

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

BELONGING TO THE THRESHOLD:

*APPARTENENZA* AND *SRADICAMENTO* IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY “ITALIAN”

LITERATURE

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This one is for him.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the roles played by cross-national, cross-lingual and cross-cultural exchanges in the development of Italian literature at the turn of the twentieth century. In recent decades, the surge of multilingual and culturally hybrid writing, in the wake of globalization and the recent wave of immigration to Italy, has prompted scholars to rethink the notions of “Italianness” in fields such as migration studies and postcolonial studies. While these theorizations have the merit of accounting for linguistically and culturally hybrid literary production, they focus almost exclusively on contemporary writers or on works produced within the specific socio-historical phenomenon of migration. They do not trouble the approach of most literary histories, which construct narratives in which a linguistically and culturally diverse tradition coagulates around a homogenous and easily identifiable notion of *italianità*, resulting in the insularity that still characterizes the discipline of Italian Studies.

“Belonging to the Threshold,” instead, challenges this mono-nationalist paradigm, by arguing for the need of a transnational perspective even when focusing on works written shortly after Italy’s unification and by authors securely placed at the center of the national canon. The dissertation employs an interdisciplinary approach that blends methods and concepts derived from a broad range of fields, including migration and diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies and disability studies, with literary history and rigorous literary interpretation. It thus recovers Italy’s international relevance, both from the perspective of formal literary experimentation and from that of the conceptualization of increasingly transnational modes of belonging, including early reflections on cosmopolitanism that anticipate current debates. While the dissertation participates in the broader, trans-historical interest toward transnational literary

connections, it also argues for the specificity of the post-Unification era in Italy as moment in which the seed of many contemporary practices can be found.

The dissertation argues that many of the most exciting and influential developments in Italian literature, even from a formal and technical standpoint, were born out of cultural and linguistic miscegenation. To make this case, it focuses on a cluster of writers more or less unanimously understood as ‘Italian’ within a paradigm marked by the opposing forces of *appartenenza* and *sradicamento*, which, it argues, simultaneously concurred to the identity formation and artistic practice of writers working in and around Italy at the turn of the twentieth century. It examines works by canonical writers Gabriele D’Annunzio and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti alongside the marginalized voices of women and migrant writers Emanuel Carnevali, Annie Vivanti and Amelia Pincherle Rosselli. The project therefore results in a radical reconfiguration of the literary canon. Each chapter is tethered to close-readings of texts written in Italian, English, French and Venetian dialect, which collectively reflect the cultural and linguistic contamination at work in their production, while at the same time reflecting *on* the political, social, historical and personal repercussions of this contamination.

Chapter One argues that Gabriele D’Annunzio culturally embodies a liminal posture that blurs the lines between center and margin, local and foreign and that many of his works display resistance to his bombastic rhetoric of *italianità*. By analyzing two of D’Annunzio’s most ideologically nationalistic works – the novel *Il Fuoco* and the play *La Nave*, both set in Venice – I point to his engagement with “Germanic” and “oriental” aesthetic practices, which trouble his overt declarations about the superiority of Italian culture. The chapter claims that the foreign plays an important part in D’Annunzio’s nation constructing endeavor and that both works stage his negotiation between cosmopolitan and purist ideals of citizenship and art.

Chapter Two examines several works by founder of Futurism F. T. Marinetti, ranging from the manifestoes to the novel *Mafarka le futuriste* and his experiments in *paroliberismo*. It argues that in these works Marinetti is articulating a poetics of *sradicamento*, by which I identify a violent and anti-bourgeois type of cosmopolitanism, able to paradoxically coexist with militant political nationalism. The chapter looks closely at Marinetti's transnational biography and at Futurism's international aspirations and presents these factors as generative and constitutive of Marinetti's poetics, impacting his prospected readership, the characters and structure of his works of fiction and the formal experimentations of his poetry. It contends that the colonialist novel *Mafarka le futuriste* envisions continuity between Italian and African populaces, at odds with the eugenicist ideology at the root of other colonizing discourses and that poems such as "Battaglia Peso + Odore" and "Zang Tumb Tumb. Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912" openly question the foundational equation between national belonging and linguistic homogeneity.

Chapter Three examines the poetry of Italian American Emanuel Carnevali as the translingual production of an author placed at the crossroads of nations, languages and cultures. It tracks his attempts at self-construction as an "American poet" and their failure, as his body of work reflects his physical body as a disabled, queer, migrant author, and is thus subject to dynamics of othering and de-humanization. Through the case of Carnevali, the chapter reflects on the ableist and nationalistic rhetoric that governs both citizenship regulation and literary canonization and that acts as a disabling and dehumanizing force on the culturally and linguistically hybrid figures of immigrants. It therefore makes a broader argument about the generativity of disability theory within migratory frameworks.

Chapter Four also gives voice to marginalized authors, in this case two women of Jewish origin and extraordinarily international biographies. It argues that both Annie Vivanti and

Amelia Pincherle Rosselli opposed the aggressively belligerent rhetoric of nationalist writers such as D'Annunzio and Marinetti and wrestled with ideas of nationhood, anticipating current debates around cosmopolitanism and post-national modes of belonging. By examining several of Vivanti's short stories, novels, plays and poems, the chapter contends that they conceptualize what I call the "performativity of nationality" in direct opposition to coeval notions of ethnic and racial purity. By depicting race and nationality as non-ontological traits that can be performed at will, Vivanti's works resist the eugenicist rhetoric on which colonialism was being founded. In her plays, memoir and works of fiction, Rosselli is similarly engaged with matters of national belonging and the possibility of cosmopolitanism, while maintaining reservations about its viability. Her staunch patriotism, at once rooted to the specific locality of her hometown, Venice, and open to foreign stimuli by way of familial ties and her experience in exile, rejects the notion of Italian primacy over other nations and its colonialist belligerence.

## INTRODUCTION

On January 7, 1897, poet, professor and first Italian to win a Nobel Prize Giosu  Carducci gave a public speech for the centennial of the creation of the Italian flag, *il tricolore*, in which he invoked Italy’s classical past to proclaim its imminent role as a leader among nations. On November 26, 1911, during a ceremony for the Italian soldiers wounded in the Italian-Turkish war, poet Giovanni Pascoli gave a speech titled “La grande proletaria si   mossa,” in which he expressed his support for Italy’s colonial enterprise in Libya, where Italian workers vexed by difficult economic conditions, which had forced many of them to emigrate across the Alps and even the Atlantic, could finally find fertile terrain by which to support themselves and the mother country. On May 5, 1915, Gabriele D’Annunzio, poet, novelist, playwright, politician, socialite and soon-to-be military leader, gave his speech in Quarto. The occasion was the fifty-fifth anniversary of Garibaldi’s expedition with a thousand volunteers to conquer the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, eventually leading to the unification of Italy. D’Annunzio centered his mystically-toned speech around the need for Italy to enter the Great War and fulfill its destiny as a great nation.

While the speeches differ in tone, purpose and ideological stance, they all demonstrate the political engagement of the most important literary figures of post-Unification Italy and specifically the intersection between literature and nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Carducci, Pascoli and D’Annunzio are commonly referred to in Italian literary histories as the modern *tre corone*, who like Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch inaugurate a new era of Italian poetry, based on a continuation of the tradition that from classical times led to the Middle Ages,



the Renaissance and the Risorgimento. This Italian tradition was viewed in the newly established nation-state of Italy to have finally found the political equivalent of its spiritual and cultural unity.

The engagement of Italian writers with the political life of Italy and its nationalistic affirmation in Europe mirrors the critical narrative that has continued to read literary history as inextricably linked to the history of nations and, in the Italian case, to the perception of an Italian identity that would precede the modern conception of nation-state and be held by Italy's great writers, from Dante to Machiavelli.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis that Italian Studies has placed on the homogeneity of Italian literature and culture – particularly in Italy, but in various ways within the discipline as a whole – can be summarized in the document titled “Sulle celebrazioni dell’Unità d’Italia,” unanimously approved in 2009 by the *Associazione degli Italianisti Italiani*:

L’Associazione considera molto gravi e pericolose le iniziative e le proposte . . . mirate a mettere in questione, nella vita sociale, nella comunicazione, nella scuola, il carattere unitario della lingua e della cultura italiana. . . . Questa dimensione strutturalmente e geneticamente unitaria è un patrimonio inalienabile e anzi da valorizzare in tutte le sue istituzioni di formazione e di ricerca . . . perché è stata e resta la sola garanzia dell’accessibilità del nostro paese alla modernità, del suo rilievo essenziale nella cultura e nell’economia dell’Europa e del mondo.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See recent definitions of this kind in Giulio Ferroni, *Prima lezione di letteratura italiana* (Bari: Laterza, 2009) and Alberto Asor Rosa, *Storia europea della letteratura italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The Association considers very serious and dangerous the initiatives and proposals . . . aimed at questioning the unitary nature of Italian language and literature, in social life, in communication and in schools. . . . This structurally and genetically unitary dimension is an inalienable patrimony and should instead be enhanced in all education and research institutions . . . because it has been and continues to be the only guarantee of our country’s access to modernity, of its essential important within the culture and the economy of Europe and the world.” Translation is mine.

The document underscores the importance of the “structural and genetic unity of Italian language and culture” and even defines this unity as the only guarantee that Italy will become truly modern and relevant, both culturally and economically, in Europe and the world. As a document produced by the national association of Italian studies, it reflects the dominant approach to the study of Italian literature and culture and in fact reflects the structure of school curriculum, textbooks of literary history and the orientation of the majority of Italian studies departments both in Italy and abroad.

“Belonging to the Threshold. *Appartenenza* and *Sradicamento* in Early Twentieth-Century ‘Italian’ Literature” challenges this mainstream approach and aims at reconfiguring it in a transnational perspective, one that accounts for the richness and variety of cross-lingual, cross-national and cross-cultural exchanges out of which many of the most important developments of modern Italian literature have risen. The dissertation argues that historical narratives such as the one with which this introduction opened, while taking into account the contributions of the authors most securely planted at the center of the national canon, leave out equally crucial contributions to the development of modern Italian literature – some by those very same authors, others by authors whose voices have been marginalized precisely by way of a strictly mononationalist approach. “Belonging to the Threshold” also argues that by neglecting to account for the many experiences of hybridity within what can only be described as a porous, open and fluid system of Italian literature, scholarship is inadequately equipped to make sense of the recent surge of multilingual and culturally hybrid writing.

A different account might include that in 1888 Giosué Carducci met a young poet from England named Annie Vivanti, whose mother was German and father was Italian, who had set up an encounter at the older poet’s home in order to receive from him some feedback on her

poetry collection and possibly his support toward publication. The collection would indeed be published in 1890 and become an immediate bestseller. It might also mention that in 1914, a young aspiring poet named Emanuel Carnevali emigrated from Florence to New York where he began to write poetry in English and to frequent American modernists such as Sherwood Anderson and William Carlos Williams. It might also give significance to the fact that in 1898 an Egyptian-born Italian writer going by the name of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published a Symbolist poem titled *Les Vieux Marins*, in issue no. 12 of the French-Italian literary journal *Anthologie-Revue*, won one of Catulle Mendès and Gustave Kahn's "Samedis Populaires," and had his poem recited by Sarah Bernhardt.

By artificially restricting Italian literary history and criticism to works and figures that support a nationalist narrative, scholarly discourse dealing with contemporary Italy and its increasingly multilingual and multicultural landscape has at best produced scholarship that approaches literature through the lens of postcolonial, migration, diaspora and Mediterranean studies, finally assuming a transnational approach, but limiting its scope to the past two or three decades, or to the specific phenomenon of migration. The impression conveyed by this scholarship is that mono-nationalist approaches to literary studies are perfectly adequate in the majority of cases and need to be troubled only when dealing with glaring examples of geographical displacement or with the past two or three decades of literary production, when the massive waves of immigrants and refugees arriving to Italy altered the allegedly homogenous makeup of Italian language, culture and society.

Volumes such as the 2007 collection *Multicultural Literature in Contemporary Italy*, edited by Marie Orton and Graziella Parati, rightfully acknowledge the importance of migration and of the multiculturalism it generates in the context of Italian literature, building on Parati's

previous volume *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, which circumscribed multiculturalism to the specific socio-historical phenomenon of migration.<sup>3</sup> In pointing toward the contribution made by migrant writing to national literature, however, Orton and Parati outline it as a contemporary phenomenon, as evidenced by the fact that all of the texts collected in their volume were written between the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The same can be said about Franca Sinopoli's otherwise helpful paradigm, as outlined succinctly in the article "Deterritorializing the Nation-Based Approach to Literature or the Transnational Dimension of Italian Literature," in which she borrows George Steiner's concept of "extraterritorial writers"<sup>4</sup> to define the authors writing specifically in and about "migration to/from Italy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>5</sup>

Statements such as Leslie Adelson's claim about the "need to reconceptualize our understanding of an identifiably [Italian] core of contemporary literature"<sup>6</sup> refer only to the past two or three decades, positing that the hybrid nature of Italian production is a recent phenomenon, opposed to a culturally homogenous development of Italian literature until the 1990s. So while this helpful attention to transnational exchange is widespread when dealing with recent production, Italian literary history as a whole remains anchored to a prevalently mono-nationalist perspective.

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<sup>3</sup> Graziella Parati, ed, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999); Marie Orton and Graziella Parati, eds., *Multicultural Literature in Contemporary Italy* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> George Steiner, *Extraterritorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Franca Sinopoli, "Deterritorializing the Nation-Based Approach to Literature or the Transnational Dimension of Italian Literature," in *Far Away Is Here. Lejos es aquí. Writing and Migrations*, ed. Luigi Giuliani, Leonarda Trapassi and Javier Martos (Berlin, Germany: Frank & Timme Verlag für Wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2013): 9-22.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie A. Adelson, "Migrants' Literature or German Literature? Torkan's Tufan: Brief an einen islamischen Bruder," *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 218.

Certainly, the approach is not exclusive to Italian culture, if common editorial practice still relies on nationality and dates as the two primary identificatory factors used to differentiate authors. However, in contexts such as the Anglophone and Francophone ones, the long history of colonialism and migration began to trouble literary histories and authorial narratives based on rigidly mono-nationalist categorizations as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. Modernism, especially, counted a growing number of writers whose biographies and linguistic affiliations exploded classifications based on national belonging, including many of the most canonical and influential figures such as T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, André Gide and Aimé Césaire.

In Italy, instead, given the late achievement of national unity and the linguistic and cultural fragmentation of the country even after unification, the main declared objective for politicians and intellectuals post-1870 was to “make Italians,” according to the misquoted motto attributed to Massimo D’Azeglio.<sup>7</sup> This goal resulted in the creation of literary histories focused on constructing a narrative in which a linguistically and culturally diverse tradition coagulates around a homogenous and easily identifiable notion of *italianità*, starting with the ground-breaking two volumes of *Storia della letteratura italiana* published by Francesco De Sanctis in 1870 and 1871, coinciding with the completion of Italy’s unification. Even the philosophy of Benedetto Croce, whose influence on Italian literary history and aesthetics at least until the Second World War was massive, contributed, with its emphasis on classicism and its lack of appreciation for the European avant-garde, to the definition of Italian literature as autonomous and insular. Such an approach has continued to mark studies of Italian literature throughout the

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<sup>7</sup> See Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi, eds, *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell’Italia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993).

twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with the exception of contemporary postcolonial and migration literature.

While “Belonging to the Threshold” does not mean to discount the importance of national approaches to the study of Italian literature, it does question the default narrative for historicizing Italian literature and it advocates for other approaches, based on a transnational reframing of the origin, production and circulation of what we call Italian literature, in order to understand how it has engaged with a set of issues related to transnational movement and globalization, at least from the birth of the Italian nation-state. This approach also contributes to the way we think of contemporary literary production, interrogating the legacies of colonialism and emigration and providing historical perspective to debates about postcolonialism, world literature and translatability, and the recent surge of first- and second-generation Italian authors.

A crucial limitation of the nation-based approach is that it furthers the narrative of Italian literature, and consequently its scholarship, as being delayed, in comparison to traditions whose colonial and postcolonial past spans a century of literary production and theoretical reflection. It also excludes Italian writers and trends from transnational phenomena, perpetuating the insularity of Italian studies that, while seeking to underscore the peculiarity of Italy’s literary and artistic development, actually end up reaffirming its marginality. Conversely, “Belonging to the Threshold” recovers Italy’s international relevance, both from the perspective of formal experimentation and from that of the conceptualization of increasingly transnational modes of belonging, including early reflections on cosmopolitanism and its viability as an alternative to belligerent nationalism.

“Belonging to the Threshold” aims to give historical depth to the “question of what qualifies or does not qualify as Italian literature,”<sup>8</sup> by looking back to the Italian literary production between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, arguing that it is this timeframe in which the roots of contemporary phenomena of linguistically and culturally hybrid artistic practices are to be found. Of course, one might argue that these phenomena are not exclusive to the late nineteenth century, and rather could be invoked as framework for the study of Italian literature from its vernacular beginning, when troubadour poetry travelled between Italy and the South of France, and then the main works of both Dante and Petrarch were engendered by their experience of exile.

While “Belonging to the Threshold” participates in the broader, trans-historical interest toward transnational literary connections, it also argues for the specificity of the post-Unification era as moment in which the seed of many contemporary practices can be found. The dissertation illuminates this cultural moment when a major shift in the conception of national, linguistic and cultural belonging took place, within a uniquely Italian geo-historical, socio-political and cultural setting. It argues that in this period, in which Italy was marked by an intricate post-unification restructuring of borders, wars, colonial enterprises, outbound currents of political exile, internal travel and displacement and the largest emigration from any country,<sup>9</sup> the cross-cultural, cross-national and cross-lingual exchanges that had already informed the poetics of major literary figures became some of the main catalysts for the evolution of aesthetic and cultural practice. The project thus points to Italy as a vantage point from which to explore many of the most urgent questions about linguistic, cultural and national hybridity facing literary scholars today.

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<sup>8</sup> Marie Orton and Graziella Parati, *Multicultural Literature in Contemporary Italy*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> See Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge; Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2008).

In making a case for the importance of looking to Italy when dealing with the impact of transnational movement on the development of literature, the dissertation situates a cluster of representative authors who are more or less unanimously considered to be Italian – hence the quotation marks in the title – within a paradigm marked by the opposite poles of what I call “*appartenenza*” and “*sradicamento*.” I don’t take these terms to be incompatible with one another, nor do I see them as precise definitions of individual authors’ allegiance to or disavowal of a particular country, Italy or other. Rather, these terms gesture toward the conflicting forces simultaneously at play in the identity formation and aesthetic practice of writers working in and around Italy at the turn of the twentieth century.

*Appartenenza* signals the sense of being a part – *parte* – of a community, often experienced as desire or projection rather than lived reality, as evidenced by the English “*belonging*.” *Sradicamento*, instead, points toward the violence of what I describe as a process of uprooting, both in the reflexive sense of losing one’s roots and in the active one of aggressively eradicating and appropriating linguistic and artistic elements from cultures other than one’s own but in which one recognizes something of one’s self. In the first sense, the word is also nodding to the French term *déraciné*, popular at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries to indicate the growing number of individuals displaced by migration and exile and thus viewed as shifty and potentially subversive in a context of growing nationalisms. The term was used by their contemporaries to describe two of the five authors on which the dissertation focuses: Italian American poet Emanuel Carnevali and Egyptian-born French and Italian speaking Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *Les Déracinés* (1897) is also the title of the first novel in the trilogy *Le roman de l’énergie nationale* by Maurice Barrès, French nationalist writer who heavily influenced the aesthetics and politics of Gabriele D’Annunzio.



The dissertation argues that some of the most crucial and influential developments in Italian literature were born out of the very interlacing of these conflicting forces, which in varying degrees impacted the writing of all of the authors examined here. In discussing the works of individual writers, the project participates in discussions and scholarly debates around transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and other established, albeit still contested, conceptual frameworks, and engages with studies as far reaching and foundational as Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* and contributions to the understanding of cosmopolitanism by Martha Nussbaum, Bruce Robbins, Rebecca Walkowitz and Jessica Berman. However, by invoking *appartenenza* and *sradicamento*, the dissertation carves out a space for the specificity of the Italian context and shifts the focus to the linguistic, formal and thematic qualities of literary texts while remaining tethered to these broader theoretical discussions.

