

THE RETURN OF THE GHOST: GOTHIC, DYSTOPIA AND ISABELLA SANTACROCE'S *REVOLVER* (2006)

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Sommario

*L'articolo analizza il romanzo *Revolver* (2006) della scrittrice Isabella Santacroce, uno degli autori emersi negli anni Novanta nel gruppo dei cosiddetti 'cannibali', mettendone in rilievo il raffinato gioco di richiami intertestuali, particolarmente in riferimento alla tradizione del romanzo vittoriano (*Jane Eyre* di Charlotte Brontë), pur all'interno di un provocatorio rovesciamento di segno ideologico.*

It is something of a cliché to reiterate the relevance of intertextual referencing in postmodern writing. In the post – Kristeva critical environment texts are normatively seen as works always in a state of production, ensuring the constant interlocking of varying levels of reading and writing. So, while this is accepted at the most fundamental of levels, it is also worth noting that Gothic writing has been more conscious of the potential offered by intertextual referencing than other *genres* of writing. Relying heavily on the reader's knowledge of the foregoing tradition Gothic builds up a vast network of imagery that guarantees the reader's familiarity with its basic premises. The Gothic has routinely utilized the strategy of intertextual referencing in order to build its own message and imagery as "a process of spectral transformation" (Wolfreys, 2002:7). While on the one hand this formulaic quality is potentially stultifying, on the other the reader's familiarity with the tradition assures continuity and relevance within each new rewriting.

It is at this level of spectralisation that the Gothic currently finds most of its modern resonance. In fact, reading a Gothic text means also recognizing – and integrating – the prior discourse into the later

one, the “discern[ment] of a symptom of haunting” (Wolfreys:14) much like a textual version of Freud’s *unheimlich*, the uncanny emerging from the intersection of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The fragmentary nature of the reclaimed past guarantees its place as an entity separate from the present, in “a number of apparitional traces and fragments in discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Wolfreys:7) thereby creating a necessary sense of uncertainty at the root of all Gothic constructs and its relevant spinoffs.

The postmodern Gothic, a varying defined term¹, encapsulates differing forms of ‘Otherness’ in a variety of doublings and disintegrations that define the postmodern condition. In postmodern Gothic, the progressive interiorization of the mode, already begun in Victorian times, burrows more deeply into the individual psyche, causing the subject itself to negotiate “a double sense of dislocated space and threatened subjectivity” (Punter & Byron, 2004:51). This form of the Gothic, more than a means for the description of the threatening ‘Other’, is in fact a metonymic projection of the fluctuating processes of fragmentation. In the light of this definition, the Gothic becomes ever more subsumed in a range of pop Goth framings where “Gothic meanings are never stable, but rather constantly fluid and on the move” (Spooner, 2012:192) in which finding a single definition becomes ever more difficult. In recent years the diversification of Gothic into ever more performative examples of the genre has diversified itself into Steam Punk, Pop Goth, and other ever more popular subcultural manifestations².

Gothic, seen primarily as a mode rather than a *genre*, also shares many basic tenets with other *subgenres* such as dystopian writing, science fiction and neo Victorian writing, all of which partake of the underlying interest in the dark undertones of fragmented modern

¹ Much has been written about the postmodern Gothic but most critics would agree with its being “a certain sliding of location, a series of transfers and dislocations from one place to another, so that our sense of the stability of the map is [...] forever under siege” (Punter & Byron, 2004:51).

² A comprehensive coverage of these trends has been presented in Edwards, J.D & Monnet, A.S., 2012, *The Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture: Pop Goth*, London, Routledge.

society³. Thus, the same anxieties and, often, the same aesthetics, point to various readings and subtle modifications of the postmodern concern with shifting reality and profound social and personal fragmentation. While dystopian writing may imply a clearer political polemic than Gothic, the nature of a globalized urban world blurs the boundaries between these forms. The similarities between these *genres* lie in their shared interest in cross-referencing in which subtle nuances tie all these Gothic spin-offs together into a single subculture. Immediately recognizable through their shared characteristics, all these forms of niche writing represent a multilayered artistic production reliant on networks of allusions. It is therefore often difficult to clearly define borders and differentiate modalities.

