlati anche nel mormorio delle acque limpide, poiché noi desideriamo il tuo amore.</p>	<p>'Prayer of the Undines'</p> <p>Dread King of the Sea, Who hast the keys of the floodgates of heaven and dost confine the waters of the underworld in the caverns of earth; King of the deluge and the floods of the springtime; Thou Who dost unseal the sources of rivers and fountains; Thou Who dost ordain moisture, which is like the blood of earth, to become the sap of plants: Thee We adore and Thee the invoke!</p> <p>Speak unto us, Thine inconstant and unstable creatures, in the great tumults of the sea, and we shall tremble before Thee; speak unto us also in the murmur of limpid waters, and me shall yearn for Thy love!</p>
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<p>«O immensità senza limiti, oceano sublime della divinità in cui si perdono tutti i fiumi dell'essere, che senza posa risorgano in te! O infinità ed eternità di tutte le perfezioni! altezza che ti specchi nella profondità, profondità che t'esali nell'altezza, menaci alla vera vita coll'intelligenza del tuo eterno amore! Menaci, col sacrificio, all'immortalità che lo spirito del male ci rapì al principio dei secoli! Siamo pronti a immolarci a te, per essere di te più degni, e sempre t'offriremo, con cuor puro e sincero, acqua, sangue e lagrime... Possiedimi, o nostro Dio. Amen»</p>	<p>O Immensity into which flow all rivers of life, to be continually reborn in Thee! O ocean of infinite perfections! Height which reflects Thee in the depth, depth which exhales Thee to the height, lead us unto true life by intelligence and love! Lead us to immortality by sacrifice, that we may be found worthy one Day to offer Thee water, blood and tears, for the remission of sins! Amen.</p>
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<p><i>Racconto d'autunno (90-91)</i></p> <p>«Immortale, Eterno, Ineffabile e Increato, Padre di tutte le cose, tu che porti sul carro senza tregua procedente mondi che senza posa si convolgono; dominatore delle eteree immensità, ove è levato il trono della tua potenza dal cui alto i tuoi occhi terribili scoprono tutto e tutto odono le tue belle e sante orecchie; esaudisci i tuoi figli che hai amati prima ancora di crearli!</p>	<p>'Prayer of the Salamanders'</p> <p>Immortal, eternal, ineffable and uncreated Father of all things, Who art borne upon the ever-rolling chariot of worlds which revolve unceasingly; Lord of ethereal immensities, where the throne of Thy power is exalted, from which height Thy terrible eyes Discern all things and Thy holy and beautiful ears unto all things hearken, hear Thou Thy children, whom Thou didst love before the ages began.</p>
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<p>«Poiché l'aurata e grande ed eterna tua maestà splende al disopra del mondo e del firmamento siderale; tu 'sei sugli astri ele-vato, o scintillante fuoco; dove t'accendi e t'alimenti del tuo splendore medesimo, e dalla tua essenza scaturiscono inesauribili rivi di luce, che nutrono il tuo spirito infinito.</p> <p>«E questo spirito infinito nutre tutte le cose e fa il tesoro in sempiterno inesauribile di sostanza in sempiterno pronta per la generazione che la travaglia e che s'appropria le forme di cui tu l'hai impregnata fin dal principio.</p> <p>«E da questo spirito infinito traggono anche origine i santissimi spiriti-re che stanno attorno al tuo trono e compongono la tua corte, o Padre universale, o Padre dei beati, mortali e immortali!</p> <p>«In particolare, creasti potenze meravigliosamete simili al tuo pensiero e alla tua adorabile essenza. Superiori ai geni secondari le statuisti, che annunciano al mondo le tue volontà. Noi creasti, da ultimo, al terzo</p>	<p>For Thy golden, Thy grand, Thine eternal majesty shines above the world and the heaven of stars! Thou art exalted over them, O glittering fire! There dost thou shine, there dost Thou commune with Thyself in Thine own splendour, and inexhaustible streams of Light pour from Thine essence for the nourishment of Thine Infinite Spirit...</p> <p>...which itself doth nourish all things, and forms that inexhaustible treasure of substance ever ready for the generation which adapts it and appropriates the forms Thou hast impressed on it from the beginning!</p> <p>From this Spirit the three most holy kings, Who surround Thy throne and constitute Thy court, derive also their origin, O universal Father! O sole and only Father of blessed mortals and immortals!</p> <p>In particular Thou hast created powers Which are marvellously like unto Thine eternal thought and Thine adorable essence; Thou hast established them higher than the angels, Who proclaim Thy Will to the World; finally, Thou hast created us</p>
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<p>grado nel nostro regno elementare.</p> <p>«Qui, cantare le tue lodi e adorare le tue voglie è nostro continuo esercizio. Qui, aspirando a possederti in noi, ardiamo, e aspettiamo colla pazienza, dei giusti l'ora suprema in cui saremo chiamati ad ardere per l'eterno, a te ricongiunti, da te posseduti, nel grembo delle tue divine fiamme eternamente vivificanti.</p> <p>« O Padre onnipotente! O Madre la più tenera! O ammirabile archetipo della maternità e del puro amore! O Figlio il fiore dei figli! O forma di tutte le forme, anima, spirito, armonia e numero di tutte le cose! Amen»</p>	<p>third in rank within our elementary empire.</p> <p>There our unceasing exercise is to praise Thee and adore Thy good pleasure; there We burn continually in our aspiration to possess Thee.</p> <p>O Father! O Mother, most tender of all mothers! O admirable archetype of maternity and of pure love! O Son, flower of sons! O form of all forms, soul, spirit, harmony and number of all things! Amen</p>
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<p><i>Racconto d'autunno (91)</i></p> <p>«Re invisibile, che hai preso la terra per appoggio e che hai scavato gli abissi per empirli della tua onnipotenza; o tu il cui nom fa tremare le volte dd mondo; tu che fai scorrere i sette metalli nelle vene della pietra; monarca quelle sette lucerne, remuneratore degli artieri sotterranei; menaci all'aria desiderabile al regno</p>	<p>'Prayer of the Gnomes'</p> <p>King invisible, Who, taking the earth as a support, didst furrow the abysses to fill them with Thine omnipotence; Thou Whose name doth shake the vaults of the world, Thou Who causeth the seven metals to flow through the veins of the rock, monarch of the seven lights, rewarder of the subterranean toilers, lead us unto the desirable air and to the realm of splendour.</p>
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<p>della luce!</p> <p>«Noi vegliamo e lavoriamo senza riposo; noi cerchiamo e speriamo, per le dodici gemme della città santa, per i talismani nascosti sotto la terra, per il chiodo di rame che attraversa il centro del mondo.</p> <p>«Signore! Signore! Signore! Abbi pietà di chi soffre, allarga il nostro petto, libera. e innalza le nostre teste, facci grandi!</p> <p>«O stabilità e moto! O giorno avvolto di notte, o notte velata di luce! O biancore argentino! O splendore dorato! O corona di diamanti vivi e melodiosi! Tu che porti il cielo al dito come un anello di zaffiro! Tu che sotto la terra nascondi, nel regno delle gemme, la meravigliosa fonte degli astri Vivi, regna, e sii l'eterno dispensatore delle ricchezze di cui ci hai fatti guardiani! Amen.</p>	<p>We watch and we work unremittingly, we seek and we hope, by the twelve stones of the Holy City, by the hidden talismans, by the pole of loadstone which passes through the center of the world!</p> <p>Savior, Savior, Savior, have pity on those who suffer, expand our hearts, detach and elevate our minds, enlarge our entire being!</p> <p>O stability and motion! O day clothed with night! O darkness veiled by splendour! O Master Who never keepest back the wages of Thy labourers! O silver whiteness! O golden splendour! O crown of living and melodious diamonds! Thou Who wearest the heaven on Thy finger like a sapphire ring, Thou Who concealest under earth, in the stone kingdom, the marvellous seed of stars, live, reign, be the eternal dispenser of the wealth whereof Thou hast made us the wardens! Amen.</p>
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**Appendix 3: Comparing the ‘diagnostic section’ of *Cancroregina* with observations from Kraepelin’s *Compendio di psichiatria ad uso dei medici e degli studenti* (1885)**