Based on the premise clearly outlined by Teresa Fiore in *Pre-Occupied Spaces: Remapping Italy's Transnational Migrations And Colonial Legacies*, that “the contemporary history of Italian civilization cannot be understood without a rigorous reconsideration of the influence of its outbound and inbound currents of migration, as well as its colonial and imperial experience,”<sup>10</sup> the project challenges the assumption that the main cultural developments in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Italy can be assessed from a mono-nationalist viewpoint. In this perspective, the dissertation is aligned with recent developments in the fields of Italian postcolonial and migration studies, which have productively complicated the nationalist

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<sup>10</sup> Teresa Fiore, *Pre-Occupied Spaces: Remapping Italy's Transnational Migrations And Colonial Legacies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

paradigm long dominant in the fields of literary and cultural studies.<sup>11</sup> In addition to Teresa Fiore's volume, Franca Sinopoli's *Interculturalità e transnazionalità della letteratura: questioni di critica e studi di casi*<sup>12</sup> and Sandra Ponzanesi's *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies*<sup>13</sup> provide theoretical frameworks for the understanding of Italy as a post-colonial context and of its specificity compared to other post-colonial settings. Nicola Labanca's *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* and Mark Choate's *Emigrant Nation: the Making of Italy Abroad*<sup>14</sup> have analyzed emigration and colonization as interrelated phenomena prompted by the necessity of the newly unified nation-state to establish transnational socio-economies in support of the national one. The 2016 volume *Italian Mobilities*, edited by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, conceptualizes Italy as "a flashpoint for mobilities as they relate to nationalism, imperialism, globalization, and consumer, leisure and labour practices" and examines "Italy's interlinked histories of emigration, colonialism and immigration, as well as Italians' deep attachment to place and tradition."<sup>15</sup>

Following the lead of these scholars, "Belonging to the Threshold" looks simultaneously at inward and outward migration, colonialism, exile, tourism and other forms of displacement, but focuses on the ways in which these phenomena interlaced with modes of literary expression. While the view of Italy as a physical and conceptual space shaped by varieties of movement has

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<sup>11</sup> Outside of Italy, this model had begun to be eroded at least as early as the 1970s, with the rise of critical theory. See Paul Jay, *Global Matters. The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Franca Sinopoli, *Interculturalità e transnazionalità della letteratura: questioni di critica e studi di casi* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2002); Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad*.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, eds., *Italian Mobilities* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

led to productive conversations around Italian history, politics and society, it has remained anchored to sociological and anthropological studies, whereas literary history and criticism have continued to favor a mono-national narrative. Contributions to the overcoming of the rigid dichotomy between works written inside and outside of Italy, for example, have come from scholars such as Loredana Polezzi who has proposed an interpretive paradigm that overcomes the “homogeneity vs extraneousness”<sup>16</sup> bipolarity in Italian writings at a theoretical level, and politician and economist Piero Bassetti, who has proposed the category of *italicità*<sup>17</sup> as a more capacious one than *italianità* to refer to writings in Italian produced outside of the peninsula. These efforts have supported the legitimization of traditionally marginalized fields such as Italian American studies<sup>18</sup> and recent Italian language literature produced by non-native subjects in Italy.<sup>19</sup> However, these studies in the fields of sociology, anthropology and linguistics have not impacted the substantially monocultural paradigm of Italian literary studies and have certainly not modified scholarly approaches to the most canonical figures in its literary history.

“Belonging to the Threshold,” instead, seeks to overcome the obstacles to the study of Italian literature in a transnational perspective, by employing an interdisciplinary approach that blends methods and concepts derived from extra-literary fields such as Migration and Diaspora Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Gender Studies and Disability Studies with literary history and

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<sup>16</sup> Loredana Polezzi, “La mobilità come modello: ripensando i margini della scrittura italiana,” *Studi (e testi) italiani* 22, (2008): 115-128.

<sup>17</sup> Piero Bassetti, and Niccolò D’Aquino, *Italic Lessons/Lezioni Italiche* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> See Mark F. Pietralunga, “Italian American Studies in Italy,” in *Teaching Italian American Literature, Film and Popular Culture*, ed. Edvige Giunta and Kaythleen Zamboni McCormick (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2010): 70-78.

<sup>19</sup> See Armando Gnisci, ed. *Nuovo Planetario Italiano. Geografia e antologia della letteratura della migrazione in Italia e in Europa* (Troina: Città aperta edizioni, 2006) and Ugo Fracassa, *Patria e lettere: per una critica della letteratura postcoloniale e migrante in Italia* (Roma: G. Perrone, 2012).

rigorous literary interpretation. In particular, the dissertation aims at outlining a still missing “transnational poetics” – such as Jahan Ramazani defined his 2006 exploration of the cosmopolitan bearings and formal crosspollinations of poetry across the postcolonial Anglophone world<sup>20</sup> – applied to the Italian case. While I don’t focus exclusively on poetry, given the intersections between genres practiced by a majority of the authors on which the dissertation focuses, one of my main objectives is to track literature’s formal and linguistic developments in the wake of a variety of transnational templates, including migration, cosmopolitanism, exile and travel, and to indicate the place of linguistic hybridity and cross-cultural *bricolage* in Italian literary history. In so doing, I argue that these phenomena were not marginal to culturally and linguistically homogenous developments, but were some of the main engines of the evolution of modern Italian literature as we know it.

In order to make this case, “Belonging to the Threshold” focuses on the work of both canonical and marginalized authors: Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), Emanuel Carnevali (1897-1942), Annie Vivanti (1866-1942) and Amelia Pincherle Rosselli (1870-1954). This approach allows for an overcoming of the protectionist attitude in literary studies, which downgrades texts written by migrants to nonliterary expressions of autobiographical or semiautobiographical experiences which have no place in and no bearing on a canonical classification of Italian literature and therefore ends up limiting the ability of literature to interpret the culture in which it arises and with which it interacts. An intersection of rigorous literary analysis and socio-political history allows me to challenge the prioritization of a linear discourse around Italian literature securely founded on a cluster of canonical authors over the hybrid voices supposedly exclusive to peripheral and therefore

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<sup>20</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

marginalized perspectives. The dissertation thus contributes to rectifying the scholarly view according to which Italian literature did not engage substantially with migration, despite the fact that this phenomenon interested a large portion of Italian society. It also supports the scholarship of those such as Romano Luperini and Luca Somigli who have been arguing that Italian literature participated in transnational Modernism against those who consider the developments of modern Italian literature to have been isolated from European currents. The project also results in a radical reconfiguration of the literary canon. It brings to the fore works by established authors that have not received sufficient critical attention either because they are not written in Italian or because they have not seemed to influence the Italian literary tradition as strongly as others. It recovers marginalized voices of migrants, women, exiles, whose works contribute to reshaping the conversation around Italian literature and its engagement with modernity.

“Belonging to the Threshold” argues that the work of rethinking the canon and opening it up to previously marginalized voices goes beyond devoting specific volumes or book series to women writers or Italian American writers and that actually these initiatives, while valuable in the critical attention given to peripheral voices, do not really overthrow the ‘center versus periphery’ paradigm. In order to achieve this radical shift I instead group authors from the center and the margins within the same project. Through its horizontal structure in which two chapters are devoted to canonical authors and two focus on marginalized writers – women and/or migrants – the project challenges the vertical hierarchy that continues to separate so-called mainstream from minor literature, whether the latter be migration literature, women’s literature, Jewish literature, literature of disability or a combination of these categories.

The history of post-unification Italian literature has been viewed primarily as dominated by a cluster of authors, such as Carducci, Pascoli and D’Annunzio – the modern *tre corone*

mentioned earlier – firmly situated within a tradition that, coming as it was out of the Risorgimento, could finally be described in terms of national unity. Among these figures, D’Annunzio stands out as one of the fathers of modern Italian literature, with his bombastic rhetoric of *italianità* that contributed to Italy’s participation in the First World War and paved the way for Fascism. Likewise, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti espoused an aggressive form of nationalism and aimed to make Futurism the antidote to a specifically Italian form of *passéisme*. Yet, a great part of D’Annunzio’s literary efforts were directed towards creating an Italian equivalent of the Decadent Aestheticism of the French authors who most influenced him, and his fascination with German and Eastern cultures – which he often referred to as ‘Barbaric’ – led him to develop an ideal of ‘Italianness’ that, I will argue, is in many ways an artificially constructed patchwork of foreign elements. Futurism itself aspired to be a truly international movement and was born out of the overlapping of languages and traditions out of which African-born and French-educated Marinetti emerged.

The turn of the twentieth century was also the time of Italy’s massive emigration to northern Europe and North America and of harsh political struggle. Many of the most innovative voices of Italian literature came precisely out of experiences of displacement associated with migration, exile, and burgeoning forms of cosmopolitanism. Among these, Italian American poet Emanuel Carnevali achieved great success among modernist circles in the United States only to be excluded from the interests of scholars of Italian literature, together with other diaspora writers, precisely because of the challenge that a multilingual migrant author presents to nation-based literary canons and tradition. Similar critical fate befell on Annie Vivanti, author of wildly successful novels, poems and plays who worked at the intersection of Italian, English and French, and on Amelia Pincherle Rosselli, born in England to a Mazzinian refugee and author of

short stories, novels and patriotic plays that offer a female counter-narrative to the celebratory rhetoric of D'Annunzio and Marinetti.

While in the case of Vivanti, Pincherle Rosselli and Carnevali scholarship is scarce, testifying to the reductive approach engendered by a nation-based conception of canon, extensive critical works focus on D'Annunzio and Marinetti, even tracing their ties to specific foreign authors and literary movements. These transnational relations, however, have been investigated merely from a philological perspective aimed at reconstructing particular linear influences on specific works, keeping track of debts and credits, pinpointing so-called 'loans' from one literature to another, imitations and receptions, according to the interpretive heritage of Italian literature and relationship with other European literatures in a traditional 'comparativist' sense. Examples of these critical approaches are Mario Cimini's 2016 volume *D'Annunzio, la Francia e la cultura europea*, the proceedings of the 1984 conference *D'Annunzio e la cultura germanica* and Barbara Meazzi's *Le Futurisme entre l'Italie et la France*.<sup>21</sup> What is missing from this perspective is the kind of radical reframing for which my project calls, according to which D'Annunzio and Marinetti's poetics emerge specifically from their being situated at the crossroads of multiple languages and cultures and not from their injecting specific limited foreign trends or motifs within a homogenously Italian matrix.

By examining the works of both canonical and marginalized authors, the dissertation is also able to explore a wide range of shared and diverging responses to the shock of modernity, the beginning of cultural globalization and geographical displacement on a massive scale. It

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<sup>21</sup> Mario Cimini, *D'Annunzio, la Francia e la cultura europea* (Lanciano: Carabba, 2016); Centro nazionale di studi dannunziani, *D'Annunzio e la cultura germanica: atti del VI convegno internazionale di studi dannunziani, Pescara, 3-5 maggio 1984* (Pescara: Centro nazionale di studi dannunziani, 1985); Barbara Meazzi, *Le Futurisme entre l'Italie et la France* (Chambéry: Université de Savoie, 2010).

explores literature's reactions to Italy's condition as newly unified nation with incipient colonizing ambitions and at the same time a wave of emigration of truly massive proportions. It questions the degree to which both writers classified unanimously as 'Italian' and others whose national belonging is contested actually perceived themselves as 'Italian' and the characteristics of their national or international allegiances. It examines the ways in which authors could at times conceive of their political belonging as univocal while at the same time claiming a transnational dimension to their poetic imagination, viewed as a nation-crossing thrust that exceeds territorial or juridical boundaries, while often maintaining an anchor in the local and even the regional. The cluster of authors that the project groups together allows for unexpected affinities to appear, while also bringing to the fore the variety of responses to nationalism and xenophobia among authors often generically considered proto-Fascist.

D'Annunzio, Marinetti, Carnevali, Vivanti and Pincherle Rosselli serve as case studies to illustrate the dissertation's point that many of the most exciting and influential developments in Italian literature, even from a formal and technical standpoint, were generated from the cultural and linguistic miscegenation made possible at the turn of the twentieth century by Italy's socio-political condition. The transnational dimension of these writers is also attested to by their engagement with a truly international audience and a community of authors and artists that went well beyond the boundaries of Italy and the limited scope of Italian studies as the field has since been conceived and practiced. Even a quick glance at the multiplicity of languages in which these writers produced remarkable works of literature points to the artificiality of nation- or language-based disciplinary boundaries.

Each chapter contains close readings of texts by 'Italian' authors, approached through the polyphonic prism of migration and diaspora studies, feminist, disability and post-colonial theory.



Written in Italian, English, French and Venetian dialect, these texts were produced by a cluster of writers whose socio-economic status ranges from *Accademico d'Italia* and ideologue of war and colonization in the case of D'Annunzio to working-class, disabled immigrant who ended his life destitute in a sanatorium on the outskirts of society in that of Carnevali. All of them engage in one way or another with cross-lingual and cross-national forces at work shaping personal and cultural identity and modes of poetic or narrative expression, under the combined effects of travel, colonization, migration and exile. These texts collectively push back against the scope of narrowly nation-based accounts of literature and imagine the transnational character of modern experience, culture and identity. They reflect the cultural and linguistic contamination at work in the production of some of the most relevant and exciting literature from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while at the same time often reflecting *on* the political, social, historical and personal issues connected with this contamination.

Chapter One contends that Gabriele D'Annunzio culturally embodies a liminal posture that blurs the lines between center and margin, local and foreign and that pushes back against his bombastic rhetoric of *italianità*, as represented spatially by “Il Vittoriale,” the complex of buildings that D'Annunzio commissioned for his retirement. D'Annunzio, the *poeta vate* of Italy, was one of the major forces behind early twentieth-century Italian nationalist propaganda, and the literary model that generations of marginalized authors would pit themselves against. And yet his poetics is situated within a transnational web of literary, political, philosophical and artistic influences. In this chapter, I analyze two of D'Annunzio's most ideologically nationalistic works: the 1900 novel *Il Fuoco* and the 1908 play *La Nave*, both set in Venice. The choice of situating the events of nationalist fictions near a contested border is exploited in the direction of aggressive imperialism in the case of *La Nave*, and affirmation of ethnic and cultural superiority

in that of *Il Fuoco*. However, the geographically decentered setting of the works effectively opens them up to phenomena of ethnic syncretism and cultural absorption.

I argue that *Il Fuoco* stages D'Annunzio's engagement with northern, Germanic or, as he referred to it – Teutonic – artistic practice and his attempt to transfer what he acknowledged to be the richest, most refined and complex artistic expression of his time to a Latinate context. The novel performs a tribute to Wagner and the 'Barbaric spirit' and at the same time reaffirms the preeminence of the Latin genius, embodied by the lone artist-hero. By situating his narrative manifesto on the periphery of the nation, D'Annunzio is signaling an outward movement of cultural, if not yet political, imperialism and, at the same time, acknowledging that the artistic developments he envisions are born out of the swampy soil of the threshold and the contamination of Germanic and Latin, as well as eastern and western, traditions. Through the character of Foscarina, the *multanime* actress able to inhabit multiple personas, D'Annunzio stages his own voracious assimilatory poetics. While the first section of the novel depicts Foscarina as successful embodiment of expressive capaciousness, in the second section the actress becomes merely a symbol of decay and her centrality within Stelio's own creative process is threatened and ultimately overcome by a celebration of the Italian both in erotic and aesthetic terms. The erotic trajectory that leads Stelio from Foscarina to Donatella, I would contend, parallels the artistic one that leads him from Wagner to his own Italian artwork. Both itineraries involve a movement from hybridity to purity or – according to D'Annunzio's somewhat mechanistic Nietzschean terminology, a descent into the Dionysian – followed by an attempt at recomposition in the Apollonian. Foscarina's fate is mirrored by that of the city of Venice itself, which increasingly takes on the characterization of reliquary, its cosmopolitanism implicated as complicit in its decay. Despite the overtly patriotic ending of the novel, in which

various narrative and symbolic threads come together harmoniously to celebrate the superiority of Italian culture, even in these final pages, elements remain that trouble this cohesive and linear representation.

*La Nave* belongs to a series of ideologically propagandist works published by D'Annunzio in order to garner support for Italy's ambitions in the Adriatic. The play also functions as a locus for D'Annunzio to experiment with degrees of enmeshment and question – whether intentionally or not – the contribution of foreign elements to the construction not only of his ideal nation but also of the historical reality of the Roman Empire. *La Nave* sets D'Annunzio's syncretic conception of culture at odds with an ideal of ethnic purity that serves a nationalist agenda. Like all nationalist constructs, the unified ideal gains traction only in opposition to what is perceived as 'other.' In the case of D'Annunzio, however, the set of rigid dichotomies necessary to political propaganda – Latin, Christian, civilized and civilizing against Byzantine, Oriental, Pagan and barbaric – is constantly thwarted at the very time it is being upheld. I argue that, rather than the expression of an undisputed ideological stance, *La Nave* stages D'Annunzio's own troubled negotiation between transnational cultural expressions and a monolithic construction meant to win over his public to the *Questione Adriatica*.

I claim that a careful reading of *La Nave* shows the presence of the foreign to have a major role in D'Annunzio's nation-constructing endeavor. The rich textual fabric is itself reminiscent of Byzantine ornamentation, the Byzantine character of Basiliola allows D'Annunzio to express his fascination with the East while at the same time expressing the superiority of Latin culture and the amphibian nature of the Venice lagoon undermines the rigid land versus sea dichotomy. The chapter argues that both texts can be read as case studies of D'Annunzio's negotiation between ideals of citizenship – mixed versus ethnically pure – and Modernist art – cosmopolitan

versus Rome-centric and that they show the fabric of his ideal of *italianità* to be actually made up of elements from the most diverse traditions of every continent, without the slightest acknowledgment of contradictions.

Chapter Two unpacks a cluster of paradoxes within the work of the linguistically and culturally hybrid F. T. Marinetti, founder of Futurism and champion of belligerently nationalist ideals. Futurism was primarily a project of nationalist renewal. However, it also aimed at placing Italy at the center of European Modernist cosmopolitanism. Through analyses of his poetics, reception history, and translation history, I argue that Marinetti's Futurist project is a rearticulation of cosmopolitanism through the category of the barbaric, as a violent, brutish *sradicamento* or uprooting. The first part of the chapter analyzes the first futurist novel *Mafarka le futuriste* (1909) and shows how Marinetti employs African settings and characters to posit continuity between Italy and North Africa. It argues that by casting the intermediary figure of a Muslim Arab hero as protagonist of a rewriting of the foundational texts of western epic, Marinetti is articulating a cross-continental narrative, aimed at a transnational readership, through what I call a *sradicamento* and assemblage of western and non-western elements. While the international impact of Marinetti's Futurism and its vast network of alliances as well as the participation of Marinetti in a European cosmopolitan milieu are widely acknowledged, I propose to shift towards a transnational consideration of the very conception of his literary production.

The notion of *sradicamento* points to Marinetti's own uprootedness as constitutive and generative of his poetics, impacting his imagined audience, the narrative structure of his works of fiction, and the formal experimentation of his poetry. Secondly, it indicates in his active and violent *uprooting* of transnational forms, languages and symbols a brutish and barbaric

cosmopolitanism that contrasts with what he saw as an elitist bourgeois understanding. *Mafarka le futuriste* is certainly a colonialist novel, meant to show readers the potential fruits of Italy's African enterprises, which relies on nineteenth-century Orientalism. The chapter contends, however, that compared to other colonialist works of the time, including D'Annunzio's, Marinetti's novel bespeaks a skepticism about western superiority that is consistent with Futurism's claims to barbarism and that engenders structural innovations.

The second part of the chapter deals with Marinetti's poetic production, particularly his experimental *paroliberismo* or freewording, in which I locate a poetics of *sradicamento* that alters our understanding of the cosmopolitan through the use of onomatopoeia and untranslated foreign vocabulary. I argue that in "Battaglia Peso + Odore" the uprooting of foreign words injected into the textual fabric mobilizes opacity as a strategy of revolt. While Marinetti's interjection of foreign words might seem limited compared to coeval experiments in multilingualism of global modernism, the difference between such openly hybridizing gestures and the rigorously monolingual accounts of colonial encounter and violence by D'Annunzio or of transatlantic migration by Giovanni Pascoli is striking. I contend that Marinetti's text is questioning the very equation between national belonging and homogeneous linguistic expression, which is the basis of all strategies aimed at 'making Italians' elaborated during the Risorgimento. The anomaly of a project of Italian nation building and renewal divorced from concerns about linguistic homogenization and refinement is striking, and can be led back to Marinetti's own experience as a multilingual subject. The primacy of expressive thrust over the interpretive moment, which I identify in the famous freewording poem "Zang Tumb Tumb. Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912," represents a poetic embodiment of Marinetti's claim about the futurist embrace of the barbaric – understood in the etymological sense of that which sounds like

stuttering to speakers of the dominant language. I claim that Marinetti's poetics of *sradicamento* rests on its geospatial stretch beyond and across national borders, which is often overshadowed by his aggressive ideological nationalism.