Apart from the social conditions delineated above, Santacroce also draws on multiple sources from canonic literature for her vast net of intertextual references. Her many intertextual references tie together disparate layers of discourse and consciously cultivate the aesthetic “inclusion [of] linguistic registers and subcultures far removed from those predicated on a certain type of academic literariness”⁴ (Lucamante, 2002:10). More importantly, unlike the literary 1990s Italian pulp group known as the ‘Young Cannibals’ the with which she identified at the start of her career, in the words of Berisso, Santacroce, began to “favour the upper end of traditional literature”⁵ (Lucamante:42). In her literary production references to ‘high’ literature are accompanied by the typical Italian Pulp movement’s interest in ‘surface fragmentation’ in which a rejection of the ‘grand narrative’ manifests itself in a syncopated succession of fractured images. The simultaneous inclusion of references to pop music, rock groups and lyrics, names of drugs and prescription medicines, slang and profanity are interspersed with ‘high’ literary allusions. Her writing is also intricately interwoven with her own personal Pop Goth

³ As opposed to *genres* the aesthetics these writing styles being variations within a *genre* itself.

⁴ “[...] per incorporare [...] lingue e sottoculture lontane da quelle prescritte da un certo tipo di accademismo letterario [...]”. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

⁵ “[...] prediligere un livello alto di letteratura tradizionale”.

projection⁶, in which the writer and the book become difficult to differentiate, turning the author into a text that ‘manifests’, much like a haunting presence, alongside the written text in what can be described as Gothic performance, or to use Edwards and Monnet’s description of pop Goth, as “the performance of a Goth/ic performance” (2012:1).

Her reliance on the world of English literary texts has often been noted⁷. Santacroce’s liberal borrowings from the inverted world of *Alice in Wonderland* have been closely studied by a number of critics⁸ while English words (“prestiti di lusso”⁹, Pellegrini & Tarantino, 2006:108) are arbitrarily peppered throughout her works. Her characters often have contact with the English world much like Misty, the protagonist of the novel *Destroy*, a young prostitute, who moves from Italy to start a life in London. Albertina e Annetta Stevenson, the twin sisters in her most recent novel *Amorino* (2012), have English names, but more importantly for its literary consequences, reside in a home flanking the bleak moors in the English village of Minster Lovell in an ambience reminiscent of *Wuthering Heights*.

Her 2006 novel, *Revolver*, is a complex and emotionally fraught novel which brings together a complex layering of themes interwoven with strands of unexpected allusions to Charlotte Brontë’s canonical text, *Jane Eyre* (1847). This ‘haunting’ of the postmodernist *Revolver* by Brontë’s Victorian text – plot lines, Gothic ambience as well as descriptive imagery – is a ‘ghostly’ substratum that the reader must track and decode, providing a deepening of meaning with every subsequent re-visioning. The frequent textual ‘hauntings’, apparently arbitrary and eccentric, turn out to be, on close reading, rather more programmatic than at first expected.

⁶ A case in point is the YouTube presentation of the novel *Amorino*, April 2012. <http://www.nme.com/nme-video/youtube/id/fAfVyZC61fw> [Accessed 28 January 2014].

⁷ There are too many references to uses of English sources and linguistic forms throughout Santacroce’s works to allow for detailed referencing. This aspect will be investigated in a later study. Marco Berisso, in Lucamante, S., *Italian Pulp Fiction*, has done an in-depth survey of linguistic borrowings in the works of the ‘Young Cannibals’, with whom Santacroce was initially affiliated.

⁸ Lucamante (2002) cites critics who mention this.

⁹ “Luxurious borrowings”.

The return of this hypotext¹⁰ also underlines the ‘inclusiveness’ of Santacroce’s world view in which the literary ‘product’ is an object that can be reused, refocused and repositioned. In *Revolver* the Italian author draws a number of important levels of reference from *Jane Eyre*, starting mainly with the canonical presentation of female agency, in order to extend her own reading of the postmodern female condition couched in the manner required for “negotiating our (post)modern identities” (Bowler & Cox, 2009-2010:3). Narrative thematic traces drawn from the original referent are manipulated, twisted and capsized but still allowed to function as a mirror against which the pulp novel tests its ‘feminist revisioning’ (King, 2005:6) and evaluation of female agency and personal development. Each of these literary moments, both the original and the later textual transformations, has equal weighting in the respective novels and thus create a linear dialogue through time.