Extracts from <i>Cancroregina</i>	Kraepelin’s observations
<p>[...] Poco dopo la nostra partenza, avevo cominciato a notare qualcosa d'anormale nel contegno di Filano. Dapprima non attribuii soverchia importanza a quei sintomi [...]. Finché ora si fecero positivamente preoccupanti, e io entrai in allarme, mentre la benda principiava a cadermi dagli occhi. [...] Era egli sempre stato tale, o tale era diventato? La domanda era nella presente circostanza quant'altre mai oziosa. Tuttavia, avrei meglio detto che egli venisse ora giorno per giorno rivelando la propria vera natura, a prezzo di chissà quali sforzi compressa e dominata momentaneamente.</p>	<p>Esistono pazzi inguaribili che per lunghi anni sanno mantenere il loro contegno esterno socievole e che rinchiudono profondamente nel loro interno il nucleo delle loro idee deliranti, finché una parola irriflessiva, un occasionevole eccitamento emotivo fa aprire ad un tratto gli occhi meravigliati a chi li circonda [...] (306)</p>
<p>Chessò, la cosa era cominciata con torvi e inopinati sguardi, con risatine fuor di proposito, con brusche interruzioni o assenze improvvise nel bel mezzo d'un discorso, con irascibilità eccessiva, smodatezza di reazioni, e altrettali leggere deviazioni; e aveva, su su, raggiunto forme parossistiche o gravemente</p>	<p>In mezzo alla allegria sfrenata si hanno, per motivi minimi, scoppi di collera con insulti senza riguardi e tendenza ad atti violenti. D'altra parte l'umore si cambia con grande facilità in tristezza e in piagnucolamenti, per quanto solo transitoriamente. (415)</p> <p>L'aumento dell'eccitabilità emotiva conduce per cause minime a scoppi di</p>