Chapter Three tracks migrant author Emanuel Carnevali's attempts at self-construction as an 'American poet' against the unsettling body of the migrant and the disabled – two identities that, I contend, function in similar ways as markers of 'otherness' and factors of de-humanization. An Italian immigrant to the United States forced to devote his time to menial jobs in order to make a living, whose language bore the marks of a foreigner in the process of negotiating between a mother tongue steeped in erudition and a second language absorbed from the streets of the most modern metropolis, Carnevali strove to inhabit the paradoxical role of one aggressively proclaiming his belonging to a chosen community and at the same time maintaining his status as a truly international writer straddling old and new continents. The chapter first of all establishes the dynamics in the fields of literary criticism, publication and canonization that resulted in the neglect toward the poetry of Carnevali, despite his considerable success among Modernist circles in both New York and Chicago. I argue that in order to understand how Carnevali's poetry functions within and between Italian and US literature, we must look closely at the marginalizing forces that hindered his 'Americanization' and ultimately caused his demise and subsequent scholarly neglect. First, I analyze Carnevali's poetry as translingual writing. While his desire to renew poetic language and reject the shackles of the Italian literary tradition inspired his desire to remake himself as an 'American poet,' his language bears the traces of Italian in lexicon, syntax, prosody and versification as well as literary and cultural references. The result is a textual fabric that marks his work as 'other' in the Anglo-modernist milieu in which it circulated. Secondly, I explore Carnevali's shifting situatedness between European and

American cultural environments, through his work as a translator, his project for a new international journal titled *New Moon*, his work as a literary critic and his creation of an international community of poets and intellectuals while isolated from society in his hospital room in Bazzano, Italy. This interstitial position along with the hybrid characteristics of his language arguably contributed to Carnevali's immediate success as a poet, as it represented an alternative to purist modes of expression that were gaining traction in the wake of H. L. Mencken's linguistic theorizations and the US's increasingly protectionist policies. However, it also impeded Carnevali's assimilation as an immigrant into the societal fabric of early twentieth-century America. This hindrance was of course exacerbated by his physical condition. Rather than following most critics in their attempts to measure the degree to which Carnevali's work is Italian or American, I aim to shift critical perspective and examine instead the ways in which his translingual poetry illustrates the intersecting pressures of normative ideological prescriptions onto the embodied identity of the migrant. As an immigrant – thus linguistically and culturally hybrid – chronically ill and in today's terms queer, the case of Emanuel Carnevali turns on its head the immigrant trajectory of assimilation. The chapter underscores how beyond Carnevali's posture as a non-conforming rebellious poet, modeled after *poète maudit* Arthur Rimbaud, was a very real condition of marginalization due to the intersecting pressures of language, socioeconomics, gender, class and disability.

The final section of the chapter traces the imbrications of disability and migration in some of Carnevali's poems, particularly in the recurrence of the semantic constellation related to pain, the stuttering associated with poetic expression, the insistence on the oddity of a 'queer' body made up of apparently incompatible elements, the inability to perform labor and subsequent economic distress. While these conditions are related to Carnevali's specific biography, I draw

out the disabling rhetorical forces that act on *all* migrants and thus make a broader claim about the generative potential of reading migration literature as a whole through the lens of disability studies, which relies on oblique readings to value the meanings that come from difference – bodily and otherwise.

Chapter Four views the works of two women writers – Amelia Pincherle Rosselli and Annie Vivanti – as counter-narratives to the celebratory nationalist rhetoric of the time. The works of these culturally hybrid women writers of Jewish origin display the rich variety of commitments to the nation and the international community displayed by female writers of the time, in opposition to the proto-fascist rhetoric that associated nationalism with virility. It argues that both Rosselli and Vivanti were wrestling in different ways with ideas of national belonging, at a time in which totalitarian models of national community were spreading rapidly, and that they anticipated conceptions of community both beyond and coexistent with nationhood that are emerging powerfully today in the wake of globalization, mass migrations and technological advancements.

The chapter brings to light the gendered perceptions and self-representations that conflate cultural hybridity with feminine seductiveness and capacity for metamorphosis, particularly as regards critical assessments of Annie Vivanti's work. While often dismissed as sentimental writer of popular fiction and poetry, I argue that such dismissal overlooks first of all her unique translingual and transcultural position, able to engage with a diverse international audience and a variety of genres including the Italian lyric tradition and the Anglophone transcontinental novel. Secondly, it neglects the rich cosmopolitan engagement that her texts display and require of their readers. Through the genre of the *romanzo sentimentale*, for example, Vivanti invites her readers to empathize with ethnically hybrid characters and to question the purist racial and cultural



discourse that eugenicists at the time were using to support colonialism and nationalist belligerence. Overall, Vivanti's texts display what I call the "performativity of nationality," a distinctly modern view of identity as fluid and socially determined. Her writing introduces a transnational dimension to the provincialism of Italian literature in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Amelia Pincherle Rosselli wrote several plays influenced by the international drama of ideas that she had become familiar with during her stay in Vienna with husband "Joe" Rosselli, and employed playwriting as a locus for feminist practice. Through analyses of several of Rosselli's most famous plays, written both in Venetian dialect and in Italian, and her fictional piece *Fratelli minori*, the chapter argues that her international ties, Jewish-Venetian roots and experience as a woman led her to develop a particular brand of patriotism which is immune from both the *macho* myth of colonial conquest<sup>22</sup> and the belief in the primacy of the Italian nation over others.

"Belonging to the Threshold" participates in the "transnational turn" in literary studies<sup>23</sup> and is related to recent efforts to conceptualize and analyze Italian literature and culture from a transnational perspective that has gained traction in the last five years, as evidenced by the panel and roundtable on Transnational Italian Studies organized at MLA2020 and planned for MLA2021 and the book series Transnational Italian Cultures launched by Liverpool University Press in 2016. It is my hope that this study will help nudge scholars of literature toward transnational approaches, such as adjacent fields in cultural studies have been theorizing, not

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<sup>22</sup> See Stefano Jossa, "Matria. L'Italia femmina dei poeti maschi," in *Una. D'arme, di lingua, d'altare, di memorie, di sangue, di cor* (Palermo: :due punti, 2013): 193-2018; Matteo Di Gesù, *Una nazione di carta. tradizione letteraria e identità italiana* (Roma: Carocci, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> See Paul Jay, *Global Matters. The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

only when dealing with contemporary writing by so-called “multicultural Italians,” but when broadly assessing literature written in the wake of the formation of Italy as a nation-state.

## CHAPTER ONE

“La Patria è su la Nave.” The Hybrid Nationhood of Gabriele D’Annunzio.

### **Il Vittoriale degli Italiani.**

When Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938) chose to spend the final years of his life in a building that was to be called “Schifamondo” in his villa “Il Vittoriale,” designed with architect Giancarlo Maroni, he was signaling more than a retirement from public life in the wake of the rise to power of Benito Mussolini. The name of the new wing of his meticulously designed residence was a literal expression of his desire to withdraw - *schivare* - from the world. The archaic spelling, by evoking the word *schifo* – disgust –, signals a sense of aesthetic superiority that readers of D’Annunzio have come to associate with his persona, both in his literary production and in the overtly public conduct of his life. Though not completed before the author’s death, the plan for Schifamondo was already included in the original blueprint for “Il Vittoriale,” the villa in Cargnacco, on lake Garda, where D’Annunzio relocated in 1921 at the age of fifty-eight. D’Annunzio was then something of a legend: a hero in the Great War and a leader of the failed but spectacular Fiume expedition, a widely popular political speaker, a notorious womanizer and one of Italy’s biggest socialites, as well as successful novelist, poet and playwright. An early creator of ‘fake news,’<sup>1</sup> D’Annunzio was one of the first to intuit the potential of modern media a

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<sup>1</sup> When he was 16 years old, in order to gain publicity for his first book of poems, *Primo Vere*, published at his father’s expense, he sent an anonymous postcard with the news that he had fallen

century before ‘influencer’ would become a profession in its own right. It is striking, then, that despite his relentless efforts to remain in the public eye – albeit dominating from above what he perceived as the mass of the uncouth – he would choose to end his life in secluded isolation.<sup>2</sup>

Refined French dandy and Symbolist poet one moment, tragic playwright in the spirit of the classical tradition the next, D’Annunzio was a chameleon both in terms of his public persona and of his literary production. The connection between his transformability and his conception of the self as an arbitrary construct has already been brought to light,<sup>3</sup> as have the myriad of connections to the works of others, both Italian and foreign, which led to the vast scholarship on D’Annunzian plagiarism both during his lifetime and posthumously.<sup>4</sup> What the character of Andrea Sperelli claims in the novel *Il Piacere* seems to be applicable to the author himself: “quasi sempre, per incominciare a comporre, egli aveva bisogno d’una intonazione musicale datagli da un altro poeta.”<sup>5</sup>

While Sperelli had a penchant for the medieval Tuscan tradition, however, D’Annunzio’s masks have precise national and ethnic connotations, as each transformation manifests itself as a new declaration of allegiance and an implicit proclamation of belonging to a linguistic or cultural tradition. At times, it is possible to trace D’Annunzio’s national sympathies and self-identifications along trajectories in which the political and the aesthetic go hand in hand. More often, I contend, D’Annunzio appears to pledge belonging to the intersection and overlapping of

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off a horse and died to a newspaper editor in Florence. The plan worked and a second edition soon followed.

<sup>2</sup> This isolation did allow him, however, to stage something of an early death, directing the posthumous reception of his oeuvre by beginning to edit the National Edition of his works

<sup>3</sup> See Lucia Re, “Gabriele D’Annunzio’s Theater of Memory. Il Vittoriale degli Italiani,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts 1875-1945*, 3 (Winter 1987): 6-51.

<sup>4</sup> Giacom, Maria Rosa, “Gabriele D’Annunzio. “Grande plagiatario al cospetto di Dio,” *Archivio D’Annunzio*, 5 (October 2018): 141- 158.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Il Piacere*, ed. Federico Roncoroni (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), 146.

multiple traditions. Like a son conceived of many fathers, he presents himself as the rightful heir to many aesthetic and cultural lineages, not wanting to commit to a single one. His constant metamorphosis can be viewed as the consequence of a rhetorical voraciousness in appropriating foreign artistic trends, comparable only to his erotic rapaciousness. And yet few authors have pledged their allegiance to the fatherland in equally bombastic terms, devoting entire poetry collections, plays, works of political oratory, essays, as well as sections of novels, to nationalist propaganda.

Parallel to the idea of self as a construct, then, we find the construction of an ideal of *italianità*, whose fabric, I would submit, is actually made up of elements from the most diverse traditions of every continent, without the slightest acknowledgment of contradiction. A similar dynamic can be found in his contradictory attitude toward the masses – to which he strived to appeal in search of an ever-larger audience, while maintaining the aura of aristocratic artist for the élite – as well as in his political action. Following the late twentieth-century trend of *trasformismo*, D’Annunzio moved from representative of the *Destra* in Parliament in 1897 to supporter of the *Sinistra* within three short years. While the shift has been viewed by some historians as a leap from right to left symptomatic of political superficiality,<sup>6</sup> Jared Becker argues convincingly that his action was “an attempt to effect a novel *synthesis* of the two antithetical political factions,”<sup>7</sup> absorbing portions of both ideologies into a nationalist and imperialist design.<sup>8</sup> The contrast between this paradoxical construct and the historical reality of the time is

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<sup>6</sup> See Paolo Alatri, *Gabriele D’Annunzio* (Torino: UTET, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis is mine. Jared M. Becker, *Nationalism and Culture. Gabriele D’Annunzio And Italy after the Risorgimento* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 48.

<sup>8</sup> Romano Luperini coined the term *post-politico* to express his indifference to traditional ideological formations. See Romano Luperini, Pietro Cataldi and Lidia Marchiani, eds, *La scrittura e l'interpretazione - Edizione Blu: Storia e antologia della letteratura italiana nel quadro della civiltà europea* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1999). Becker, instead, highlights the

of course apparent when contemplating D'Annunzio in his retirement. In 1921, after decades in which the horizon of his enterprises seemed to cover the entire world, his area of engagement had officially shrunk to "Il Vittoriale degli Italiani." The villa, named in honor of the populace who he predicted would inherit and benefit from the property after his death, was actually something of a cloister. With its multiple rooms, gardens, museum, theater and even retired combat airplane, Il Vittoriale is a spatial representation of the intellectual, creative, and political life of D'Annunzio, whose far-reaching interests and obsessions are mapped onto the blueprint of the area quite literally: *stanza della musica, corridoio del labirinto, stanza della Leda*.

The religious connotation of many of the names designating rooms in the private house - *prioria, corridoio della via Crucis, oratorio Dalmata, sala delle reliquie* – might appear as a tribute to the sacredness of the nation in the form of 'civil religion.'<sup>9</sup> Instead, it is in service only to a cultish veneration of the person of D'Annunzio, down to his very body, buried in the majestic mausoleum. After adhering to a multiplicity of places and cultures, the conclusion of his quest for a nation that he deemed worthy of himself ended in solipsism, expressed architecturally within the perimeters of his home.

The image of D'Annunzio in isolation from the rest of the world does not imply a rejection of the traditions that he gradually absorbed into his works, in a continual process of accretion that grew only more complex with time. "Il Vittoriale" itself, viewed as his final work

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similarity between D'Annunzio's new politics, based on transforming the explosive energies of the socialist-inspired mass insurgency into nationalist and imperialist programs, and the mixture of aggressive leftism and nationalism identified by many scholars as the matrix of Fascism and quotes Zeev Sternhell in viewing D'Annunzio as a typical manifestation of an international movement toward "socialist nationalism," a term first used by Maurice Barrès in 1898, but implicitly conceptualized e.g. in D'Annunzio's 1897 election speech.

<sup>9</sup> George Mosse credits D'Annunzio with the invention of a "national liturgy," in "The Poet and the Exercise of Political Power," *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Fertig, 1980), 89.

of art, presents the same characteristics of collage and synchronic juxtaposition of pre-existing materials of multiple origins as his literary works,<sup>10</sup> and constitutes what Barbara Spackman aptly defines “a house of citation.”<sup>11</sup> And yet, if we conceive of the villa as a representation of the cultural fabric of D’Annunzio’s imagined nationhood, we are led to wonder whether it could house any citizens other than D’Annunzio himself. His strategy of the composite and the cumulative, rather than being inclusive actually excludes virtually everyone but the author, resulting in an idiosyncratic manifestation that represents the most truly original element in the work of an endless imitator.

The paradoxical construction of “Il Vittoriale” highlights the many contradictions within D’Annunzio himself<sup>12</sup> and one could even argue that the space functions as a *mise en abîme* of D’Annunzio’s poetics. A modern cabinet of curiosities, the complex of “Il Vittoriale” can be viewed as an architectural distillation of D’Annunzio’s ethnically hybrid interests, aimed at fixing an impossibly restless image in monumental form. “Leda’s room” and the “Blue bathroom” contain more than two thousand objects, mostly of ‘oriental’ origin.

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<sup>10</sup> It is telling that the collective life of “Il Vittoriale” – its passing down to all “Italiani” and the inauguration of an open air Greek theater for instance – began only after D’Annunzio’s death in 1938. The theater was completed only in 1953 and has since then hosted a summer season of plays and concerts open to the public. Furthermore, the collective fruition of “Il Vittoriale,” rather than bearing the traits of a celebration of the Italian nation, is very much centered on the figure of D’Annunzio himself. Visits to the house and grounds are not a regular part of tourists’ visits to Italy, nor a central component of Italian national celebrations – rather they are carried out by students and readers of D’Annunzio’s works who want to learn more about the life and personality of the writer. The decision to change the name of the museum in 2011, from *Museo della guerra* to *D’Annunzio Eroee*, is symptomatic of the space’s function.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness From Baudelaire to D’Annunzio* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 35.

<sup>12</sup> I propose to add the main paradox highlighted within this chapter, namely that between nationalism and cosmopolitan posture, to the two contradictions highlighted by Jared M. Becker within D’Annunzio’s political and aesthetic ideology: its embrace of both of a return to the past and a passion for technology, modernity and industrial development and its fluctuation between a cult of masculinity and a homoerotic warrior ideal. See Jared M. Becker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 3.





Figure 1.1. Blue bathroom. Il Vittoriale, Gardone Riviera, Italy.

Valerio Terraroli. *Il Vittoriale. Percorsi simbolici e collezioni d'arte di Gabriele d'Annunzio*.  
Milano: Skira, 2001, 203.



The “room of relics,” for example, is dominated by two compositions in the form of a pyramid and an altar. The former is comprised of a series of statuettes including dragons, Confucius, and Buddhas, alongside various Catholic saints and crowned by a wooden statue of Madonna and child. The latter is covered in Baroque reliquaries and showcases at its center the crushed steering wheel of the boat in which D’Annunzio’s friend Sir Henry Segrave died during a race. Certainly this cumulative aesthetic and fascination with the ‘oriental’ attests to D’Annunzio’s participation in turn-of-the-century trends operating at a European level, as shown by comparing “Il Vittoriale” to other contemporary interiors, such as Sigmund Freud’s collection of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities. My claim, however, reaches beyond this observation, to the point of pinpointing in the accumulation of objects deriving from multiple geographical and historical sources one of the key processes in D’Annunzio’s literary creation as well as an ideological crux that pushes back against attempts at political and ethnic homogeneity in service to a nationalist agenda. As the close readings that make up the heart of this chapter will show, in his literary works D’Annunzio is negotiating between opposing ideals of citizenship – mixed ethnically versus pure – as well as Modernist art – cosmopolitan versus Rome-centric.



Figure 1.2. Room of relics, “Il Vittoriale,” Gardone Riviera, Italy.

Valerio Terraroli. *Il Vittoriale. Percorsi simbolici e collezioni d'arte di Gabriele d'Annunzio*. Milano: Skira, 2001, 163.

## Why D'Annunzio?

In the remaining sections of the chapter, I will attempt to unpack some of the paradoxes surrounding D'Annunzio's nationalist rhetoric alongside his assemblage of multiple traditions and cultures into an extremely individualistic and abstract construction. The chapter will focus on two of the most nationalist of his works, composed in different genres: *Il Fuoco* a novel published in 1900,<sup>13</sup> *La Nave* a theatrical *drama* first performed in 1908.<sup>14</sup>

Post-colonial theory, diaspora studies and migration studies have encouraged scholars to think about cultural identity as fluid, dynamic and in constant state of transformation, particularly in contact zones and globalized urban spaces. The last two decades have seen what has come to be known as the 'mobilities turn' in cultural and literary studies alike, although the field of Italian Studies is still dominated by a mononationalist perspective. Furthermore, Italian colonialism – the political phenomenon that fueled D'Annunzio's nationalism – has been marginalized within the colonial record, as scholars have recently noted,<sup>15</sup> in favor of narratives of an Italian "exceptionalism" which distinguished between the exploitative and abusive nature of other imperial enterprises and the essential humanity of Italian colonizers and their policies of 'demographic colonialization.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Quotations from the novel are taken from this edition: Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il Fuoco*, ed. Anco Marzio Mutterle (Milano: Mondadori, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Quotations from the play are taken from this edition: Gabriele D'Annunzio, *La Nave: tragedia* (Milano: Treves, 1919).

<sup>15</sup> See Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> See Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. (Rajeev Shridhar) Patke and Lars Jensen, *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and Its Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). In the early 1910s poet Giovanni Pascoli justified Italy's colonial enterprise in the name of lower-class emancipation, e.g. in the above-mentioned public speech "La grande proletaria si è mossa" (1911). This discourse was essentially an Italian variant of the

A transnational approach to culture and belonging, which stems from experiences of displacement, is of course suited to contexts marked by migration or colonial history, as I will demonstrate in chapter 3 in regard to Emanuel Carnevali. However, I argue here that it is not only beneficial but necessary when dealing with more canonical contexts and authors as well, such as the powerful and ‘centralized’ D’Annunzio. While considerations of cross-cultural and transcultural trajectories can be fruitful in any context, from the twentieth century onward, world wars, mass migrations, colonization and de-colonization, the explosion of global capitalism and communications render transnational considerations of literary production essential even and perhaps particularly in cases such as D’Annunzio’s in which the works themselves attempt to undermine the importance of the foreign. Recent developments in various fields of cultural studies have highlighted that contemporary history of Italian civilization cannot be understood “without a rigorous reconsideration of the influence of its outbound and inbound migrations as well as its colonial and imperial experience.”<sup>17</sup> The development of Mediterranean studies, documented by the inaugural issue of *California Italian Studies Journal* in 2010, has also contributed to a more complex understanding of Italian culture, in its ethnic, cultural and linguistic layers and crosspollinations. And while recent publications have begun to give historical depth to the ‘mobilities turn’ in scholarship on contemporary Italy, by looking back over the twentieth century in search of events and phenomena able to proleptically shed light on

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“social imperialist” idea, which was evolving in Italy and elsewhere in late nineteenth-century Europe, from an attempt to blend the socialist agenda and the colonialist idea. Antonio Labriola, perhaps the best-known Italian student of Marx and Engels, proposed a similar strategy for benefitting the Italian proletariat through the acquisition of foreign territories in 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Teresa Fiore, *Pre-Occupied Spaces. Remapping Italy’s Transnational Migrations and Colonial Legacies*, 4.



recent literary expressions of hybridity, translingualism and displacement,<sup>18</sup> this approach has not been sufficiently applied to literary studies, and certainly not to canonical early twentieth century authors.