In Santacroce’s work the return to the Victorian Gothic starts at a structural level. Narrative nuclei of the loosely rewritten female *Bildungsroman*, are mixed in a subtle ‘cut and paste’ or “*contaminatio*” (Lucamante, 2002:27) in which Santacroce also fuses, re-uses and re-evaluates societal norms at the base of the novelistic exploration of the social and psychological positions of the female character. *Revolver*’s main character, the young protagonist Angelica – the erstwhile Angel woman of the Italian literary tradition from the *Stilnuovo* to the Renaissance – returns in the demonic incarnation of “puttana da rimorchio”/“highway whore” (Santacroce:16) and embarks on the *Bildungsroman* of the recounted first person narrative. Angelica’s psychological and narrative journey towards *denouement* follows a similar trajectory and re-elaborates the angry female voice that is so much a part of the original narrative. Narrative, which Genette identifies as the “initial definition of the pure narrative mode, [... where] the poet constitutes the only announcing subject, monopolizing speech without ever turning it over to any of his characters” (1979:34) is a pre condition for the 19th century female *Bildungsroman*. The theme of personal development central to its essence is integrally tied up with the development of the ‘I’ and

¹⁰ Genette, Palimpsests, 1997:5.

therefore the central issue of the development of female agency. Since the female condition is also often a problematic and fraught topic, this most easily lends itself to the narrative of female development embedded in the *Bildungsroman*.

A number of narrative *nexus* link these two texts. In both novels the narrative trajectory is enabled by the fear elicited in the reader by the conventions of the Gothic. The motherless orphan girl, entrapped in a threatening society with which she is at odds is a staple theme in Gothic plots. *Revolver's* urban Gothic¹¹ referencing of place, atmosphere and plot align the modern text with the expectations created by the Victorian text. The Victorian concern with fluctuating social positions by “register[ing] the psychic disturbance of the Victorian middle-class wife [...] at the very time in which [the domestic realm] ceased to be productive or economically active” (Milbank, 2002:12), is closely aligned to the consumerist concerns of the closing years of the twentieth century, in which commercialization undermines individuation. The commercially consumptive obsessiveness of postmodern society forms the backdrop to the need for a textual cannibalism that postulates itself as the primary definition of the modern literary era.

Santacroce takes intertextual referencing to the very core of the narrative content, going back to answer a long-forgotten and obliquely recalled question from the original text. The attainment of the empowered position that Jane the character manages to forge for herself in the Victorian classic through a series of defiant personal stands go symbolically hand in hand with the *Bildungsroman* form. However, while “Jane’s voice is an extraordinarily defiant fiction of authority” (Lanser, 1992:185), Santacroce takes up the mode of the first person narrative to portray Angelica’s voice as the fragmented projection of postmodernist *angst*. It is not surprising that the narrative female voice is the dominant feature of both these texts. Lanser sees the legacy of *Jane Eyre* as a “[...] logical rather than accidental result of the terms of *Jane Eyre's* authority” (Lanser:190) and its echo in the pulp novel is still a guiding force for the definition

¹¹ Mighall, R., 1999 *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction Mapping History's Nightmares*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

of female agency. The city as locale of threat in itself is another recurrent theme that is re-visioned with a modern Italian slant while the morbid freak show of marginalized characters furnish the pages with postmodernist urban angst.

Gothic angst, used so fulsomely by Brontë, is taken up by the pulp writer to create a dialogue across time in which the intertextual mode becomes a revisionist tool aimed at reflecting dislocation and incoherence. In the realist model of *Jane Eyre*, the counter configuration of the Gothic formulated a network of images that introduced the reader to major binary oppositions; between the feared and the real, between the imagined and the known and between power and powerlessness. In the psychologically interiorized *Revolver*, the Gothic is enabled by a network of fragmented and oxymoronic images that channel this ambivalent postmodern female voice into close identification with the protagonist herself. The feared and the real, the imagined and the known and the power and powerlessness of the Victorian text now reside within the confines of one personal projection, an individual whose self-identification competes with the other multiple fragments of the commercialized society in which she lives. The character of Angelica is the focus of this narrative fragmentation. Her oxymoronic self-identification is both powerful and powerless, both Bertha Rochester and Jane Eyre. Her narrative journey towards a heightened understanding associated with the *Bildungsroman*, is also a journey into loss of self and complete fragmentation. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, where the end of the narrative journey represents the attainment of female agency, *Revolver* ends with a personal disintegration that also, ironically, points to a confirmation of personal will.