<p>patologiche, come gesti inconsulti, temporanea afasia, balbettamento, deduzioni arbitrarie, associazioni meramente verbali, forme coatte, automatismi, e così via. [...] Rideva, piangeva; urlava, schiamazzava, fremeva sussultava, si scoteva, in preda a infrenabili accessi.</p>	<p>collera straordinariamente violenti, a veri flutti di insulti e di ruggiti, a minacce pericolose, a distruzioni cieche od assalti? (430)</p>
<p>In generale i suoi discorsi suscitavano ora l'immagine di quelle scatoline di lucido da scarpe che i ragazzi del popolo forano e fanno vorticosamente prillare attorno a uno spago; essi, per adottare una moderna immagine, giravano in folle; una volta assunto un dato qualunque, il più sovente secondario, egli vi si accaniva infaticabilmente e irrefrenabilmente attorno per ore intere, senza riuscire a «ingranare» cogli altri dati del discorso o a cavarne costruito alcuno. [...]</p>	<p>Nella eccitazione più grave questi incitamenti si succedono sempre più frequentemente e la la coerenza della condotta si perde a poco a poco. L'ammalato non è più in grado di condurre realmente a fine un'idea qualsiasi, perché vi si frammentano continuamente nuovi incitamenti che lo allontanano dalla meta originaria. (416)</p>
<p>Le sue giornaliere occupazioni avevano anch'esse perduto ogni apparenza di coordinazione: nella sua smemoratezza egli veniva qua e là inconsultamente toccando gli strumenti e variamente sollecitando, senza alcuna necessità gli organi</p>	<p>Così infine la sua smania di agire può espandersi in una serie variopinta di azioni volitive sempre nuove, rapidamente mutevoli, che non mostrano più alcuno scopo comune, ma che vanno e vengono, come esse sono nate, nel momento (416)</p>

interni di Cancroregina.	
<p>Egli inoltre parlava da sé a tutto spiano, e spesso nel cuore della notte [...] io ero svegliato, se la stanchezza avesse avuto ragione del mio terrore, da certe risate che facevano accapponare la pelle.</p>	<p>Nelle espressioni verbali dell'infermo si manifestano contemporaneamente la fuga delle idee e l'impulso a parlare. Egli non può tacere a lungo, chiacchiera e grida a voce alta, fa chiasso, rugge, canta a squarciagola [...], passando immediatamente da discorsi ampollosi ad altri umoristicamente commoventi, minacciosi, piagnucolosi o terminando all'improvviso con un riso sfrenato (418)</p>
<p>[...] Egli arrovesciava un poco la testa, portava i pugni alle tempie e, mentre una spaventosa smorfia gli si stampava sul volto scoprendogli i denti, tremava tutto, o più precisamente vibrava in preda a un indomabile convulso, senza peraltro che alcun suono uscisse dalle sue labbra.</p>	<p>Conclusioni più o meno sicure sulla natura del processo morboso cerebrale ci permettono certe forme di convulsione (epilessia corticale, atetosi, corea), di tremori (senile, da alcoolismo, da <i>delirium tremens</i>) e di paralisi [...] (277)</p>
<p>Ma perché dirne tante? Egli era, dovevo confessarmelo, <i>un pazzo</i>. E, se ancora dubbi avessi avuti, notai che la pupilla destra, e soltanto quella, gli si era grandemente dilatata; ed egli cominciò infine a lagnarsi di allucinazioni visive, auditive, persino tattili.</p>	<p>Nel campo motorio ci interessa innanzi tutto la grandezza e la motilità delle pupille [...]. Inoltre dovremmo osservare i movimenti dei muscoli oculari, dei muscoli del volto e della lingua; anche la mimica ha grande importanza (rigidità, contrazioni, smorfie) (276-277)</p>



<p>Si aggirava freneticamente, come una belva, per la cella, mi si piantava a un tratto davanti, riprendeva a dimenarsi, e sembrava sempre sul punto di saltarmi addosso. I suoi centri inibitori apparivano distrutti</p>	<p>[...] Per tale disturbo è adatto molto bene il nome di «stimolo motorio». Essi consistono semplicemente in smorfie, storcimenti e contorcimenti delle membra, nel saltare su e giù, nel fare campitomboli, rotolarsi, battere le mani, correre in su e in giù, arrampicarsi e ballonzolare, nel produrre suoni e rumori insensati (216).</p>

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