Beginning a dissertation on transnationalism with a chapter on Gabriele D'Annunzio is of course in many ways a provocation. As the *poeta vate* of Italy, one of the major forces behind early-twentieth-century Italian nationalist propaganda, and the literary model that generations of marginalized authors would pit themselves against, D'Annunzio is not an obvious choice when seeking to trouble monolithic notions of the relationship between nation, identity, language and race. Compared to Italian American poet Emanuel Carnevali, Anglo German Italian Annie Vivanti, Italian exiled to Switzerland, England and the United States Amelia Pincherle Rosselli and even Egyptian-born French and Italian speaking F. T. Marinetti, Gabriele D'Annunzio's identity would seem to be quite unanimously linked to Italy, despite a period of exile in France. Nor would it be fair to make D'Annunzio the pre-Second World War poster child for cultural hybridity. At the same time, as I hope to show in this chapter, D'Annunzio absorbed and manipulated foreign traditions and cultural products, constructing an ideal nation, which he then ideologically framed as Italian at a time of aggressive ethnic nationalism. Taking my cue from Jahan Ramazani's *Transnational Poetics*, my research reconfigures displacement, cross-lingual and cross-cultural exchanges not "as exotic or marginal sideshows to literary histories of formal advancements or the growth of discrete national [literatures],"<sup>19</sup> but rather as some of the main motors of their evolution in the twentieth-century. Devoting serious scholarly attention to

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<sup>18</sup> See Pasquale Verdicchio, *Bound By Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2016); Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination*; Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*.

<sup>19</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 4.

D'Annunzio in this framework, proves him to be a key figure in understanding the development of Italian literature well into the twenty-first-century. Furthermore, beyond the Italian context, tackling such a paradoxical figure as D'Annunzio from this perspective serves to draw the realm of Italian literature into broader discussions, entering in conversation with Jessica Berman's studies on cultural hybridity and modernism, the debate on global modernism in which Rebecca Walkowitz, Eric Hayot, Susan Stanford Friedman and others have been active and the recent work on modernist internationalism by Aarthi Vadde, as well as current political debates made all the more urgent by rising waves of xenophobic nationalism.<sup>20</sup>

Rather than attempting the impossible feat of resolving all of D'Annunzio's contradictions, it is perhaps more fruitful to ask how D'Annunzio's problematic persona and, by extension, the peculiar case of Italian literature at the turn of the twentieth-century can help scholars in many fields understand phenomena such as the development and literary expression of nationalism, cultural hybridity, the development of forms of cultural appropriation, and pre- and post-imperial cosmopolitanism. Many of the inconsistencies within D'Annunzio's life and literary production can only be explained by virtue of what he perceived to be a 'sublimation' within which everything could coexist. But, I contend, the texts themselves thwart this attempted homogenization by revealing the resistance to assimilation of various residual elements that engender tension and ambiguity. The result is what I propose to call a "liminal posture" that blurs the lines between center and margin, local and extraterritorial.

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<sup>20</sup> See Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Eric Hayot and Rebecca Walkowitz, *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations On Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Aarthi Vadde, *Chimeras of Form: Modernist Internationalism Beyond Europe, 1914-2016* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

Discussions surrounding the building of defensive walls along borders, countries exiting the European Union, and the status and assimilability of migrants and refugees make the paradoxical figure of Gabriele D'Annunzio eerily current. The transnational breadth of his writing anticipates many modes of expression that characterize literary production today. His construction of what I argue to be an ideal cultural nation which is *de facto* without territory also foregrounds modes of belonging that are increasingly taking the place of traditional nationalist conceptions, such as those of the so-called "Erasmus generation" of European millennials, or supranational sub-cultures based largely on shared values and tastes to which members of the Facebook generation belong. Nevertheless, scholarship devoted to the study of D'Annunzio's works has been scarce for the last twenty-five years, due in part to the lack of consensus around the tenet of an Italian "Modernism"<sup>21</sup> that would open up the Italian context to broader literary discussions. The last comprehensive works devoted to D'Annunzio were published in the wake of the 1993 celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the author's death. Among them are Paolo Valesio's *The Dark Flame* and Renato Barilli's *D'Annunzio in prosa*, both of which shore up a representation of D'Annunzio's modernity from a linguistic and formal perspective.<sup>22</sup> Since then, the majority of studies devoted exclusively to D'Annunzio have centered on his linguistic innovations<sup>23</sup> and his personal life.<sup>24</sup> A notable exception are two recent books by Andrea

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<sup>21</sup> See Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni, eds., *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture between Decadentism and Avant-garde* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Guido Guglielmi, *L'invenzione della letteratura: Modernismo e Avanguardia* (Napoli: Liguori, 2001); Romano Luperini and Massimo Tortora, eds., *Sul modernismo italiano* (Napoli: Liguori, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Paolo Valesio, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: The Dark Flame* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Renato Barilli, *D'Annunzio in prosa* (Milano: Mursia, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Maurizio Vitale, *La scienza delle parole: la lingua del Fuoco e della Città Morta di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milano, Italia: Ledizioni, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> See Annamaria Andreoli, *Il vivere inimitabile: Vita di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000) and *Più che l'amore: Eleonora Duse e Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Venezia:

Mirabile – *Ezra Pound e l'Arte Italiana: fra le Avanguardie e D'Annunzio* and *Multimedia Archaeologies. Gabriele D'Annunzio, Belle Époque Paris, and the Total Work of Art* – which situate D'Annunzio within a broader context of cross-cultural trajectories.<sup>25</sup> For the most part, scholars who tackle D'Annunzio's numerous relationships to foreign authors, whether direct or mediated by literary antecedents, do so by exploring influences bidirectionally.<sup>26</sup> While invaluable in the philological accuracy with which studies such as these trace linear relations between D'Annunzio and specific foreign authors or national literatures, none of these studies challenge a fundamentally mononationalist approach to D'Annunzio, marshaling their findings in support of a depiction of him as an intellectual 'on the threshold,' as I claim him to be in this chapter. Overall, interest in D'Annunzio has been limited to the field of Italian studies, and particularly to Italian scholars. Recent English-language essays on his work are few and far between – proof and at the same time cause of the fact that his work is not accounted for in broader cultural, political and literary discourses. The notable exceptions – such as Laura Wittman's *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning and the Invention of the Mystical Bodies*<sup>27</sup> – attest to the capaciousness and generativity of scholarship that engages with D'Annunzio across disciplinary boundaries.

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Marsilio, 2017); Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *The Pike: D'Annunzio. Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Andrea Mirabile, *Multimedia Archaeologies: Gabriele D'Annunzio, Belle Époque Paris, and the Total Artwork* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2014) and *Ezra Pound e l'arte italiana: fra le avanguardie e D'Annunzio* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> See Guy Tosi, *D'Annunzio e la cultura francese: Saggi e studi (1942-1987)*, ed. Maddalena Rasera (Lanciano: R. Carabba, 2013); Emanuela Scicchitano, *Io, ultimo figlio degli Elleni: la greccità impura di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Pisa: ETS, 2011). This trend appears to have been inaugurated by the conference proceedings *D'Annunzio e il Simbolismo europeo* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1976) edited by Emilio Mariano, in which each essay compares D'Annunzio to a specific foreign author or movement.

<sup>27</sup> Laura Wittman, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2011).



Undoubtedly, D'Annunzio's xenophobia and misogyny play a part in scholars' reticence toward him, despite the fact that contemporary political and social debates are rendering these phenomena increasingly widespread and thus in need of critical attention. These traits, coupled with emphatic diction, baroque stylistic mannerisms and convoluted sentence structure can easily explain why D'Annunzio is not currently a popular subject in Italian literary scholarship. However, at a textual level, his work also enables a historically deep and nuanced consideration of contemporary literary phenomena. His narratives set on the borders of Italy, which conjure images of colonial expansion and political aggression, help frame some of the most pressing questions scholars of twenty-first-century Italian literature face, such as: what does it mean to write Italian literature, in a culture defined by border crossing, displacement, migrations, regional differences? D'Annunzio's production also highlights Italy's uniqueness as nation whose very establishment rests on the stitching together of a diverse regional texture, whose diaspora is the largest emigration from any country,<sup>28</sup> and which is now at the forefront of the so-called "migration emergency" from North Africa to Europe. Consideration of his work thus goes far beyond the scope of Italian Studies.

### **A Web of Influences**

Since the very first assessments of D'Annunzio, scholars have highlighted the influence of foreign movements on one or the other of his works, and written essays on D'Annunzio and

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<sup>28</sup> See Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne Sinke, *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

Goethe,<sup>29</sup> D'Annunzio and von Hoffmannsthal,<sup>30</sup> D'Annunzio and Nietzsche,<sup>31</sup> D'Annunzio and French Symbolism and many others.<sup>32</sup> However, a brief glance at the various phases of D'Annunzio's literary production show him to be firmly situated within a transnational web of reciprocal literary, philosophical, artistic and political influences, rather than engaged in linear relationships with specific foreign authors. Cultural trajectories are so intricate that they are virtually impossible to trace.

Even Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* – the Italian artwork *par excellence* – which functions as aesthetic model in *Il Piacere* and lead character in the 1898 play *Gioconda*, is actually re-interpreted through the Anglo-French *cliché* of the *femme fatale*. Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) had definitively sanctioned Leonardo's enigmatic *Gioconda* as the ultimate *femme fatale* in the 1880s and D'Annunzio's characterization of his own *Gioconda* – who in the play is the model for the sculptor Lucio Settala – follows closely Pater's description of the constantly variable beauty of Leonardo's model.<sup>33</sup> Another source for the female figure is the protagonist of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Aglavaine et Sélysette*. At the end of the play, a quote from Homer applies the elderly Trojans' comments about Elena to

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<sup>29</sup> Srecko Jurisic, "D'Annunzio e il mito moderno. La riscrittura del mito di Faust," *Critica Letteraria*, 144 (2009): 441-454.

<sup>30</sup> Sandra Kremon, "Venezia nel racconto europeo dei primi del novecento (Gabriele D'Annunzio/Hugo von Hofmannsthal)," in *Simbologie e scritture in transito*, ed. Vanessa Castagna and Vera Horn (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2016): 205-216.

<sup>31</sup> See Francesco Piga, *Il mito del superuomo in Nietzsche e D'Annunzio* (Firenze: Nuovedizioni E. Vallecchi, 1979); Emilio, Mariano, "La genesi del Trionfo della Morte e Friedrich Nietzsche," in *Trionfo della morte. Atti del III Convegno Internazionale di studi dannunziani*, ed. Edoardo Tiboni and Luigia Abrugiati (Pescara: Centro nazionale di studi dannunziani, 1983): 143-94; Marja Härmänmaa, "Anatomy of the Superman: Gabriele D'Annunzio's Response to Nietzsche," *The European Legacy* 24, no. 1 (2019): 59-75.

<sup>32</sup> Piero Bigongiari, *La voce e il silenzio figurato: Rimbaud, Valéry, D'Annunzio* (Cernusco sul Naviglio: Severgnini, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> A heavily marked up copy of a 1917 French translation of Pater's text by Roger-Cornaz (Paris, Payot et C.ie) preserved at "Il Vittoriale" bears witness to D'Annunzio's interest in the work.

the aestheticist thesis of the supremacy of beauty over every other logic: “è giusto che i Troiani e gli Achei da’ bei schinieri patiscano tanti mali e da sì gran tempo, a cagione di una tal donna; perocché ella somiglia in sua bellezza alle iddie immortali.”<sup>34</sup> Rather than viewing the many references to French authors as a direct tribute to the modern nation, the Homeric quote places them within the context of an overarching classical and Western-European tradition. In this perspective, French and Italian manifestations are complementary rather than antithetical, in the wake of the Latin Renaissance movement to which D’Annunzio subscribed in the 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>35</sup> D’Annunzio saw a possibility for renewal of Rome’s greatness in the restoration of its past, comprising both classical antiquity and the Renaissance. To this end, he and the other supporters of the Latin Renaissance advocated an alliance of Latin cultures against the ‘barbaric’ influence of Germanic populaces. Italy’s – and specifically Rome’s – heroic past was thus viewed as an antidote to what was judged as a grey, modern, petty bourgeois society. At this stage, therefore, D’Annunzio’s envisioned country surpassed the boundaries of the Italian nation, looking at France as more than a fraternal ally, and projecting the confines of his ideal country beyond modern national contours, ideally coinciding in the future with the boundaries of the Roman empire – thus justifying colonial enterprises not as wars of conquest but as the rightful re-gaining of lost lands.

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<sup>34</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *La Gioconda: tragedia* (Milano: Treves, 1910), 221.

“It is not a matter of blame that the Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans should suffer agonies for so long over such a woman; she is terribly like the immortal goddesses to look on.” Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Anthony Verity, Book 3, vv. 156-158 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46.

<sup>35</sup> This concept had been formulated in an 1895 article by Eugène-Melchior De Vogüé published in *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In February of the same year, a “Nota sul ‘Rinascimento Latino’” appeared in *Convito*, signed by Lauro De Bosis but likely written by D’Annunzio himself. Formulations and references to the concept riddle D’Annunzio’s work in the late 1890s and into the early 1910s. The poem “La canzone di Elena di Francia,” contained in *Merope*, book four of *Laudi*, explicitly mentions the “gran patto latino” by which France is Italy’s “unica sorella.” Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Merope* (Milano, Treves, 1915), 104.

In his best-known poetic endeavor – the first three books of *Le Laudi* project: *Maia*, *Elettra* and *Alcyone* (1903-1906) – D’Annunzio saturates the literary space by accumulating multiple modes of expression drawn from epic, tragedy, political oratory, the lyric, the eclogue and so forth. The poet shifts virtuosically between different registers, in imitation of pre-existing works taken from various locations and time periods with no regard for philological accuracy or historical verisimilitude. His stylistic metamorphosis is certainly functional to dazzling the audience and achieving success<sup>36</sup> and has been pointed out extensively as a ‘Decadent’ trait. It could be said as well that his idea of art as imitation or recreation draws upon the classical tradition of *imitatio aemulatio* in which many of his most classicist texts fall. *Alcyone*, in particular, draws upon lyrical poetry of Greek and Latin antiquity both from a thematic perspective and in structural and stylistic terms. The poet transposes modern and individual experiences into mythical terms. In “Ditirambo II,” the poet himself embodies the role of Glaucus, god of the sea, who is grieving the loss of his divine nature. In “Ditirambo IV,” we find the *Übermensch* appears to have taken on the role of Icarus, mediated though Dante’s depiction of Ulysses. D’Annunzio’s mythopoesis also invests elements of the Tuscan town of Versilia, such as Versilia herself, a nymph living in the trunk of a pine tree, and Undulna, born from the waves of the sea. Of course, the description of geographical and natural elements through the lens of artistic antecedents is part of an aestheticist conception – to which D’Annunzio subscribed at this point in his career – of artifice as superior to the unfiltered expression of nature to which

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<sup>36</sup> See letter to Hérèlle, dated July 9, 1896. “Io sono sicuro di poter *étonner* il pubblico ancora per parecchi anni. La mia facoltà di metamorfosi è prodigiosa. Il segreto è tutto qui. Io darò sempre non quel che è *atteso*, ma quel che è *inatteso*; e riuscirò sempre a turbare, a irritare o a trascinare una parte della moltitudine.” Gabriele D’Annunzio and Georges Hérèlle, *Carteggio D’Annunzio-Hérèlle (1891-1931)* (Lanciano: R. Carabba, 2004), 407. “I am sure that I will be able to *étonner* (astonish) the public for several years. My capacity for metamorphosous is astounding. That is all it takes. I will always give them not what is expected, but what is unexpected; and I will always manage to unsettle, irritate or attract part of the crowd.” Translation is mine.

naturalists and the young D'Annunzio of *Primo Vere* (1879) had aspired. That these antecedents are classical and drawn in equal measure from Greek and Latin sources inscribes *Alcyone* within a Mediterranean framework that is inherently syncretic. His approach to the classics is also filtered through a broad prism of European voices, including Rilke, Baudelaire, Wilde, Rimbaud, von Hoffmannsthal, Goethe and many others.

D'Annunzio had emerged onto the literary scene in the early 1880s with a series of poems and short stories describing peasant life in his native region of Abruzzo, in the style of contemporary *Veristi*, reminiscent of Zola and other French Naturalists. Between 1881 and 1891, he lived in Rome, where he was well-known as chronicler of the city's upper-class society and participated in the 'Decadent' aesthetics upheld by artists gathered around Angelo Sommaruga's journal *Cronaca Bizantina*. In 1888, he completed the novel *Il Piacere*, widely regarded as an Italian version of Huysman's novel-manifesto for aestheticism, *À Rebours* (1884).<sup>37</sup> Other foreign works directly cited or implicitly present in the work – by Schopenhauer, Wilde, Shelley and others – were known to the author through their French translations. At this stage, French literature as a whole provided D'Annunzio with most of the coordinates for his narrativization of the upper middle-class Roman life: *Idées et sensations* (1866) by the Goncourt brothers, *Fragments d'un journal intime* (1884) by Henri-Frédéric Amiel, *Initiation sentimentale* (1887) by Joséphin Péladan, and Paul Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883).

In the winter of 1891 he met French Italianist Georges Hérelle, who would soon become his translator, enabling him to achieve great success among the French public. This proved all the more useful given the scandalized response of most Italians to his novels *Giovanni Episcopo* (1891) and especially *L'Innocente* (1892) and the simultaneous increase of D'Annunzio's

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<sup>37</sup> Critics have also noted the ideological and stylistic differences between the works. See Ilvano Caliaro, *D'Annunzio lettore e scrittore* (Firenze: Olshki, 1991).

financial debts, which would soon lead him to France in a self-inflicted ‘exile.’ Through a series of essays published in the Neapolitan newspaper *Il Mattino*, the author began his counterattack against Italian critics and moral censors of his work – first and foremost writer Luigi Capuana. His articles gradually came to constitute a full-fledged theoretical exposition of the principles of the modern novel as opposed to the naturalist novel or *romanzo verista* such as Capuana was famous for and with which D’Annunzio himself had begun his literary career. Elements of his proposed innovation came from the *littérature wagnérienne* and its French adaptations. D’Annunzio’s epistolary exchanges with Hérèlle show him to have kept himself updated on the most recent developments in both French and German culture from his villa in Naples. Besides mentioning articles in Paris-based newspapers and journals, D’Annunzio discussed his own readings of Bourget, Carlyle, Wilde, Pater, Emerson, Barrès and others with his French translator. From an intellectual perspective, he found his most active interlocutors outside of Italy, where he faced harsh criticism for his ‘borrowings’ from other authors, his non-conforming romantic attachments, extravagant social life, and biting political interventions. His success abroad and particularly in France served as a motivating force against the colder Italian reception, in the same way as F. T. Marinetti would rely on the French reception of *Mafarka le futuriste* to defend the novel from accusations of indecency in Italy.

In 1892, he moved to Naples and began collaborations with other intellectuals gathered around Adolfo De Bosis’s journal *Convito*. Rather than a retreat into a regional and provincial setting, D’Annunzio’s transfer from Rome to Naples actually signified the entrance into a highly cosmopolitan city. This supranational outlook translated into the awareness of facing “the old soul of Europe” – one that was not merely Italian and that was characterized by common features deriving from its Christian past. The lens through which to view this decrepit society – made up

at the very least of all of Western Europe – was provided to him for the most part by non-Italian thinkers, most of whom belong to what D’Annunzio will come to define as the “Teutonic race”: Nietzsche, Wagner, Goethe, as well as Schopenhauer. D’Annunzio’s reading of Nietzsche – whom he claimed to have ‘discovered’ within Italy– also bears traces of Darwin’s evolutionism<sup>38</sup> and of Dostoevskij, as shown by the representation of the existence of Andrea Sperelli (the protagonist of the bestselling novel *Il Piacere*) as inevitable struggle for survival.

Layman expositions of the *Übermensch* ideal, after which D’Annunzio modeled his own life, can be found in several of D’Annunzio’s works from the Neapolitan period, with explicit references to Goethe as well as Nietzsche himself. In *Trionfo della morte* (1894), the narrator states of Giorgio Aurispa: “Il verbo di Zarathustra, del Maestro che insegnava il Superuomo goethiano, gli pareva il più virile e il più nobile che fosse mai stato proferito da un poeta e da un filosofo nell’età moderna.”<sup>39</sup> The reason attributed to Aurispa for this fascination is the same D’Annunzio claims for himself in many of his personal essays and letters, namely the direct opposition against late-nineteenth century middle-class society and its alleged pettiness. The outlook of Claudio Cantelmo, the main character of the 1895 novel *Vergini delle rocce*, is expressed in terminology reminiscent of both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer: “Il mondo è la rappresentazione della sensibilità e del pensiero di pochi uomini superiori, i quali lo hanno creato e quindi ampliato nel corso del tempo.”<sup>40</sup> Nor was D’Annunzio’s relationship with European artistic and intellectual life monodirectional. No other Italian author provoked more reaction abroad at the

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<sup>38</sup> It is likely that D’Annunzio had read the monograph *Caro Darwin*, by Michele Lessona, published in 1883 by the editor Sommaruga, friend and collaborator of D’Annunzio. Between 1881 and 1883, Lessona also edited a series on Evolutionism titled “Storia poco naturale” for the journal *Cronaca Bizantina*, which D’Annunzio himself would publish between 1885 and 1886.