[...] the complications of postmodern writing, particularly in the areas of subjectivity and location [...] reflect back onto and into the Gothic, how the uncertainties of a world in which narrative is never sure or reliable not only suggest an origin in the Gothic but also resort to Gothic means in the development of the texts themselves. (Punter & Byron, 2004:53)

Jane Eyre's famous *incipit*, ("There was no possibility for a taking a walk that day":1) focused the reader's attention on the opening action of the 1847 novel, turning the narrative inaction of the missed walk into a metonymy for the impossibility of personal agency within the confines of patriarchal society that the character Jane Eyre fights against throughout the rest of the novel. This novel thus starts with a clear indication of its central theme. Santacroce's *Revolver* starts with a reversal ("Siamo usciti"/"We went out" (Santacroce:11)) where the subversion of the original Victorian text posits the possibility of personal action consonant with a feminist empowerment of the modern female voice. The complex and nuanced ambivalence of that metaphoric 'walk' will similarly engage the reader throughout the rest of *Revolver*.

The novel *Revolver* thus also starts with its central theme. This oblique reference to the original, while turning *Revolver* into a mirror image of *Jane Eyre*, also 'fixes' the action of the respective opening scenes in both books in their emblematic weightiness. What follows in both novels must be decoded in the light of the promise of these opening lines. Thus, while Brontë's opening line is an invitation to the launch of the female *Bildungsroman*, Santacroce's opening line introduces an action that is accomplished and completed, an inevitable end of the road for the character Angelica, thereby enticing the reader into comparing these narrative journeys, the origin of which had already been wished for in the Victorian text.

While both openings immerse the readers *in media res*, *Revolver* also launches a dialogue that plays forwards and backwards and is deepened with ironic references alluding to the earlier novel. Like many of the monsters of Gothic fiction, *Revolver* feeds off the original and pushes its referents to their 'extreme' conclusions. How did the impossibility of taking a journey resolve itself, the later author asks, and is the "going out" achieved by the main character of *Revolver*, Angelica, as momentous and fulfilling as Jane Eyre wished it to be? A dialogue across the years is launched, therefore, with the opening lines.

The unfolding of the personal tale of agency, which looks forward in *Jane Eyre*, becomes a bitter looking back in *Revolver*, where the cyclical action of the novel is reversed. *Jane Eyre* tells the *Bildung* of

the young girl from youth, through suffering to maturity and finally to the fruition of personhood. For Angelica a similar journey becomes a form of retrogression into the limited possibility of feminine agency allowed by modern consumer society. *Revolver* opens with the ending of the novel, a circular action that also contains the horrifying finality of self-orchestrated rape, in a loop of continued female self-assertion/self-destruction. The unfolding of the tale of female agency, which is brought to a difficult birth in the Victorian text, is likewise glimpsed but then lost again and again in its continuing – and monstrous – reformulation in *Revolver*. Themes that repeat themselves: loneliness, the self in its confrontation with the ‘Other’, loss of volition and regaining of that volition and ultimately madness flow through the links binding these texts to reformulate and present the same continuity of meaning.

A number of more basic similarities bind these texts together. Both heroines are deprived of parents in childhood. However, unlike Jane Eyre, whose involuntary isolation is due to the death of her parents, Angelica suffers parental abandonment (“Mancava del marmo a tenerli. Non erano morti. Non c’erano e basta”/“There was no marble to hold them. They were not dead. They were just not there”, (Santacroce: 14)). In typical Gothic mode in which the mothers are either physically absent if they are evil and deviant (Anolik, 2003:27) or “dead long before the readers meet the daughters” (Anolik, 2003:25)¹². Both heroines find themselves motherless in a manner that threatens their relationship with the world. At the mercy of the surrogate caregiver, Gothic heroines usually find justification for their ‘escape’ from their disordered motherless world (Anolik, 2003). Jane’s abusive aunt and surrogate caregiver, Mrs Reed of Gateshead, who is the first link with the Gothic in the Victorian original, becomes a dystopian image of disintegration and illness in *Revolver* (“la zia paralitica”/“the paralysed aunt”) whose degenerative condition (“affetta da sclerosi multipla”/“affected by multiple sclerosis”, (2006:13)) is a symbolic living death that represents the dystopian society with which Angelica

¹² The evil mother as an essential means for moving along the plot is explored by Ruth Bienstock Anolik in her article on the missing mother figure referred to in the bibliography.

herself is irretrievably and horrifyingly tied. The physical and psychological thrall that Jane experiences at Gateshead (“you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep” (1847:7)) also deprives Angelica of emotional satisfaction in the dysfunctional society in which there is no latitude for survival outside the strict norms of social compliance.

Dovevo pulirla. Sfamarla. Diventare il suo ossigeno. Dovevo ascoltarla. Parlarle. Diventare sua figlia. C’era qualcosa tra noi che c’ avvolgeva come un nastro in metallo. Un sentimento perverso. Malato. Pieno di croste. Io non l’amavo. Non l’amavo per niente. Per lei nuttivo un variegato disgusto. (Santacroce, *Revolver*, 2006:13)

I was obliged to clean her. Take away her hunger. Become her oxygen. I had to listen. Speak to her. Become her daughter. There was something between us that held us together like a metal band. A perverse feeling. Illness. Covered in scabs. I didn’t love her. I didn’t love her at all. I nurtured layers of disgust for her.

The shared apartment is “una rivoltella che sparava ai miei sogni”/“a revolver shooting at my dreams”, (Santacroce:13), providing the novel’s title and epitomizing the life-threatening decay of the horror of the dystopian urban metropolis: “All’ultimo piano di un grattacielo dimenticato da anni”/“On the last floor of a skyscraper forgotten for years” (Santacroce:14); “ascensori buissimi”/“very dark elevators”, (Santacroce:14); “La luce assente da anni”/“No light for years”, (Santacroce:14); isolation and alienation: “Non veniva nessuno a trovarci. Nessuno a chiamarci”/“No one came to visit us. No one to call us” (Santacroce:14). Angelica finds emotional release from the horror of the Gothic claustrophobia in the sexual promiscuity offered by “amanti [...] catturati nelle passeggiate”/“lovers [...] captured during walks” (Santacroce:14). In this reversal Angelica’s lovers have lost their traditional male power, ‘captured’ by the predatory female in a parody of female agency. The Victorian silence surrounding the

sexual moment is reversed in a 'show and tell' of sexual commercial exchange where the pornographic detail ambivalently both invalidates the heroine while confirming her personal agency.

Ospitavo nel mio corpo chiunque. L'ho sempre fatto. Farmi occupare dai maschi. Buttare fuori me stessa. Le donne al lavoro spettegolavano sul mio conto. Mi chiamavano la puttarella. Per gli uomini era diverso. Per loro ero la principessa. [...] Li prendevo nella mia bocca. A uno a uno. Come caramelle. Mi ero convinta che solo così riuscivo a esistere. (Santacroce:19)

I welcomed anyone into my body. I have always done it. To allow myself to be occupied by males. To throw myself out. The women at work gossiped about me. They called me the little whore. For the men it was different. For them I was the princess. I took them in my mouth. One by one. Like sweets. I had convinced myself that this was the only way in which I could continue to exist.

The ambivalence between the objectified woman of the pornographic exchange and the empowered subject of the *Bildungsroman* creates a tension that disorients the reader's expectations. In itself this tension is at the root of the postmodern Gothic's redefinition of agency as an aspect of that particular Gothic preoccupation defined as an "anachronism [...] that is central to the mode throughout its development" (Mighall, 1999:xxi). The traditional Gothic convention of entrapment – which elicits the solution of escape as liberation, resides at the centre of the narrative events for both novels.