<sup>39</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Il trionfo della morte* (Milano: Treves, 1903), 378.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Le vergini delle rocce* (Milano: Treves, 1900), 28.

turn of the century. He was read, sometimes imitated, and other times criticized<sup>41</sup> by a host of European literary figures, such as Henry James, Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, James Joyce and Thomas Mann.

One might say that to give theoretical substance to his own philosophical intuitions as well as to find formal and stylistic artistic models beyond conventional modes of realism, D'Annunzio felt compelled to look abroad, as generations of artists had done for centuries before him. What makes this constant reach beyond the borders problematic is its coupling with his aggressive nationalist and in many ways proto-fascist discourse against the contamination of race. Between 1892 and 1893 he launched a nationalistic battle in defense of Italy's artistic patrimony, threatened by bad government. The term D'Annunzio used in his attack of those in charge of fostering Italy's artistic conservation and development is a highly loaded one: *nuovi barbari* (new barbarians). Ironically, at the very same time as he was developing – and *de facto* importing – a Symbolist poetics and proclaiming himself the champion of culture and artistic sensitivity, he was accusing the leaders of his own country of lack of refinement, taste and erudition by calling them barbarians, etymologically those who did not speak Greek and thus were irredeemably foreigners. On one hand, then, D'Annunzio is subscribing to the age-old equation of foreign and uncouth; on the other he is implicitly locating the source of modern art and culture beyond the Alps, while at the same time elaborating a nationalistic ideal based on Italy's ancient history, as documented in his *Elegie romane*. Elsewhere, he uses the term *beoti* in a similar way, again employing a word of Greek origin that referred to those who did not speak the language correctly, as they resided in Boeotia and not in Attica: “Mi par già lontanissimo il

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<sup>41</sup> While Henry James's reservations (as expressed in an article published in *The Quarterly Review* in 1904) were primarily aesthetic in nature – given his uneasiness with what he perceived as “bad taste” – Thomas Mann and André Gide both expressed consternation over D'Annunzio's treacherously beguiling “politics of aestheticism.”



tempo in cui . . . conducevo qualche impresa efficace contro i beoti, per la dignità dell'arte, pel rispetto di una grande memoria, pel trionfo di un'idea nuova.”<sup>42</sup> D'Annunzio's political nationalism grew during his years in Florence (1894-1904) and France (1910-1915), culminating in his participation in the First World War – during which he organized the “Flight over Vienna,” among other airborne missions – and the “Fiume expedition,” a fifteen-month occupation starting on September 12, 1919. The “Regency of Carnaro,” as it was named, ended on September 12, 1920 with the Rapallo treaty by which both the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes agreed to acknowledge “the complete freedom and independence of the State of Fiume and oblige to respect it in perpetuity” (art. 4). The army of the Kingdom of Italy expelled D'Annunzio and his military forces in the so-called “Bloody Christmas” (December 24 to 30 1920), after his refusal to acknowledge the agreement.<sup>43</sup>

Colonial expansion and the assignment to Italy of the so-called *terre irredente* on the Northeastern border were the main focus of D'Annunzio's nationalist efforts, as expressed in his public political oratory as well as his literary works. In the remaining sections of the chapter, I analyze two of such works, which share the paradoxical characteristic of being set in Venice or thereabouts. While the choice of situating the events of nationalist or proto-nationalist fictions near a contested border is exploited in the direction of affirmation of ethnic and cultural superiority in the case of *Il Fuoco* and aggressive imperialism in that of *La Nave*, the decentered setting of the works effectively opens them up to phenomena of ethnic syncretism and cultural

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<sup>42</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, “Preambolo,” *Tribuna* (June 7, 1893). “It seems long ago that I conducted several ventures against these Beotians, for the sake of the dignity of art, the respect of a great momoery, the triumph of a new idea.” Translation is mine.

<sup>43</sup> The fate of Fiume remained contested, alternately occupied and claimed once more by both kingdoms as well as internal parties, until 1947 when the Paris Treaty assigned it to Yugoslavia.

absorption.<sup>44</sup> Both texts can be read as case studies of D'Annunzio's negotiation between the cosmopolitan and the monolithic in both political and aesthetic terms.

## Il Fuoco

In 1900, D'Annunzio published a novel set in then present-day Venice titled *Il Fuoco* (Fire; or The Flame).<sup>45</sup> At the time of its lengthy composition, D'Annunzio had just met, in Venice, Eleonora Duse, who would famously become his lover amid the attention of Italy's burgeoning celebrity culture. The relationship with Duse strengthened his own interest in the theater as literary medium with strong ritualistic and political potential. With his plans for rejuvenating Italian theater, D'Annunzio was aligning himself to a broader trend of theater reform among European Modernists, including not just Wagner but Hofmannsthal, Claudel, Artaud and Brecht. While not as explicitly a nationalist work as *La Nave*, nor a play in itself, *Il Fuoco* narratively expresses D'Annunzio's projects for reforming Italian theater and also the author's highest ideal, at the time of its publication, for the modern novel in its most developed form.

It is paradoxical, then, that *Il Fuoco* is a *romanzo veneziano*,<sup>46</sup> situated on the threshold of Italy's Eastern border, rather than securely planted at the core of the Italian nation to which D'Annunzio meant to deliver his new art. The novel itself gestures toward this more logical

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<sup>44</sup> Fernando Ortiz's famous concept of "transculturation" is a helpful synthesis of the inevitably bi-directional influence that occurs in border territories. See Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> All quotations from this text are drawn from this edition: Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il Fuoco*, ed. Anco Marzio Mutterle (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1967).

<sup>46</sup> This is how D'Annunzio refers to it in correspondence from the years of the novel's composition.

choice by referring multiple times to the ongoing construction of a new theater – modeled after Wagner’s *Bayreuth* – on “il Gianicolo . . . colle romano”<sup>47</sup> (85): “Il teatro d’Apollo, che s’alza rapidamente sul Gianicolo dove un tempo scendevano le aquile a portare i presagi . . . la rivelazione monumentale dell’idea verso di cui la nostra stirpe è condotta dal suo genio” (93).<sup>48</sup> The theater is the narrative transposition of a real life project conceived by D’Annunzio for a new open theater on Lake Albano, which was never built. Towards the end of the novel, having conceived every aspect of his work of art, including “l’edifizio nascente”<sup>49</sup> (280) in a Symbolist dream-vision of sorts, the protagonist claims: “Per questo andrò forse a Roma . . . Credo che la mia presenza a Roma per alcuni giorni sia necessaria anche a impedire qualche errore nella costruzione del Teatro” (281).<sup>50</sup>

The building of the Italian “Teatro di Festa” at the heart of Italy’s capital is displaced outside of the text, as is, for the most part, Donatella Arvale, the singer who will take Foscarina’s place as the young, vigorous muse of the genius composer Stelio Effrena – one of D’Annunzio’s many fictional *alter egos* – and who is said to be assisting her ailing father in Tuscany for the majority of the novel. What does appear front and center is the relationship between Stelio and Foscarina, enmeshed in the development of Stelio’s artistic composition: a new theatrical *drama* modeled after Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but in which music is the driving force. The project, of course, mirrors D’Annunzio’s own ambitions, which he is able to achieve fully through the

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<sup>47</sup> “The Janiculum . . . a Roman hill” (110). All translations of this novel are drawn from this edition: Gabriele D’Annunzio, *The Flame of Life*, trans. Cassandra Vivaria (Boston: L. C. Paige and Co., 1900).

<sup>48</sup> “The theater of Apollo which is rapidly rising on the Janiculum, where once the eagles descended with their prophecies, must be no other than the monumental revelation of the idea toward which our race is led by its genius” (121).

<sup>49</sup> “The rising building” (376).

<sup>50</sup> “I shall perhaps go to Rome for this . . . I think my presence in Rome for a few days is necessary also in order to avoid some error in the construction of the Theatre” (377).

fictional character of Stelio, who, unlike D'Annunzio himself, is also a musician and composer.<sup>51</sup> Eleonora Duse was most likely the inspiration behind the Venetian setting of *Il Fuoco*, since she resided for years in the “Palazzo Barbaro Wolkoff.” As I will argue over the course of this paragraph, the character of Foscarina and the city of Venice are in many ways interlaced in the novel, as sites of hybridity and symbols of cosmopolitanism – concepts that D'Annunzio had been wrestling with since his time in Rome and then Naples, well before his French ‘exile.’

D'Annunzio also defined *Il Fuoco* as a *romanzo wagneriano*, not only because it celebrates, within the broader narrative of the love triangle, the creative genius of Richard Wagner, but also because Wagner's work functions as compositional model for its “prosa plastica e sinfonica.”<sup>52</sup> “Il Vittoriale” contains more than one hundred volumes by or on Richard Wagner, many of which are underlined. The German composer influenced D'Annunzio both for his conceptual synthesis of different art forms and for his compositional technique. In *Il Fuoco*, key sentences are woven throughout the work like *Leimotifs*, both structuring the text by way of a skeleton of repetitions and emphasizing claims that support the novel's function as treatise on art. For example, variations of “La mia tragedia è il combattimento”<sup>53</sup> (259) and “La mia opera è d'invenzione totale. Io non debbo e non voglio obbedire se non al mio istinto e al genio della mia stirpe”<sup>54</sup> (277-278) recur throughout the novel. The result is a symphonic structure of themes and variations that is meant to enhance the musical effects of the prose and results in a weighty texture reminiscent of Venice's baroque ornamentation and Byzantine tapestries. Furthermore,

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<sup>51</sup> D'Annunzio expressed a strong interest in music during his entire life, and would cultivate friendships with celebrated musicians and composers of the time, such as Claude Debussy, but lived the life of a musician only vicariously, through his protagonists. See Paola Sorge, *Musica e musicisti nell'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Lanciano: Carabba, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> See Angelo Piero Cappello, *Come leggere Il Fuoco di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milano: Mursia, 1997), 31.

<sup>53</sup> “My tragedy is a battle” (348).

<sup>54</sup> “I shall invent a new form, obeying my instinct and the genius of my race only” (201).

the main characters are often introduced by repeated epithets, such as Foscarina “non più giovane” and Stelio “l’Imaginifico.”<sup>55</sup> This device functions also as reproduction of a typically ancient Greek mode – albeit more suited to epic than to tragedy.

While I will propose to read *La Nave* as a site of East-West negotiation, I contend that *Il Fuoco* stages D’Annunzio’s engagement with Northern, Germanic or, as he referred to it – ‘Teutonic’ – artistic practice and his attempt transfer what he acknowledged to be the richest, most refined and complex artistic expression of his time to a Latinate context. The novel performs a tribute to Wagner and the ‘Barbaric spirit’ and at the same time reaffirms the preeminence of the Latin genius, embodied by the lone artist-hero with whom D’Annunzio identified. Through the novel, D’Annunzio theorizes and stages a reverse *translatio imperii* of artistic production, in which the *imperium* of art is transferred back from the German context (the modern day Holy Roman Empire) to its rightful seat of Italy (the modern day Roman Empire). Much of what he attributes to Wagner, Nietzsche and other German artists is precisely their superiority – at least until that point – in recreating Greek tragedy and ushering classical antiquity as a whole into the modern age. This strikes D’Annunzio as a tremendous disgrace, which must be rectified, given the linear connection between Graeco-Roman antiquity and the “genio della stirpe” that is now Italian. D’Annunzio is also intervening in the international controversy of the 1890s surrounding the alleged ‘degeneration of the Latin race’ – a debate spurred by French occultist writer Joséphin Péladan, author of *La décadance latine* (1892). While Péladan took melancholy satisfaction in the signs of cultural decline, Stelio’s speech shows D’Annunzio’s response to have been quite the opposite.

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<sup>55</sup> D’Annunzio would himself adopt the latter as personal moniker.

The first of the two sections of the novel, titled “L’epifania del Fuoco,” resembles a philosophical dialogue in which the characters, of different social and ethnic backgrounds, debate the characteristics of the ideal drama, the role of Wagner in modern theatrical developments, and the primacy of the Latin genius in European literary culture. The novel opens with Stelio Effrena’s preparation for a public speech, meant to signal the beginning of the process of revivification of art, as expressed in classical antiquity: “Io ho veramente rinnovellato un antico mito trasfondendomi, con una maniera ideale e significatrice, in una forma della Natura eterna”<sup>56</sup> (15). The speech occurs at the closing ceremony of the first International Exposition of Art in 1895, a precursor to the contemporary “Biennale di Venezia,” signifying both the nationalistic thrust of his engagement and the international stage on which he believed himself to be operating. The rest of the section is devoted to the dialogue that occurs during the performance of Claudio Monteverdi’s “Lamento di Arianna,” sung by Donatella Arvale. Several of the characters involved disappear after the discussion, which remains somewhat autonomous from the main plot and could easily be extrapolated as a theoretical piece of writing.

Although the dialogue celebrates the superiority of Latin over Germanic art, the text itself produces an ultimate ambiguity. The dialogic form embodies the very aesthetic filiation that is being debated, harkening back to the shared European background of classical Platonic philosophy, through the markedly Italian channel of the Renaissance courtly dialogue, which is evoked implicitly through some of the characters’ names. Baldassare Stampa, in particular, is a compound of Baldassar Castiglione and Gaspara Stampa, representatives of Renaissance thought and literature, whose main works were published in Venice. Through the dialogic form, the text

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<sup>56</sup> “I have truly renewed an antique myth by thus projecting myself into one of the forms of eternal Nature” (17).

expresses various points of view, strengthening over time the claim for Italian superiority, supported by Stelio himself:

L'opera di Riccardo Wagner . . . è fondata su lo spirito germanico, è d'essenza puramente settentrionale. . . Il suo drama non è se non il fiore supremo del genio d'una stirpe, non è se non il compendio straordinariamente efficace delle aspirazioni che affaticarono l'anima dei sinfoneti e dei poeti nazionali, dal Bach al Beethoven, dal Wieland al Goethe. Se voi imaginaste la sua opera su le rive del Mediterraneo, tra ai nostri chiari olive, tra i nostri lauri sveltiti, sotto la Gloria del cielo latino, la vedreste impallidire e dissolversi . . . Io annunzio l'avvento d'un'arte novella o rinnovellata che per la semplicità forte e sincera delle sue linee, per la sua grazia vigorosa, per l'ardore de' suoi spiriti, per la pura Potenza delle sue armonie, continui e coroni l'immenso edificio ideale della nostra stirpe eletta. Io mi glorio d'essere latino; e . . . riconosco un barbaro in ogni uomo di sangue diverso.<sup>57</sup> (85-86)

While admitting to the efficaciousness of Wagner's art as highest expression of the Germanic spirit and culmination of a trajectory that includes many great composers before him, through Stelio the text reaffirms the superiority of the Latin genius, and functions as manifesto for a Mediterranean response to Wagner. The description of the composition that listeners are called to imagine touches on the key features of Italian music at the time – linearity, grace, simple harmony – embodied by Claudio Monteverdi, who is praised shortly after: “Il divino Claudio

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<sup>57</sup> “The work of Richard Wagner . . . is founded on the German spirit, and its essence is purely northern . . . its drama is nothing if not the supreme flower of the genius of a race, the extraordinarily efficacious summing up of the aspirations that have burdened the soul of the symphonists and of the national poets from Bach to Beethoven, from Wieland to Goethe. If you could imagine his work on the shores of the Mediterranean, among our light olive-trees and our slender laurels, under the glory of the Latin sky, you would see it grow pale and dissolve . . . I announce the advent of a new and renewed art that by the powerful, sincere simplicity of its lines, by its vigorous grace, by the ardour of its spirit, by the pure force of its harmonies, shall continue and crown the immense ideal edifice of our elect race. I glory myself that I am a Latin, and . . . I see a barbarian in every man of different blood” (111).

Monteverde. Ecco un'anima eroica, di pura essenza italiana!"<sup>58</sup> (87). While the dialogue ends with the proclamation of the pro-Latin stance as victorious – "Basta, basta . . . Il barbaro è vinto!"<sup>59</sup> (87), the form itself of the dialogue does not allow for the complete disposal of the opposite point of view,<sup>60</sup> introduced by doubts that mobilize Stelio's patriotic statements: "Ma anch'egli, Riccardo Wagner, sviluppando il filo delle sue teorie, si parte dai Greci"<sup>61</sup> (86). Furthermore, the genius of Wagner is affirmed on the basis of direct experience, recounted by prince Hoditz, who has just returned from Bayreuth (the Bavarian town where Wagner is buried), which challenges the theoretical claims of those who did not witness the German performance firsthand. Finally, D'Annunzio's prose itself, with its luscious accumulation of detail and repetition, is mimetic of Wagnerian syntax and thus concedes to the Germanic in practice what it denies conceptually.

In addition to the claims put forth by the participants in the conversation, the text wrestles with the ethnic primacy of artistic inspiration through the experience of Stelio Effrena, who is the mouthpiece for renewal of the arts and particularly the theater akin to that envisioned by the Latin Renaissance. Venice's value is constantly shown to rest on the layering of its history, expressed visually by the art and décor of the "Palazzo dei Dogi." The text is in this sense in line with other European modernisms: nostalgic, while at the same time professing enthusiasm for the modern. Stelio exclaims: "Se io fossi vissuto al tempo in cui gli uomini disseppellendo i marmi

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<sup>58</sup> "The divine Claudio Monteverde. His was an heroic soul of pure Italian essence" (113).

<sup>59</sup> "Enough, enough! . . . the barbarian is conquered" (113).

<sup>60</sup> See Vittorio Hösle, *The Philosophical Dialogue. A Poetics and a Hermeneutics*, trans. Steven Rendall (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), specifically the chapter "The Problem of Authorial Intention."

<sup>61</sup> "But he, too, Richard Wagner, started from the Greeks in developing the thread of his theory" (111-112).



greci ritrovavano nella terra le ancor umide radici delle antiche favole”<sup>62</sup> (15). His desire is not to have lived in ancient Greece, but to have participated in the initial rediscovery of the past, when antiquity was idealized, aestheticized, and became a myth. Later on in the novel, when Stelio’s *drama* is summarized scene by scene as it manifests itself to him, the degrees of separation between artist and subject matter underscore the nostalgic sense of impossibility of recovering the past. The irretrievability of this heroic era is sanctioned by the fact that rather than conjuring the ancient hero himself, the character of Stelio describes Agamemnon through the eyes of the actor playing the protagonist. Even more strikingly, the Greek hero is dead even in this depiction. Yet, albeit through layers of artifice, an at least partial access to the past is presented as available in the present to “ogni uomo d’intelletto,” who can “oggi come sempre, nella vita creare la propria favola bella”<sup>63</sup> (15).

Language of renewal and regeneration permeates this passage, in which the artistic rejuvenation of Venice is meant to usher in a cultural and political renewal of Italy as a whole. Stelio claims that the artist must “restaurare il gusto tra la presente barbarie”<sup>64</sup> (3), alluding here both to the masses’ lack of artistic refinement and to the domination of Germanic influences, to which the character and text nevertheless pay tribute. The first section of the novel contains a long sequence in which Stelio hears for the first time the voice of Donatella Arvale singing Monteverdi’s “Lamento di Arianna.” As if awakened by the chorus, “tutta l’antica ebrietà dionisiaca pareva risorgere e diffondersi . . . come nell’inno orfico . . . come nell’inno omerico”<sup>65</sup> (67). The awaited regeneration is thus enacted thanks to an Italian composer, but consists in a

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<sup>62</sup> “If I had lived in the ages when the men who excavated the old Greek marbles used to find the roots of the ancient fables still moist in the earth” (17).

<sup>63</sup> “Every man of intellect [who] can, to-day as ever, create his own beautiful fable of life” (19).

<sup>64</sup> “Restoring taste in the midst of present barbarities” (54).

<sup>65</sup> “The old Dionysian intoxication seemed to revive and diffuse itself . . . as in the Orphean hymn . . . as in the Homeric hymn” (80).

present-day apparition of Greek myth: “Dioniso liberatore riappariva d’improvviso in conspetto degli uomini su le ali del canto . . . Le Menadi parevano gridar quivi”<sup>66</sup> (68). Like the opera by Benedetto Marcello discussed a few pages before, as the Italian counterpart to the genius of Wagner, Monteverdi’s music plants in Stelio the seed of his pursuit of the resurgence of ancient tragedy: “dal Ditirambo strepitoso la natività del Drama”<sup>67</sup> (65). His inspiration is described in terms of a nullification of time – “così, d’improvviso, nell’interno mondo dell’animatore si schiudevano le vie dei secoli prolungandosi per le lontananze dei miseri pimitivi. Quella forma dell’Arte . . . gli appariva nella santità delle sue origini”<sup>68</sup> (65). It is Donatella Arvale’s performance that enacts the transfiguration: “Era quello forse il divino pianto della Minoide protese invano le braccia deluse, dalla riva di Nasso deserta, verso l’Ospite favor? La favola vaniva, l’inganno del tempo era abolito”<sup>69</sup> (66). Even the vital force of Venice is traced back to the presence within it of “creature ideali,” the eternal works of art that “vivono in tutto il passato e in tutto il futuro,” making the city “sempre una Città di Vita”<sup>70</sup> (60) implicitly antagonistic to the Città Eterna. However, the simultaneity of past and present through the ritual of theater can also be understood in spatial terms. The audience of Arianna truly is transported to Crete and Nasso.

Such statements of regeneration are in stark opposition to the lagunar setting, Venice, as Stelio himself is made to acknowledge that “non è oggi considerata, dai più, se non come un

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<sup>66</sup> “Dionysius the liberator, suddenly reappeared before the face of man on the wings of song . . . The Mænads seemed to scream out here” (80).

<sup>67</sup> “It was the birth of the Drama from the noisy Dithyramb” (83).

<sup>68</sup> “Thus, suddenly in the inner world of the Life-giver the pathways of the centuries had opened up, and were stretching away into the distance of primitive mysteries. That form of art . . . appeared to him in all the sanctity of its origins” (84).

<sup>69</sup> “Was it indeed the divine weeping of the daughter of Minos as she held out her deluded arms to the Flavian guest from the deserted shore of Naxos? The fable vanished, abolishing the deception of time” (85).

<sup>70</sup> “Ideal creatures . . . live in the whole past and in the whole future . . . City of Life” (71).

grande reliquiario inerte o come un asilo di pace e d'oblio!"<sup>71</sup> (58). However, as Stelio contends, the image of Venice as deathlike is a false one, to be supplanted by that of a life-giving city:

In verità, io non conosco al mondo altro luogo – *se non Roma* – dove uno spirito gagliardo e ambizioso possa, meglio che su questa acqua torpida, attendere ad incitare la virtù attiva del suo intelletto e tutte quante le energie del suo essere verso il grado supremo. Io non conosco palude capace di provocare in polsi umani una febbre più violenta di quella che sentimmo dall'ombra di un canale taciturno . . . né . . . un'onda di sangue più fiera di quella . . . quando c'inchinammo a cercar troppo intently nell'acqua se per avventura ci si scorgesse in fondo qualche antica spada o qualche antico diadema.<sup>72</sup> (58)

While acknowledging that Venice is a swamp,<sup>73</sup> the character of Stelio identifies it as a source of creative energy both intellectual and active, at least for strapping and ambitious spirits, which he later opposes explicitly to the "anime gracili" to whom Venice appears to be "una clemente città di morte"<sup>74</sup> (58). The parenthetical exclusion "se non Roma" brings to the fore what I would describe as D'Annunzio's "liminal posture," gesturing as it does toward what would have been a more obvious choice. It would have been more straightforward, that is, for D'Annunzio to have his alter ego proclaim the birth of a new artistic phase in Latinate literature and performance

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<sup>71</sup> "Is only considered to-day, by the many, as a great inert shrine full of relics, or as a refuge full of peace and oblivion!" (68).

<sup>72</sup> "Indeed I know of no other place in the world – unless it be Rome – where an ambitious and robust spirit can spur on the active virtue of his intellect and all the energies of his being towards the supreme degree, better than on these sluggish waters. And I know of no marsh capable of provoking in human pulses a fever more violent than that which at times creeps towards us from the shadow of a silent canal. And . . . no wilder wave of blood . . . than . . . when we bend too intently over these waters, seeking lest by chance we should discover in the depths below them some ancient sword or old lost diadem" (68).

<sup>73</sup> The stagnant landscape of Venice had been framed as *paludisme* by French nationalist poet Maurice Barrès, to whom D'Annunzio would dedicate his Decadent play *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* in 1911.

<sup>74</sup> "Fragile souls . . . a clement city of death" (68-69).

from the central and homogeneous location of the capital of Italy, which had provided the setting for several successful previous novels. By situating his narrative manifesto on the periphery of the nation, D'Annunzio is signaling an outward movement of cultural, if not yet political, imperialism and, at the same time, acknowledging that the artistic developments he envisions are born out of the swampy soil of the threshold and the contamination of Germanic and Latin, as well as eastern and western, traditions. The city of Venice, because of its illustrious past born of the enmeshment of Latin and Byzantine influences – represented in the quotation above by the double image of ancient sword and diadem – functions as a locus of spiritual, moral and creative renewal:

Ah se io sapessi dire di che prodigiosa vita ella mi par palpitante . . . Ogni giorno ella assorbe la nostra anima. Ed ora ce la rende intatta e fresca e tutta nuova. . . Ella ci persuade ogni giorno l'atto che è la genesi stessa di nostra specie: lo sforzo di sorpassar sé medesimo, senza tregua . . . energia stimolatrice . . . c'insegna che il piacere è il più certo mezzo di conoscenza.<sup>75</sup> (59)

The city of water itself absorbs the souls of the young, energetic, virile creative geniuses of modern Italy and returns them purified and revitalized, ready to engage in their endeavors. The discourse is permeated with nationalist rhetoric, given the characterization of the “elect” able to benefit from the “Venice effect” as part of the “*stirpe*” (64). It is of course ironic that the endeavor be framed in decidedly Nietzschean terms.

The novel's descriptions of Venice, however, play into the traditional representation of the city – such as Marinetti would mock in his 1910 manifesto “*Contro Venezia passatista*” –

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<sup>75</sup> “Ah if I could only show you the prodigious life that I see throbbing [in her] . . . Day by day she absorbs more of our soul: now giving it back to us intact and fresh . . . She entices each of us into the act that is the very genesis of our species: the effort to surpass ourselves unceasingly . . . stimulating energies . . . she teaches us that joy is the most certain means of knowledge” (69).

relying primarily on a melancholic mode generated among other things by the frequent mentions of death and decay, including Richard Wagner's passing and the aging Foscarina herself. Stelio recalls having composed an "Allegoria dell'Autunno" – thus subscribing to the autumnal image of Venice filtered through foreign representations such as Hippolyte Taine's in *Voyage en Italie*. In his poem, which he wrote as a young man in Venice, Dionysus resembling "un principe del Veronese" was depicted "nell'atto di migrare" – literally migrating to Venice: "la Città anadiomene dalle braccia di marmo e dalle mille cinture verdi"<sup>76</sup> (21).

The Dionysian character of the city is highlighted throughout the text. Although Stelio deplores the city's conflation with a "grande reliquario inerte," "asilo di pace e d'oblio"<sup>77</sup> (58), many descriptions fit this definition, particularly in the second section of the novel. The lengthy episode of Stelio and Foscarina's walk among the statues and the comparison of many of the city's buildings to ruins are striking examples. The long dialogue between the two is set during the "estate dei morti"<sup>78</sup> (170) and the word "malinconia" is repeated several times. Even the greyhounds in the abandoned palace belonging to the aging countess of Glanegg are "gravi e tristi"<sup>79</sup> (171). The primary function of these images of decay and desolation is of course that to highlight and objectify Foscarina's old age, which emerges as the main obstacle to the continuation of her romantic engagement with Stelio as well as to her role as muse. The section devoted to Stelio's musical inspiration is framed as a vision of the discovery of the tombs of Mycenaean warriors, which Heinrich Schliemann had carried out six years prior to the composition of *Il Fuoco*. Thanks to this vision, Stelio enacts the desired transposition of this

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<sup>76</sup> "Like one of Veronese's princes . . . about to migrate to the sea-city with arms of marble and the thousand girdles of green" (25).

<sup>77</sup> "A great inert shrine full of relics . . . a refuge full of peace and oblivion" (68).

<sup>78</sup> "Dead summer" (231).

<sup>79</sup> "Heavy and sad" (230).

event out of the bourgeois Middle European setting and into the aestheticizing creative genius of a Latin spirit:

Hai tu mai pensato a quell'esploratore barbarico che, avendo trascorsa gran parte della sua esistenza fra le droghe e dietro un banco di commercio, si diede a ricercare i sepolcri degli Atridi nelle rovine di Micene ed ebbe un giorno . . . la più grande e la più strana visione che sia mai stata offerta a occhi mortali? . . . Hai tu mai pensato che quello spettacolo sorvumano e terribile avrebbe potuto apparire a un altro: a uno spirito giovanile e fervente, a un poeta, a un animatore, a te, a me forse? Allora la febbre, la frenesia, la demenza... Immagina!<sup>80</sup> (155)

Tombs and statues in disrepair are also the background for most of the character work involving the female protagonist Perdita/Foscarina. She functions as symbol of hybridity and multiplicity throughout the text, just as in *La Nave Basiliola* will represent a major locus of mobility. I would contend that in Foscarina D'Annunzio is working through his own aspirations toward artistic and cultural cosmopolitanism, such as he would encounter during his self-imposed French exile, ultimately rejecting this model in favor of a markedly Latinate ideal, celebrated in the very last pages of the novel. What I am attempting to chart are the residues that resist assimilation and complicate D'Annunzio's nationalist message in paradoxical ways, despite his attempts at a homogeneous sublimation of the different elements on which his ideal rests. Foscarina is by far the most cosmopolitan character of the novel – second perhaps only to the city of Venice itself – and the very feminization of the hybrid is once again vehicle for

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<sup>80</sup> “Have you ever thought of that barbaric explorer who, after having passed the greater part of his life among his drugs behind a counter, began digging in the ruins of Mycenæ among the graves of the Atridæ, and one day . . . saw the greatest and strangest vision that has ever presented itself to mortal eyes? . . . Have you ever thought that the terrible, superhuman spectacle might have appeared to another, to some youthful, fervent spirit: to a poet, a Life-giver, to you, to me, perhaps? The frenzy of it, the fever... Imagine!” (208).

ambiguity. The gendered representation of cultural hybridity of both Foscarina and Basiliola contrasts with a different sort of feminization, the one at play in the representation of Italy through the traditional feminine figures of either virgin or mother in *Le vergini delle rocce* (1895). While Foscarina is presented as object of love and admiration not merely of Stelio but of the multitudes that make up the audiences of her performances, she is nevertheless confined to an inferior position within the author's clearly crystallized hierarchy of gender. In this perspective, D'Annunzio is operating differently from the exploitation of cosmopolitanism in imperialistic terms, frequent especially in British contexts.<sup>81</sup> Whereas in that setting cosmopolitanism is overtly serving a nationalist agenda founded on imperialism, D'Annunzio's position constantly shifts between fascination toward and rejection of cosmopolitan ideals, generating ambiguity and tension. Furthermore, the comparison with the young rising star Donatella Arvale, daughter of the famous Venetian sculptor Lorenzo Arvale, residing in Tuscany and prepared to interpret the heroines of Stelio's future compositions, explicitly indicates the overcoming of the international in favor of the national.

Foscarina, often referred to as “*donna nomade*,” is the epitome of the ‘actress,’ whose very identity is multiple and coincides with that of the roles she has played. For Stelio, she is “*la creatura dionisiaca, la vivente materia atta a ricevere i ritmi dell’arte... innumerevole come le onde del mare*”<sup>82</sup> (164). Like *La Nave*, *Il Fuoco* indicates in the Nietzschean category of the Dionysian a powerful and necessary creative force, invoked as antidote to artistic emanations far from the surge of primordial energy. The Dionysian here is again heavily gendered, made to

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<sup>81</sup> See Walter D. Mignolo, “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism” in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha and Carol Breckenridge (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 170-174.

<sup>82</sup> “The Dionysian creature, the living material capable of receiving the impress of the rhythm of art . . . as various as the waves of the sea” (221).

coincide with Foscarina's malleability as an actress, her capacity for metamorphosis not autonomous but rather subject to the power of the "artifice" (164).<sup>83</sup>

La fedeltà eroica di Antigone, il furore fatidico di Cassandra, la divorante febbre di Fedra, la ferocia di Mesea, il sacrificio d'Ifigenia, Mirra dinanzi al padre, Polissena e Alceste dinanzi alla morte, Cleopatra volubile come il vento e la vampa sul mondo, Lady Macbeth veggente carnefice dalle piccolo mani, e i grandi gigli imperiali di rugiade e di lacrime. Imogene, Giulietta, Miranda, e Rosalinda e Jessica e Perdita, le più dolci e le più terribili e le più magnifiche erano in lei, abitavano il suo corpo, balenavano per le sue pupille, respiravano per la sua bocca.<sup>84</sup> (82)

The capaciousness of Foscarina's identity is underscored not only by the sheer number of female heroines whose lives she is said to have truly experienced, but also by the spatial and temporal distance between them. Foscarina's existence encompasses centuries of history throughout Greece, Egypt and England: "Così in una vastità senza limiti e in un tempo senza fine pareva ampliarsi e perpetuarsi il contorno della sostanza e dell'età umana"<sup>85</sup> (82). A statement such as this one could be read as a mere platitude concerning the universality of human experience and its artistic expression, but it stands out, embedded as it is within a text whose aim is to announce the dawn of a specifically Italian cultural epoch, superior and in opposition to others. The text explicitly highlights the diverse geographical and cultural origins of the characters lived and

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<sup>83</sup> Similar connotations characterize coeval critical assessments of female writers and artists of the time, such as Annie Vivanti.

<sup>84</sup> "The heroic fidelity of Antigone, the fury of Cassandra, the devouring fever of Phædra, the fierceness of Medea, the sacrifice of Iphigenia; Mirra before his father, Polissena and Alcestes before the face of death, Cleopatra, changeable like the wind and flame of the world; Lady Macbeth, that dreaming murderess of the little hands and the large lilies pearled over with dew and with fears; Imogen, Juliet, Miranda; and Rosamund and Jessica and Perdita, the sweetest souls and the most terrible and the most magnificent, – were all in her, living in her body, flashing through her pupils, breathing in her mouth" (106).

<sup>85</sup> "Thus, with an unlimited bastness and through endless time, the outlines of human age and substance seemed to widen and perpetuate themselves" (106).



performed by Foscarina, adopting the Romantic notion of a ‘genius’ specific to each cultural-linguistic unit. The first to be mentioned are of course the various regions of Greece, followed by western and northern Europe, and finally by North America – “I continenti immensi di là dagli oceani”<sup>86</sup> (82) – where she had achieved great success and where – unbeknownst to D’Annunzio at this time, of course – Eleonora Duse would ultimately die in 1924.

I genii stessi dei luoghi consacrati dalla poesia alitavano sopra di lei, la cingevano di visioni alterne. Il piano polveroso di Tee, l’Argolide sitibonda, i mirti arsicci di Trezene, le anti olive di Colono, il trionfale Cidno, e la pallida campagna di Dunsinana, e la caverna di Prospero, e la selva delle Ardenne, i paesi rigati di sangue, travagliati dal dolore, trasfigurati da un sogno o rischiarati da un sorriso inestinguibile, apparivano, lontanavano, dileguavano dietro la sua testa. E altri paesi remoti, le regioni delle brume, le lande settentrionali, i continenti immensi di là dagli oceani ov’ella era passata come una forza inaudita tra le moltitudini attonite portando la parola e la fiamma, dileguavano dietro la sua testa; e le moltitudini con i monti con i fiumi con i golfi con le città impure, le stirpi assiderate e antichissime, i popoli forti anelanti al dominio della terra, le genti nuove che strappano alla natura le energie più segrete per asservirle al lavoro onnipossente negli edifici che fermentano e si corrompono su un suolo vergine, tutte le folle barbariche a cui ella era apparsa come una rivelazione sovrana del genio latino, tutte le torme ignare a cui ella aveva parlato la lingua sublime di Dante, tutte le innumerevoli greggi umane ond’era salita verso di lei sopra un flutto di ansie e di speranze confuse l’aspirazione verso la Bellezza.<sup>87</sup> (82-83)

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<sup>86</sup> “The immense continents beyond the ocean” (107).

<sup>87</sup> “The very genii of the places consecrated by poetry breathed over her and girded her round with alternating visions: the dusty plain of Thebe, the parched Argolide, the burnt up myrtles of Trezene, the sacred olives of Colonus, the triumphant Cydnus, the pale landscape of Dunsinane, Prospero’s cave, the wood in the Ardennes, regions furrowed with blood, laboured by pain, transfigured by a dream or lighted by an inextinguishable smile, appeared, receded and melted away behind her head. And other remote regions: regions of mist, northern plains, the immense continent beyond the ocean where she had passed like an unknown force, carrying her voice and her flame with her, melted away behind her head; with the multitudes, their hills and rivers, the gulfs, the impure cities, the ancient forsaken races, the strong peoples panting for the dominion

Each region and people is endowed with its own specific traits, creating an impression of complementarity and totality, signifying both the breadth of Foscarina's expressiveness and the weight of experience that she has had to bear and that is contributing to her mental and physical decay. As we have come to recognize as typical of D'Annunzio, nationalist rhetoric seeps into the acknowledgement of the rich diversity that contributes to Foscarina's repertoire.

Furthermore, the Italian actress, bearer of the "genio latino" expressed through the "lingua sublime di Dante" is juxtaposed to the "folle barbariche," "torme ignare . . . innumerevoli greggi umane" mesmerized by her performance but capable only of "speranze confuse."

The description of Foscarina's acting style, modeled after that of Eleonora Duse herself, is also highlighted in this passage, and underscored shortly after: "Non nella finzione soltanto ella aveva gittato i suoi gridi e soffocato i suoi singhiozzi, ma nella vita commune... Certo ella era stata testimone delle più truci miserie, delle più cupe ruine"<sup>88</sup> (83). Duse's innovative acting style, which broke decidedly with the artificial and pantomimic style of her contemporaries, anticipated modern techniques based on Lee Strasberg's 'method' acting. Her performances were disturbing to many precisely because of the impression of her actually inhabiting the characters and bringing her own inner life to them, through small, intimate and brilliant gestures.<sup>89</sup>

D'Annunzio draws heavily on Duse's technique in his characterization of Foscarina and assigns

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of the world, the new peoples that wrest from nature her most secret energies to make them the slaves of omnipotent labour in edifices of iron and glass, the colonies of bastard races that derment and grow corrupt on virgin soil, all the barbarous crowds to which she had appeared as a sovereign revelaton of Latin genius, all the unconscious masses to which she had spoken the sublime language of Dante, all the innumerable human herds whence the aspiration to beauty , had risen towards her on a wave of confused hopes and anxieties" (107).

<sup>88</sup> "It was not on the stage only that she had cried out and suffocated her sobs, but . . . in her daily life for herself . . . Certainly she had witnessed the cruelest misery, the darkest ruin" (108).

<sup>89</sup> See Lucia Re, "Eleonora Duse and Women: Performing Desire, Power, and Knowledge," *Italian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2015), 351.

the character multiple pages to narrate her discovery of the method, when preparing to play the part of Shakespeare's Juliet:

Entrammo a Verona . . . e ripetevo in me le parole del primo apparire . . . La mia immaginazione era sconvolta da una strana congiuntura: compivo quel giorno quattordici anni, l'età di Giulietta! . . . Al canto d'ogni via credevo di vedermi venire incontro un corteo che accompagnasse un feretro coperto di rose bianche. . . Io fui Giulietta.<sup>90</sup> (237-238)

I propose to interpret D'Annunzio's assimilatory poetics as the literary equivalent of Duse's stage performances. In his characterization of Foscarina-Duse, D'Annunzio expressed his own artistic voracity, as he aspired to a totality of expression that he recognized only in Wagner before him: "profonda, *multanime* e misteriosa . . . *una e diversa*"<sup>91</sup> (83). In the description of Stelio's lust for the actress as literally orgiastic, D'Annunzio is conflating erotic passion with artistic ambition: "Ah io ti possederò come in un'orgia vasta . . . io scoterò nella tua carne esperta tutte le cose divine e mostruose che t'aggravano, e le cose compiute e quelle in travaglio che crescono entro di te come una stagione sacra"<sup>92</sup> (83). Ironically, the term "multanime," used by D'Annunzio to indicate the multiplicity of individual women contained in Foscarina's soul, is the direct opposite of Duse's own description of her acting technique - "elimination of self" - which is ultimately suited to her destiny in the novel: leaving Stelio and her career because of old age and retreating overseas in self-imposed exile.

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<sup>90</sup> "We entered Verona . . . and constantly repeated to myself the words of my first entrance . . . A strange coincidence had excited my imagination: I was fourteen years old on that very day, - the age of Juliet! . . . At the corner of every street I thought I saw a crowd coming towards me and accompanying a coffin covered with white roses . . . I have been Juliet" (319-320).