On a plot level, of course, escape enables the continuity of the action. Both heroines escape: Jane leaves after the failed almost-bigamous marriage ceremony, her flight resulting in a journey of personal volition ("I had injured – wounded – left my master. I was hateful in my own eyes. Still I could not turn, nor retrace one step" which she both contradictorily regrets but undertakes). Her flight from Thornfield, aboard a hired coach for which she can barely pay,

plunges her into the chaos of “absolute destitution” (Bronte:394), while her arrival at the crossroads called Whitecross, a place of loaded symbolic ‘nothingness’ (“[...] no town nor even a hamlet; it is but a stone pillar set up where four roads meet [...]” (Brontë:394)) heralds a path towards possible perdition and almost inevitable death. Likewise, Angelica’s flight away from the horror of the shared familial apartment in the dark skyscraper is equally a flight of desperation, updated to a squalid hitchhiking trail “[...] sopra un camion fuggendo un po’ da tutto. Un po’ da niente”/“[...] on a truck fleeing a bit from everything. A bit from nothing” (Santacroce:15) which leads her also to the crossroads reminiscent of Brontë’s ‘Whitecross’, this time an empty piazza, the grey sky setting the tone for this “luogo assurdo”/“absurd place” (Santacroce:16).

At Whitecross Jane encounters the ruthlessness of social propriety. She is denied material help by people too scared to offer assistance to a socially undefined wanderer. The Victorian female, cut off from the succour of family and friends, is nothing more than a destitute body, fighting physical and emotional trauma. The postmodern Angelica must coerce help from the stable groom she picks up in the empty piazza, who allows her the opportunity of riding a horse in the stables where he lives, thereby facing an interiorized nightmare of traumatic symbolic images “[...] foresta dei miei sensi di colpa. Arrivavo dentro l’ascensore tutto buio. Nel grattacielo dei defunti [...] la parente sulla seggiola”/“[...] forest of my feelings of guilt. I arrived back in the completely dark elevator. In the skyscraper of the dead [...] the relative in the wheelchair”. An aunt who appears in Angelica’s waking nightmare “[...] sporca di sangue sulla faccia. Mi gridava cose brutte. Le sentivo quelle urla che abbaiano. Avevo un cane nello stomaco. Mi divorava le budella”/“[...] besmirched by blood on her face. She shouted obscenities at me. I heard those barked shouts. I had a dog in my stomach. It devoured my intestines” (Santacroce:17). This is a symbolic horse ride away from the Romanticized images of freedom and escape but directed into the interiorized nightmare of a devouring monstrosity, identified with the extremities of postmodern fragmentation. The dystopian images of the decomposing urban landscape are horrors that reside within the psyche rather than being confined to the traditional threatening Gothic

landscape. The visceral terror of this imagery is a literary means for objectifying the fragmented 21st century-pain as “monstrously othered” (Hogle, 2001:173): a ‘simulacrum’, in fact, of the real societal angst of modern Italy.

Within the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, both Jane and Angelica emerge unscathed from their flights of self assertion, Jane to the Rivers family and eventually to her job as a country school teacher, Angelica to a job in a doll factory where she glues eyes onto plastic dolls, hyperbolically parodying Jane’s humble teaching of “Knitting, sewing, reading, writing, ciphering [...]” (Brontë:435) in the farm school at the behest of St. John Rivers. While Jane’s teaching provides the curtailed education reluctantly allowed to the underprivileged masses, Angelica’s job crudely provides eyes that cannot see, a hyperbolic metaphor for Angelica’s inability to find a consummation of an identity that is, in fact, impossible to find because it is the ultimate “lost object” (Bruhm, 2000:263) of postmodern Gothic anxiety.