<sup>91</sup> "Profound, many-souled and mysterious . . . one and yet different" (108).

<sup>92</sup> "Ah, I will possess you as in a vast orgy . . . I will shake from the knowledge of your body all the divine and monstrous things that weigh upon you; the things you have accomplished, and those still in travail that are growing in you as in a sacred season" (108).

While the first section of the novel depicts Foscarina as successful embodiment of expressive capaciousness, in the second section the actress becomes merely a symbol of decay and her centrality within Stelio's own creative process is threatened and ultimately overcome by a celebration of the Italian both in erotic and aesthetic terms. Donatella Arvale, securely rooted on her "colle toscano"<sup>93</sup> (128) takes the place of the "mille maschere" of Foscarina's "volto appassito"<sup>94</sup> (137) both as Stelio's lover and as his muse: "A chi, se non alla fresca giovinezza, alla verginità intatta, poteva egli chiedere di gioire e di creare?"<sup>95</sup> (137). Foscarina, the "donna nomade" equivalent to cultural and literary contamination, is still identified with the Dionysian "istinto di ferocia bestiale"<sup>96</sup> (138), but this force is now viewed as a necessary step that must ultimately be transcended and overcome: "il desiderio dell'amato doveva attraversare l'ingombro confuso . . . doveva contaminarsi, corrompersi, inacerbirsi, incrudelirsi, passare al disgusto"<sup>97</sup> (137).

The erotic trajectory that leads Stelio from Foscarina to Donatella, I would contend, parallels the artistic one that leads him from Wagner to his own Italian artwork. Both itineraries involve a movement from hybridity to purity or, according to D'Annunzio's somewhat mechanistic Nietzschean terminology, a descent into the Dionysian, followed by an attempt at recomposition in the Apollonian. The fact that the great majority of the novel is devoted to the former, while the latter is merely gestured to as future outcome in the final pages, is indicative of D'Annunzio's own preferences, as is once again visually expressed by the décor of "Il

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<sup>93</sup> "Tuscan hill" (172).

<sup>94</sup> "thousand masks . . . faded face" (185).

<sup>95</sup> "Of whom, if not of fresh youth, intact virginity, could he ask joy and creation?" (184).

<sup>96</sup> "Instinct of brutal ferocity" (185).

<sup>97</sup> "The desire of the man she loved was obliged to force itself through the confused encumbrance . . . it would contaminate and corrupt itself there, become sharp and cruel; lastly, from sharpness it would pass to disgust" (185).

Vittoriale,” an architectural *mise en âbyme* of D’Annunzio’s poetics. The lengthy description of Stelio’s artistic inspiration closely mirrors the acting process of Foscarina, suggesting that he too is or aspires to be “multanime”: “Imagini di cieli incurvati su paesi lontani traversarono il suo spirito; erano agitazioni di sabbie di alberi, di acque, di polvere in giornate di vento: il Deserto libico, l’oliveto su la baia di Salona, il Nilo presso Memfi, l’Argolide sitibonda”<sup>98</sup> (151). The artist, however, instead of giving way to this flux of images, forces his mind to remain rooted to his local environment: “Altre immagini sopraggiunsero. Egli temette di smarrire quella che aveva trovato. Con uno sforzo serrò la sua memoria . . . segnò le note del tema su una pagina del suo taccuino”<sup>99</sup> (151). The inspiration that ultimately comes to him, however, appears to him in the form of Mycenae with its ancient tombs, as it appeared to Heinrich Schliemann:

Egli rivedeva un luogo solitario e selvaggio presso i sepolcri di Micene, in un avvallamento tra il minor corno della montagna Eubea e il fianco inaccessibile della cittadella. . . Terra di fuoco, paese di sete e di delirio, patria di Clitemnestra e dell’Idra, suolo sterilito per sempre dall’orrore del più tragico destino che abbia mai divorato la stirpe umana.”<sup>100</sup> (154)

Rather than a generic renewal of the tragic form, the ultimate work of art requires a visitation – albeit in Rimbaudian dreamlike form – to the city of Mycenae, center of Greek culture during the Bronze age, later transformed into the mythical setting of the Trojan cycle. The description of the

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<sup>98</sup> “Images of skies rounded over far-off countries crossed his spirit; agitations of sands, trees, water and dust on windy days; the Libyan Desert, the olive field on the Bay of Salona, the Nile close to Memphis, the parched Argolides” (204).

<sup>99</sup> “Other images overtook these. He feared lest he should lose what he had found. With an effort he closed his memory . . . he marked the notes of the theme in the lamplight on a page of his notebook” (204).

<sup>100</sup> “Once more he saw a wild, lonely spot by the tombs of Mycenæ in the hollow between the lower peak of Mount Eubœa and the inaccessible flank of the citadel . . . Land of Fire, land of thirst and delirium, birthplace of Clytemnestra and the Hydra, soil made sterile for ever by the horror of the most tragic destiny that has ever overwhelmed a human race” (207-208).

heroes' tombs, heavily decorated in gold, points toward a baroque aesthetic not unlike that of Venice itself, whose bridges and streets make up the concrete backdrop of the episode: "Ed ecco tu l' vedi apparire! L'oro, l'oro, i cadaveri, una immensità di oro, i cadaveri tutti coperti d'oro"<sup>101</sup> (155). The artist's vision connects the ancient "terra del fuoco" with the present-day Murano, setting of the following scene, where glassblowers create perfect works of art by using fire. The apparition is followed by a conversation between Stelio and his friend Daniele Glauro, in which the former's aspiration to totality is reiterated – "volendo tutto abbracciare e tutto esprimere . . . l'Universo intero"<sup>102</sup> (157), "che vuoi? . . . Tutto, è vero? Tu vuoi tutto"<sup>103</sup> (165) – together with the possibility of transcending time and space through art: "Conosci la Colonna verde che è in San Giacomo dall'Orio? . . . Guardandola io ho visitato la Sila, l'Ercinia"<sup>104</sup> (161). Through the many iterations of the concept of totality, D'Annunzio is building up his own theorization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and *Totalendrama*, in a process of *imitatio aemulatio* of Wagner's work.

D'Annunzio's geopolitical concerns surrounding Venice as a point of entry into the Adriatic also come to the fore in this scene, in the juxtaposition between artistic and political enterprise – "In altri tempi avrei forse saputo anche conquistare un Arcipelago . . . Che t'importa? Una melodia val una provincia . . . un cervello contiene il mondo"<sup>105</sup> (163). For the moment, cultural imperialism takes precedence over military colonialism, but the final scenes of the novel show the scale beginning to tip in the opposite direction. During Stelio's final conversation with Foscarina, the two reach the island of St. Francis of the Desert, whose name

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<sup>101</sup> "And it appears, the gold, the gold, the bodies, great heaps of gold, the bodies all covered with gold" (209-210).

<sup>102</sup> "That wanted to embrace all and express all" (211).

<sup>103</sup> "What is it you want? . . . Everything, is it not true? You want everything?" (223).

<sup>104</sup> "Do you know the green column that is in San Giacomo dall'Orio? . . . When I gaze at it I seem to be visiting Sila and Ercinna" (218-219).

<sup>105</sup> "In other times I too might have conquered an archipelago . . . What does it matter to you? A melody is worth a province" (219).

ushers in Stelio's evocation of the region of Umbria and the chance for a sentimental but politically charged statement about the unity of the Adriatic Sea: "Ho udito i marinai del Tirreno chiamare *l'Adriatico il Golfo di Venezia*. Questa sera penso che la mia casa è sul Golfo e mi sembra più vicina"<sup>106</sup> (290).

D'Annunzio's political and military aims in the Adriatic emerge in tandem with the centralization of this artistic project – consigned to Donatella Arvale and the new theater built in Italy's capital – at the expense of Foscara, whose destiny of abandonment and exile is underscored numerous times as ultimate defeat. Her status as "donna nomade" is presented throughout the second section of the novel as the curse of rootlessness, which guarantees personal unhappiness as well as public neglect. Multiplicity – symbolized both by Venice's layered architectural history and by Foscara's psyche – is cause for confusion and insecurity. Even the multicolored streaks of the marble of the Basilica of St. Mark seem to evoke the ambiguous status of belonging of the "donna nomade":

le innumerevoli vene dei marmi . . . di San Marco . . . parvero quasi renderle visibile la sua stessa diversità interiore, la confusione stessa dei suoi pensieri. Ella sentiva le cose a volta a volta estranee, remote, inesistenti, e familiari, prossime, partecipanti della sua intima vita. A volta a volta ella credeva ritrovarsi in luoghi sconosciuti e in mezzo a forme che le appartenessero come se ella le avesse materiate dalla sua propria sostanza<sup>107</sup> (187).

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<sup>106</sup> "I have heard the sailors of the Thyrreanean Sea call the Adriatic the Gulf of Venice. To-night I am thinking that my home is on the Gulf, and that seems to bring it nearer" (389).

<sup>107</sup> "The numberless veins of the various marbles . . . seemed to make her own interior diversity visible, and the very confusion of her thoughts. In turn, she felt all things estranged, remote, unexisting, and then familiar, approaching her and participating in her intimate life. In turn she seemed to find herself in unknown places and among forms belonging to her as if her own substance had given them their material life" (251-252).

To highlight the failure of the cosmopolitan and hybrid ideal, D'Annunzio introduces another female figure, that of Stelio's sister Sofia, securely rooted in her native Adriatic town, where "le montagne avevano quel . . . colore . . . di cose che rimarranno per sempre lontane e intatte," devoted to the "Serafico" St. Francis and the "raccoglimento [del] focolare"<sup>108</sup> (167). Family, Catholic tradition and regional color are directly opposed to Foscarina's "continuo migrare"<sup>109</sup>: "andar vagando per il mondo, andar lontano! pensava la donna nomade 'Mai posa, mai pace'"<sup>110</sup> (205). The text stages Foscarina's displacement by depicting her as lost and terrified in a labyrinth: "Egli guardava la donna girare in corsa come una demente per i sentieri ciechi e dubbii, come una creatura condannata a un supplizio vano, a un affanno inutile ma sempiterno"<sup>111</sup> (216). To bolster his point, D'Annunzio draws on an illustrious tradition of Italian self-representations of exile to characterize Foscarina's experience, which has in the pilgrim Dante its most notable example. "Sofia non saprà mai il bene che ha fatto alla *povera pellegrina* . . . ho potuto figurarmela . . . Nei paesi *lontani, laggiù, laggiù*, tra la *gente estranea e dura*,

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<sup>108</sup> "The mountains had that . . . colour . . . of those things that will for ever remain distant and intact" (224).

<sup>109</sup> The passage is rich in nostalgic evocations of regional color, such as "Poi passavano le greggi . . . dalla montagna, andavano verso le pianure della Puglia . . . pecore . . . imitavano il movimento delle onde . . . Tutto era quieto" (169). "Then the flocks passed along . . . they came from the mountains and went to the plains of the Puglia . . . sheep imitated the motion of the waves . . . All was quiet" (227). The description echoes the famous poem "I pastori," published in *Alcyone* in 1903: "Settembre, andiamo. È tempo di migrare./Ora in terra d'Abruzzi i miei pastori/lascian gli stazzi e vanno verso il mare:/scendono all'Adriatico selvaggio/che verde è come i pascoli dei monti./Han bevuto profondamente ai fonti/alpestri, che sapor d'acqua natia/rimanga né cuori esuli a conforto,/che lungo illuda la lor sete in via./ . . . Isciacquio, calpestio, dolci romori./Ah perché non son io cò miei pastori?"

<sup>110</sup> "To be always going waway, aimlessly through the world, to go far away!" thought the wandering woman. "Never to rest, never to be at peace!" (276).

<sup>111</sup> "He saw the woman running round like a mad thing along the blind uncertain paths, like a creature condemned to some vain torment, to some useless but eternal agitation" (290).



quando mi sentivo perduta”<sup>112</sup> (166) echoes *Paradiso* 17: “Tu proverai sí come sa di sale/lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle/lo scendere e ‘l salir per l’altrui scale”<sup>113</sup> (vv.58-60). Foscarina’s decay and the uselessness of her existence in exile emerge through a comparison between herself and the objects contained in a Viennese museum: “reliquiari preziosi . . . cose in esilio, divenute profane, non pregate, non adorate più”<sup>114</sup> (168).

Foscarina’s fate is mirrored by that of the city of Venice itself, which increasingly takes on the characterization of “reliquiario” that Stelio had attacked at the beginning of the novel as false characterization of “l’animula di Venezia”<sup>115</sup> (74): the sentimental representations of gondoliers serenading pretty young girls “come in una stampa di Pietro Longhi”<sup>116</sup> (76). The city’s cosmopolitanism appears now as complicit in its decay, as exemplified by the ruined state of the gardens – “orti, orti, ovunque orti! Un tempo erano i più belli del mondo”<sup>117</sup> (227) – and foreign *palazzi* visited by Stelio and Foscarina in their tour of the lagoon, and by the old age and death of the foreign artists and cultural figures residing in Venice at the time, such as Wagner himself and the countess of Glänegg. The dilapidated room that used to house Napoleon on his visits further confirms the impression of irretrievable cosmopolitan glory. Despite attempts at rejuvenating the city through art, in fact, Venice appears in the latter portion of the novel as little more than a place where to come to die.

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<sup>112</sup> “Sophia will never know the good she has done to the *poor pilgrim* . . . I have pictured her to myself . . . In *distant* countries, *far, far away* in the midst of a *strange, hard* population . . . when I was feeling lost” (224).

<sup>113</sup> “You are to know the bitter taste/of others’ bread, how salt it is, and know/how hard a path it is for one who goes/descending and ascending others’ stairs.” *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Paradiso*, ed. Peter Armour, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1995).

<sup>114</sup> “Precious shrines . . . of exiled things no longer prayed to, no longer worshipped” (226).

<sup>115</sup> “The child-soul of Venice” (99).

<sup>116</sup> “As in a print by Pietro Longhi” (98).

<sup>117</sup> “Gardens, gardens; gardens everywhere. Once they were the most beautiful in the world” (305).

The decay of cosmopolitan – and aristocratic – Venice is crystallized in the representation of lady Myrta’s pack of hounds, the beloved *levrieri* that D’Annunzio himself kept throughout his life.<sup>118</sup> Their names indicate the diversity of their origins and the value of the pack resides precisely in the multiplicity of features that come together under the guidance of their owner in a perfect expression of multiform strength:

Ali-Nour! Crissa! Nerissa! Clarissa! Altair! Helion! Hardicanute! Veronese! Hierro! . . .  
V’era il levriere di Scozia, native delle alte montagne . . . v’era il levriere d’Irlanda,  
distruttore di lupi . . . v’era quello di Tartaria, birizzolato . . . originario delle immense  
steppe asiatiche . . . c’era quello di Persia pallido...; v’era il galgo spagnuolo, migrato coi  
Mori, quello magnifico che il nano pomposo regge a guinzaglio nella tela di Diego  
Velasquez, istruito a raggiungere e ad abbattere nelle nude pianure della Mancia o nelle  
macchie della Murcia e di Alicante fitte di stipe; v’era lo sluoghi arabo, l’illustre  
predatore del deserto...nobilissimo...E, raccolti insieme come una muta, essi fremevano  
intorno a colui che sapeva risvegliare nel loro sangue intorpidito gli istinti primitive  
dell’inseguimento e dell’uccisione.<sup>119</sup> (174-175)

The hounds’ lands of origin span every direction and the anachronistic terms used to indicate them such as “Tartaria” and “Mori” allude both to the Roman Empire and its historical

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<sup>118</sup> D’Annunzio had envisioned a mausoleum for dogs as part of “Il Vittoriale,” as “simbolo del nulla,” but the building was never completed. He did, however, compose the poem “Qui giacciono i miei cani” and disseminate tributes to his hounds throughout “Il Vittoriale.”

<sup>119</sup> ““Ali-Nour! Crissa! Nerissa! Clarissa! Altair! Helion! Hardicanute! Veronese! Hierro!’ . . . There was the Scotch deer-hour, the native of the hghlands . . . there was the reddish Irish wolf-hound, destroyer of wolves . . . there was the spotted Tartary hound, black and yellow, brought from the vast Asiatic steppes . . . there was the Persian dog . . . his coat paler. . . there was the Spanish *galgo* who had migrated with the Moors, the magnificent beast held in leash by a pompous dwarf in the picture of Diego Velasquez, trained to course and overthrow in the najed plains of the Mancha or in the low woods thick with bushwood of Murcia and Alicante; there was the Arabian *sloughi*, the illustrious plunderer of the desert . . . a noble animal . . . And gathered together in a pack they quivered round him who knew how to reawaken in their torpid blood their primitive instincts of pursuit and carnage” (235-236).

successors and to the crosspollination that occurred between it and foreign cultures, such as through the Arabic presence in Spain. This representation of power, in which multiplicity is functional to “un solo scopo . . . perfetto”<sup>120</sup> (177) is immediately thwarted, however, by the mention of Gog, one of the two best hounds who is now lame and comes to objectify Foscarina’s feelings of inadequacy and neglect: “Ah, come facilmente gli invalidi sono posti in oblio!”<sup>121</sup> (182).

Venice’s glorious past as literary outpost is evoked through a series of notable mentions, including that of Gaspara Stampa, one of Europe’s greatest female poets and leading voice in sixteenth-century Petrarchismo, Pietro Bembo, the greatest linguist and literary theorist of the Renaissance, and master *stampatore* “Aldo Manuzio” who made Venice one of the main centers for printing and publishing in Europe during the Renaissance. The references all hearken back to the humanistic culture of the *Cinquecento*, when the Republic of Venice was at the height of its political and military expansion. Rather than signifying an imminent rejuvenation of Venice through art, they contribute to a sense of irredeemable loss, parallel to that experienced by Foscarina. By the end of the novel, in tandem with the indication of Rome as site for the fulfillment of Stelio/D’Annunzio’s projected reform of the theater, Venice appears more and more similar to the representation offered of it by local colorists that Stelio had mocked at the beginning.

Even the references to Murano’s glassblowing as exquisite art, though powerfully operating on various metaphorical levels, end up highlighting the local in lieu of the exportable, given also the isolation inherent in the island as space. The text underscores this diminishment of scale linguistically, by mimetically reproducing the dialect of the latest successor of Murano’s

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<sup>120</sup> “All is directed to one aim” (238).

<sup>121</sup> “Ah, how easily an invalid goes out of our minds!” (245).

most illustrious family of glassblowers, as he offers Foscarina what is clearly an exquisite but humble craft with little industrial potential: “Xela la nostra nostra gran Foscarina? . . .Una sera, parona, Ela me ga fato tremar e pianzer come un putèlo. Me permetela che in memoria di quella sera, che no podarò desmentegar fin che vivo, ghe ofra un piccolo lavoro vegnuo for a de le mani del povaro Seguso?”<sup>122</sup> (223).



Figure 1.3. Pietro Longhi. *Cacciatori d'anatre in laguna*. 1760.

Pinacoteca Querini Stampalia, Venezia.

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<sup>122</sup> “Is it our great Foscarina? . . . One evening, mistress, you have made me tremble and cry like a child. Will you allow me, in memory of that evening, which I can never forget as long as I live, to offer you a little work made by the hands of the poor Seguso?” (299).



Figure 1.4. Pietro Longhi. *Il Ridotto a Venezia*. 1750.

Ca' Rezzonico – Museo del settecento veneziano, Venezia.

At the same time, the text clearly resists a local, homogenous cultural project, even as it points toward the limitations and dangers of cosmopolitanism. The image of exile, for example, summoned by the desperate fate that awaits Foscarina, generates a constellation of references that undoubtedly represent D'Annunzio's own artistic aspirations. The Dantean echoes used to characterize Foscarina's career outside of Italy are counterpointed by explicit mentions of the poet in respect to Stelio's aesthetic ideals:

Leggendo le antiche cantiche di Dante . . . egli le parlò dell'Esule. . . "Imaginate l'Alighieri, pieno già della sua visione, *su le vie dell'esilio, pellegrino implacabile,*

cacciato dalla sua passione e dalla sua miseria *di terra in terra, di rifugio in rifugio, a traverse le campagne, a traverse le montagne, lungo i fiumi, lungo i mari, in ogni stagione*, soffocato dalla dolcezza della primavera, percosso dall'asprezza dell'inverno, sempre vigile, attento, aperto gli *occhi voraci*, ansioso del travaglio interior ond'era per formarsi l'opera gigantesca.<sup>123</sup> (253)

The passage can be read as D'Annunzio's self-representation, at a time when he was being repeatedly sought after by creditors.