Both protagonists achieve marriage with their love object, for one the figure of Edward Rochester, who, appropriately re-dimensioned to the proportions of a chastised hero, fulfils the romantic ideals of the empowered Jane. Her rise to selfhood is directly proportionate to the degree of the curtailment of the Byronic hero Rochester. For Angelica marriage is achieved with the problematic bourgeois figure of Gianmaria, who only seems to offer salvation to the Victorian freak show exhibit (“Mi sentivo come l’uomo elefante quando il dottore lo salva”/“I felt like the elephant man when the doctor rescues him”, (Santacroce:26)). Angelica also is proportionately balanced to the disconsolately bourgeois Gianmaria whose concerns are bound by the peripheries of his narrowly conceived world and middle class obsessions of narrow social propriety, the regular night out to eat at a restaurant, the regular couple dates with the next door neighbours, the mother’s instructions on how best to please and serve her son. Angelica thus becomes a disempowered woman, gutted of any volition, prepared to give even her blood (“Ho dato tutta me stessa. Anche il sangue”/“I gave all of myself. Even my blood” (Santacroce:27)) to Gianmaria but one who ultimately fails entirely because he is only an ambivalent rescuer. He plucks her from the

dystopian nightmare of the modern city in a parody of the ‘happily ever after’ formula, but then expects her to conform to the marital social contract that negates any potential for personal freedom. So, much like the child Jane, who tries to hide behind the curtain from the psychopathic cruelty of her cousin Reed, whose cruelty is enabled by the power imbalance determined by the money and birth that accompanies patriarchal supremacies, Angelica also tries to shield herself in emblematic isolation (“Chiudi le tende”/“Close the curtains” (Santacroce:82); “Ho tirato le tende come facevo da piccola per separarmi da tutto”/“I pulled the curtains as I used to do when I was a child so as to isolate myself from everything” (Santacroce:83); “Tiravo la tenda per non vederlo [lo squalore]”/“I drew the curtain to avoid seeing the squalor” (Santacroce:83)). As with Jane, however, isolation of the traditional retiring female role is not enough. Action is called for even if simply to assert the self against the inevitability of defeat.

So where *Jane Eyre* ends in the misty promise of a happy ending, Santacroce traumatizes her readers into the nightmare of the unfulfilled promise of agency that was tentatively offered by the Victorian text. Jane Eyre’s glow of fulfilment¹³ after the statement “Reader, I married him” becomes for Santacroce’s Angelica an *elenchus* of domestic, sexual and social chores in which, attempting to please the patriarchal male in his dominant social position (“Moltiplicavo me stessa. Gli davo anche l’anima”/“I duplicated myself. I even gave him my soul” (Santacroce:31)). Angelica loses her identity and becomes a fragmented part of the commercial exchange that defines gendered consumer society (“Non sono una donna. Sono l’affare del secolo”/“I am not a woman. I am the bargain of the century” (Santacroce:31)). In this dislocation between the real suffering self – of which Angelica has a shattered, fragmented and illusionary understanding (“Che bello. Che brutto. Che gioia. Che merda. Felicità. Tristezza. Sicurezza. Smarrimento. Quietè. Panico. Bianco. Nero. Io la schizofrenica”/“How lovely. How awful. What pleasure. What shit. Happiness. Sadness. Safety. Wandering.

¹³ The ‘happy ending’ is, naturally, much tempered by the numerous references to darkness in the final chapter as many critics have noted. See for example Valerie Beattie.

Peace. Panic. White. Black. Me the schizophrenic” (Santacroce:4)), and the desired happiness achieved in the afterglow of Jane Eyre’s *denouement*, is the search for a self that is never fully grasped, but only glimpsed in the myriad masks of a postmodern angst. Angelica’s wish “Un giorno tornerò. Diversa”/“One day I will return. Changed” (Santacroce:84) echoes Jane’s return to Gateshead as an adult, in control of a limited power built up by experience gained through suffering at Lowood School but also by her self-supporting work as a governess. Angelica’s ‘return’, however, is a fluctuation between poles of impossibility; the fantasy of agency and shocking taboo of child molestation.

Jane’s experience of the Gothic threat emanating from the other world, first experienced as a child in the Red Room, is shifted to the interiorized threat from uncontrollable emotions that are taboo but also pleasurable, the sexual desire for the thirteen year old Matteo, against which Angelica takes precautions (“Prendevo distanza dalla zona rossa. Forse mi sarebbe servita una sciabola per difendermi da un possibile attacco. Sentivo il bisogno del sesso”/“I distanced myself from the red zone. Perhaps I would need a sword to defend myself from a possible attack. I felt the need for sex” (Santacroce:85)). In the words of Hogle the modern “[...] neo-Gothic fantasy [...] can emphasize the fictionality of th[e] abjecting and ‘othering’ process” (2001:176) that allows the reader a glimpse into a shared disintegration that is metonymically embodied in the single character at the centre of this narrative rewriting. The societal taboo of child molestation is a psychological inevitability tied up with the modern social fragility of the protagonist Angelica into which the madwoman in the attic is unleashed. However, the “aesthetics of the unsavoury” (Gutleben, 2001:157) open a space for a radical subversion or mirroring of the horrors implied in the Victorian text.

As her marriage disintegrates into a degrading sham of social respectability and boredom, Angelica’s turbulent relationship with a shattered form of normalcy not only entwines her with the figure of Jane but also with that of Bertha Mason. Madness, itself a “gothic revolution” (Beattie, 1996:497) acts as the counterpoint to the patriarchal society that Rochester and Angelica’s husband Gianmaria both represent. Where Jane rejects the suffocating patriarchy that

ambivalently also goes hand in hand with her rejection of the 'madwoman' Bertha, Angelica embraces a patriarchal attitude that also equates 'madness' with the angry, subversive female voice¹⁴ and with the Victorian equation of sexual deviance with women and madness. Much as Jane's description establishes the image of the mad Bertha as "some strange animal" (Brontë:291) on the outside of the norms of Victorian socialization, so too Angelica's positioning of herself as 'Other', subjected to the external gaze of the dominant male which turns this character into a pathological manifestation ("Esaminava la matta"/"He was examining the mad woman" (Santacroce:67)). According to Foucault the state of madness suffered the post Renaissance dissolution of word and image becoming itself a spectacle ("theatre of unreason" (Jay,1986:180)), which also predicates death ("non c'era scampo. Solo il suicidio"/"There was no escape. Only suicide" (Santacroce:67)). This process re-establishes the power imbalance of the dominant male gaze that had somehow been diminished at the conclusion of the Victorian novel.

Angelica's decline into a death wish is an ambivalent pleasure/terror sublimation associated with the traditional Gothic ("Accarezzavo la bestia"/"I fondled the beast" (Santacroce:76)) and a return for Angelica to the terror of *Jane Eyre's* red room ("M'avrebbero messa come la zia nella camera ardent" (Santacroce:76)). In the Italian, the linguistic ambivalence causes a shift in meaning between "They would put me, like my aunt did, in the burning [red] room" but could also be read as "They would put me, like my dead aunt, in the crematorium" thereby linking death – seen as a Pop Goth spectacle "Quant'era bella"/"How beautiful she was" (Santacroce:67) – and Jane's Red Room, in which she had encounters her first unexplained Gothic terror.

Many more subtle echoes can be found in a careful comparison of these two texts. However, the central question remains at the base of both readings. Has the female agency so fought for by Jane Eyre found its fruition? Angelica's final self-orchestrated rape on the

¹⁴ See Beattie, V. "The Mysteries of Thornfield: representations of Madness in *Jane Eyre*", *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 28(4), 1996 in which a detailed parallel is drawn between the portrayal of the madness of Bertha Mason and the temporary 'madness' of Jane in the fight against patriarchal suppression represented in *Jane Eyre*.

roadside at the hands of hitch hikers whom she taunts, gives her control of her body in a way that she has not been able to have in the various incarnations of her dissembling form. Her assertion of agency, much like Jane Eyre's narrative violence towards Rochester, only accepting him at the end of the novel when he is physically maimed, asserts the necessity for a personal voice even if this is in itself impotent and destructive. In Santacroce's imagery the textual *pastiche* mimics society while reflecting the fact that the modern social milieu has become a theatre for the maladjusted in which only the existential chaos of modern life remains. The 'ghostly' apparitions from the original text shape Santacroce's novel into one version of the possible outcomes of the Victorian text. While in Brontë's novel the triumph of individual personal agency establishes a resolution within the narration, in the postmodernist context the reader faces only the implosion of the individual's identity in a nightmarish loss of self. Has the 'walk' turned out for the best? Clearly, for Santacroce's character Angelica, this has not happened at all.

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