Imaginate la *plenitudine di quell'anima* nel contrasto delle necessità comuni e delle infiammate apparizioni che gli si facevano incontro di repente allo svolto di un cammino, sopra un argine, nella cavità di una roccia, pel declivio di una collina, nel folto di una selva, in una prateria canora di allodole. Per i tramiti dei sensi *la vita molteplice e multiforme gli si precipitava nello spirito trasfigurandolo* in viventi immagini le idee astratte ond'esso era ingombro. *Ovunque*, sotto il passo doloroso, scaturivano sorgenti imprevedute di poesia.<sup>124</sup> (253)

The breadth of Dante's inspiration is signified by the multiplicity and variety of geographical places and sources of poetic stimulation, resulting in a depiction that transcends the typical dimensions of the *padre della letteratura italiana*. Shortly after, the text confirms that

D'Annunzio is situating himself in the wake of Dante's multiformity: "*Il Fuoco l'Aria l'Aqua e*

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<sup>123</sup> "One day after she had read to him, he spoke to her of the Exile . . . 'Imagine an Alighieri *on the road to exile*, already possessed by his vision, *an implacable pilgrim* driven from land to land by his passion and his misery, *from refuge to refuge, across fields, across mountains, along rivers, along seas, in every season*, suffocated by the sweetness of spring, stricken by the harshness of winter, ever alert, attentive, his *voracious eyes* ever open, anxious with the inner travail that was forming the gigantic work'" (340).

<sup>124</sup> "Imagine the fullness of that soul in the contrast between common necessities and the flaming apparitions that suddenly came to meet him at a turning of the road, on some river bank, in a rocky cave, on a slope of a hill, in the thick of a forest, in a meadow bright with the song of the lark. Manifold life poured into his spirit by means of his senses, transfiguring the abstract ideas that filled him into living images. Wherever he went unexpected sources of poetry flowed from his sorrowful step" (340).

la Terra collaboravano al poema sacro”<sup>125</sup> (254). Similar statements abound in D’Annunzio’s essays and personal writings, including the memoir *Cento e cento e cento e cento pagine del libro segreto di Gabriele D’Annunzio tentato di morire*, in which he recalls “avevo nove anni, e già mille anime, già mille forme”<sup>126</sup> (23).

Furthermore, the very description made of Foscarina in exile, surrounded by objects no longer in use and relics no longer worshipped, immediately calls to mind D’Annunzio’s own “Vittoriale,” which could well be described as a “grande reliquario inerte . . . asilo di pace e d’oblio”<sup>127</sup> (*Il Fuoco* 58). The chalk head of Eleonora Duse by sculptor Arrigo Minerbi displayed in the author’s studio eerily calls into question the actual demise of Foscarina and the uselessness of objects taken out of context. Afterall, the sheer number of intertextual borrowings in this and other works by D’Annunzio already pushes against the impossibility of refunctioning and resemanticizing through movement from one context to another.

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<sup>125</sup> “Fire, air, earth and water worked in collaboration at the sacred poem” (340).

<sup>126</sup> “I was nine years old and already I possessed a thousand souls, a thousand forms.”

Translation is mine.

<sup>127</sup> “A great inert shrine full of relics . . . a refuge full of peace and oblivion” (68).





Figure 1.5. “Eleonora Duse,” l’Officina. Il Vittoriale. Gardone Riviera, Italy.

Valerio Terraroli. *Il Vittoriale. Percorsi simbolici e collezioni d’arte di Gabriele d’Annunzio*. Milano: Skira, 2001, 120.

The novel ends with the death of Richard Wagner, and Stelio’s participation as pallbearer together with Daniele Glauro and four of their friends – all of them Italian – one of which is bringing a bundle of laurel from the Janiculum, where the theater for the new Roman *Gesamtkunstwerk* is being built. The scene is an obvious dramatization of the passing of the baton from German to Italian tradition, completing the cultural *translatio Imperii* and ushering in an *imitatio aemulatio*, which, according to the traditional Latin view, would by far surpass the original. Wagner’s body is on display “chiuso nella cassa di cristallo”<sup>128</sup> (298) – a visual

<sup>128</sup> “Shut in its crystal coffin” (400).



representation of the veneration with which he is regarded but also of the inevitable passive fossilization – creative as well as biological – which death obliges. The novel ends on a celebratory nationalist note, with a pompous description of the fine Roman youth – “libertà selvaggia dell’Agro” – carrying the body of the defunct Teuton:

*Membruti e possenti*, eletti tra i più *forti* e tra i più *belli*, parevano foggiate nell’antica impronta della *stirpe romana* . . . I sei compagni a gara, divenuti eguali nel fervor, prendendo i rami dai fasci li sparsero sul feretro dell’eroe. Nobilissimi erano quei *lauri latini*, recisi nella selva del colle dove in tempi remoti scendevano le aquile a portare i presagi, dove in tempi recenti e pur favolosi tanto fiume di sangue versarono per la bellezza d’Italia i legionari del Liberatore . . .

E viaggiarono verso la collina bavara ancora sopita nel gelo; mentre i tronchi insigni mettevano già i nuovi germogli nella luce di Roma, al romorio delle sorgenti nascoste.<sup>129</sup>  
(300)

The language of renewal of Stelio’s speech with which the novel had opened reappears here in the crystallized form of political propaganda, relying on the trite images of Latin laurels. The depiction of the young men rests on the stereotypical traits of the *viri romani* – physically strong, handsome, overly masculinized – that Fascism would soon exploit. While the presence of laurels immediately calls to mind poetic investiture, the passage invokes ancient and recent military and political history – including Garibaldi’s 1870 capture of Rome which sanctioned the end of the

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<sup>129</sup> “The wild liberty of the Agro . . . They were vigorous, powerful men, chosen among the strongest and finest, and they seemed to be shaped in the ancient mould of the Roman race. . . . The six companions in turn, equal now in their fervor, strewed branches from the bunches of laurel over the hero’s coffin. Noble indeed were those Latin laurels, cut from the shrubs of the hill where, in the days of remote antiquity, the eagles descended with their prophecies, where in recent though still fabulous times a stream of blood has been shed for the beauty of Italy by the soldiers of the Liberator . . . And they travelled towards the Bavarian hill still slumbering under its frost, while their noble trunks were already budding in the light of Rome to the murmur of hidden springs” (402-403).

Risorgimento – much more forcefully than the artistic rejuvenation to which Stelio had called the Venetian populace.

Once again, despite the overtly patriotic ending of the novel, in which various narrative and symbolic threads come together harmoniously to celebrate the superiority of Italian culture, even in these final pages, elements remain that mobilize this cohesive and linear representation. The first of these textual residues is Foscarina herself, who announces her departure “verso l’Atlantico”<sup>130</sup> (293), signifying her failure to retain Stelio’s love and her status as his muse. However, her voyage overseas is framed as cultural imperialism that participates in the renewal of the Graeco-Roman artistic tradition and expresses D’Annunzio’s own cosmopolitan ambitions.<sup>131</sup> “Ho sopra di me il peso di tutta la mia gente. Aspettando che il Teatro d’Apollo sia aperto e che La Vittoria dell’Uomo sia compiuta, vado a prendere commiato dai Barbari. Lavorerò per la bella impresa! A rifare i tesori di Micene, ci vorrà molto oro!”<sup>132</sup> (293). Most strikingly, the dominant tone of the novel’s conclusion is not the celebratory one of the very last lines, but rather highly melancholic, fitting with the rich autumnal landscape of the greater part of the novel. Stelio’s leaving Foscarina and Venice, and substituting a layered, hybrid and cosmopolitan aesthetic for a homogenous nationalist project is therefore conveyed as a loss, which is not trumped by the emphatic rhetoric of the concluding paragraph. Most strikingly, the

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<sup>130</sup> “I am crossing the Atlantic” (394).

<sup>131</sup> Politics aside, D’Annunzio aspired to international renown as a writer, and cared for the reception of his public persona abroad, even across the Atlantic, where he became a proudly flaunted national icon among the migrant population of North America’s Little Italies. See Luca Scarlini, *D’Annunzio a Little Italy. Avventure del vate nel mondo dell’emigrazione* (Roma: Donzelli, 2008).

<sup>132</sup> “I have the burden of all my people upon me. While I wait for the Theatre of Apollo to be opened and for ‘The Victory of Man’ to be ready, I shall go and take my leave of the Barbarians. I will work for the great undertaking. We will need a great deal of gold to build up again the treasures of Mycene!” (394).

final pages are haunted by the unsettling image of Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia*. Foscarina and Stelio contemplate a print of the incision, which is described in minute detail:

E il grande Angelo terrestre . . . così rispondeva: “ . . . Io so che l'armonia dell'Universo è fatta di discordie . . . So che io sono e non sono . . . So gli odori della putredine e le infezioni innumerevoli che sono congiunte alla natura umana. . . Veggo dinanzi al fuoco mutarsi tutte le cose, come i beni dinanzi all'oro.”<sup>133</sup> (297)

The title metaphor of fire is broken down in the description of the German artist's work, which functions as *mise en abyme* of the entire novel and provides the interpretive framework of Stelio and Foscarina's love affair and artistic trajectories much more powerfully and organically than the pompous enunciation of Latin triumph.

The language of mobility and instability that permeates the Angel's speech introduces an ambiguity that stays with the reader, despite the serene depiction of the six young Romans. Beyond the statuesque rhetoric of the *lauri latini* there remains the malleability of fire.

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<sup>133</sup> “And this is the answer of the great Angel of Earth . . . “I know that the harmony of the Universe is made of discords . . . I know that I am and that I am not . . . I know the putrid odour and the numberless infections that go hand in hand with human nature. . . I see all things changing before fire as fortunes do before gold” (397-398).



Figure 1.6. Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia I*, 1514.

Stalliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe.

## La Nave

In 1907, seven years after publishing *Il Fuoco*, D'Annunzio wrote the play *La Nave*. The dramatic retelling of the mythical foundation of the city of Venice offered D'Annunzio the chance to outline the ethnic, ideological and cultural boundaries of what he implicitly framed as the Italian nation. The play was written, published and performed in the troubled decade leading up to the First World War and the conflict surrounding the Adriatic sea and Italy's possession of the border territories of Istria, Dalmatia and the Quarnaro islands against what was then Austria-Hungary. The play can be read as part of a series of ideologically propagandist works published

by D'Annunzio between the final years of the nineteenth century and the aftermath of the First World War, when he carried out the Fiume expedition. Almost a decade before the Futurists would claim that “the only way to inspire Italy with the warlike spirit today is through the theater” (1915),<sup>134</sup> D'Annunzio was exploiting the genre to call Italians to support Italian imperialism in the Adriatic and beyond.

The work itself formally exhibits the hybrid features that are constantly being framed as a menace. Knowledge of D'Annunzio's other works and a visit to “Il Vittoriale” ground the experience of reading *La Nave* as indulgence in and enjoyment of Byzantine aesthetics, hybridity and multiplicity as much as that of xenophobic propaganda. Bookish eastern exoticism had colored D'Annunzio's work since his first collections of poetry in the 1880s, which he imbued with orientalism, in the wake of French literary precursors Victor Hugo's *Les Orientales* (1829), Flaubert's *Salambô* (1862) and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874), as well as Judith Gautier's translations from the Chinese (*Le Livre de Jade*, 1867) and Japanese (*Les Poèmes de la libellule*, 1885). Verbally archaic, written in the classicizing hendecasyllabic verse and at the same time nodding toward the aesthetics of Symbolist drama, *La Nave* stages the negotiation between purist and syncretic aesthetics as well as between the cosmopolitan line of Modernism to which D'Annunzio would be exposed during his exile in France and an autochthonous Roman classicizing idiom.

The piece also functions as a locus for D'Annunzio to experiment with degrees of enmeshment and question –whether intentionally or not – the contribution of foreign elements not only to the construction of his ideal nation but also to the historical reality of the Roman

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<sup>134</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli, Bruno Corra, “Manifesto del teatro sintetico futurista,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milano, Mondadori, 1968), 114. “Che non si possa oggi influenzare guerrescamente l'anima italiana, se non mediante il teatro.” Translation is mine.

Empire. While Fascism would harken back almost exclusively to the aesthetic and political ideals of ancient Rome as expressed in the early Empire (with Julius Caesar and Augustus as the most frequently evoked leaders), in addressing colonialism, D'Annunzio invokes late antiquity and the assimilation of Byzantine traits into the Roman matrix. The choice itself of setting his nationalistic piece in the sixth century on the Adriatic coast means that the word "Italy" cannot even appear in the work, for reasons of chronological accuracy. Consequently, "la stirpe eletta" is necessarily a specific subgroup of the descendants of the Roman Empire, which the text isolates from hybrid and impure offshoots at times with some difficulty.

*La Nave* sets D'Annunzio's syncretic conception of culture at odds with an ideal of ethnic purity that serves a nationalist agenda. Like all nationalist constructs, the unified ideal gains traction only in opposition to what is perceived as "other." In the case of D'Annunzio, however, the set of rigid dichotomies necessary to political propaganda is constantly thwarted at the very time it is being upheld. Rather than the expression of an undisputed ideological stance, *La Nave* stages D'Annunzio's own troubled negotiation between transnational cultural expressions and a monolithical construction meant to win over his public to the *questione adriatica*.

The play's proem immediately sets the stage for a contemporary political reading of the text, by locating the events "Tra Pola e Albona presso del Quarnaro,"<sup>135</sup> at the heart of the area of the Adriatic demanded by the *Irredentisti*. The nationalist claim for possession of this territory is evident from the repeated use of the possessive "nostri" (our) and the literary allusions to the national literary icons Leopardi and Dante. It also immediately frames the founding of Venice and the conquest of the sea as willed by God. Besides following the prayer structure common to the genre, the non-Christian D'Annunzio uses the device of appealing to God in the proem to

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<sup>135</sup> "Between Pola and Albona near Quarnaro." Translations are mine, as the work has not been published in English.

advance a ‘manifest destiny’ narrative of sorts, as well as to appeal to the majority of his Catholic-Italian readers.

The image conjured by the invocations is that of the wrathful Old Testament God – “Odi Signore Iddio grande e tremendo”<sup>136</sup> – as well as origin of ancestries – “O Iddio che vagli e rinnovelli . . . le stirpi.”<sup>137</sup> The latter connotation appears repeatedly throughout the play, which places the theme of race and its selection through war, as historical enactment of the struggle for survival of the fittest, in a post-Darwinian sense.<sup>138</sup> The proem ends with an acclamation that could have been the slogan for Italy’s colonial enterprise – “Fa di tutti gli Oceani il Mare Nostro!”<sup>139</sup> – followed by “Amen.” The reference to the Latin name for the Mediterranean – *Mare Nostrum* – expresses Italy’s claim to colonial power in the Mediterranean, which had begun shortly after the country’s unification in 1861.

The use of the Latin phrase, which had regained currency in Italy alongside debates around imperialism and Italy’s role as bridge between northern Europe and North Africa, anticipates the exploitation of classical antiquity by colonial discourses that Fascism would make its own. In this perspective, D’Annunzio and other champions of Italian imperialism were applying the cultural ideas of the Latin Renaissance to the political and military arena of turn-of-the-century geopolitics. Italy’s expansion in the Mediterranean, rather than a potentially illicit form of political and military aggression, was framed as a natural re-establishment of borders that were to be controlled by the rightful heirs of the Roman Empire. Mussolini’s appropriation

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<sup>136</sup> “Hear me, o great and terrible Lord.”

<sup>137</sup> “O God, who sifts through and renews . . . ancestries.”

<sup>138</sup> D’Annunzio had read Darwin in French translation, as evidenced by his library in “Il Vittoriale.”

<sup>139</sup> “Make every Ocean our Sea.”

of Roman symbols of power, aesthetics and rhetoric had its roots in post-unification colonial discourse.

*La Nave*, by situating the events on the Venetian coast and specifically on and around the building of a ship, projects the action outward, toward the sea – the first line of the drama is “Salpa!”<sup>140</sup> – thus sanctioning the identity between colonial expansion and nation building. Extraterritorial conquests appear to be the foundation of Italy’s national power in most of D’Annunzio’s patriotic works. The “Canzone d’Oltremare,” from the collection *Merope*, contains a similar injunction to head to sea: “Italia, alla riscossa, alla riscossa! . . . come quando sorgeva sopra il mare in sangue e in fuoco un sol clamor selvaggio ‘Arremba! Arremba!’”<sup>141</sup>

Despite the play’s emphasis on the superiority of the Latin, Christian, civilized and civilizing over the Byzantine, Oriental, Pagan and barbaric – I argue that the opposing elements are very much in tension within the work, as D’Annunzio himself struggles to set up a clearcut dichotomy between worlds and modes that, I would contend, are very much enmeshed within his own poetics. D’Annunzio was fascinated by classical Greek and, like many of his contemporaries, also by Byzantine culture and ‘the Orient,’ as testified by his personal library, his essays, and many of his works, both poetic and fictional, as noted above. *La Nave* reveals an anxiety about this ‘other,’ non-Latin, non-Christian, non-Western component, which it frames as the barbaric, or – in the Nietzschean terms already present in *Il Fuoco* – as the Dionysian.

Despite the setting up of clearly demarcated oppositions, I claim that a careful reading of *La Nave* shows the presence of the foreign to have a major role in D’Annunzio’s nation-

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<sup>140</sup> “Set sail!”

<sup>141</sup> “Italy, to the rescue, to the rescue! . . . as when a single wild clamor rouse above the sea in blood and fire ‘Let’s board! Let’s board!’” Gabriele D’Annunzio, “La canzone d’oltre mare,” in *Le laudi del cielo, del mare, della terra e degli eroi: Libro IV, Merope* (Milano: Treves, 1915), 13.



constructing endeavor. In many ways, this entanglement is the result of choosing to set the work on the Venetian coast – a contested borderland – rather than at the heart of the peninsula. The work concedes to the ‘Roman’ element by underscoring the Latin civic structure, character virtues of piousness, hard work and ingenuity and even character names. At the same time it pays tribute to the lush beauty and mysterious primitive power of the Byzantine faction, particularly in the character of Basiliola. Stylistically, the archaic vocabulary rich in Latinate words is woven into a Byzantine pattern of ornamentation based on repetition.

The action is interrupted and glossed by a chorus, a device derived from classical Greek tragedy, the genre that D’Annunzio, struck like many of his contemporaries by the lesson of Nietzsche and Goethe, wished to recreate in modern times. In *La Nave*, however, rather than a unifying voice meant to highlight the moral implications of the characters’ actions, the choir is actually divided into two factions, the Roman choir of the Catechumens versus the Byzantine choir of the *Naumachi*.<sup>142</sup> Their commentary serves mainly to highlight the different ideals of the opposing factions, and was thus used in the 1918 operatic adaptation by Tito Ricordi and Italo Montemezzi. For example, the Christian choir sings hymns to the Virgin Mary – in her maritime manifestation celebrated in “Ave Maris Stella” – and in response, the Byzantine choir accompanies Basiliola’s appearances with a “carme empio”<sup>143</sup> – “Omnes trahit Diona” – to the goddess daughter of Ocean and Thetys, the mythical mother of Dionysius. The double choir marks the oppositional structure of the play, highlighted also by designations such as “carme pio” (pious song) versus “carme empio” (blasphemous song), “canto pio” (pious canticle)

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<sup>142</sup> A similar device is used also in the 1903 tragedy *La figlia di Iorio*, where one choir upholds order, measure, tradition and ancestral rites, while the other is moved by religious piety and mercy toward the character of Mila.

<sup>143</sup> “Blasphemous song.”

versus “lode sovversiva” (subversive praise), “nome temerato” (revered name) versus “nome tremendo” (terrible name), repetitions of “virgo” versus “Diona.”

At the same time, the double chorus structure contributes to the chaotic and threatening confusion staged in the work. First of all, both choirs sing in Latin, implicitly gesturing toward the ethnic contamination that occurred within the Roman Empire and that any invocation of Latin ancestry necessarily carries within itself. Secondly, the voices of the two choirs are interwoven through the play like threads from Byzantine tapestries: “Ma per mezzo ai cori votivi *s’insinua* col vento discorde la laude avversaria che le donne di Basiliola cantano forse nella loggia dipinta d’oltremare e d’oro”<sup>144</sup> (96). The verb “*s’insinua*” indicates the sinister danger of contamination, which cannot be completely avoided. The comments of the choirs rely heavily on repetition and their message grows legible by accumulation of details, with each sentence functioning as a *tessera* of a mosaic. The result is a rich textual fabric reminiscent of Byzantine ornamentation – and its Modernist recreations – suited to the play’s Venetian setting as well as to D’Annunzio’s own taste – but hardly in line with the neoclassical purity and clean lines of Roman inspired art and architecture that would soon be embraced by Fascism.

The “Proem” is in verse form, and specifically in Sapphic Stanzas, a classical Aeolian lyric form revived by Giosué Carducci in his 1877 collection *Odi Barbare*. Carducci defined as “barbaric” his attempts at transferring classical verse structures based on quantitative meter to the Italian language, based on accentual meter, because that is how they would have sounded to the Greeks and Romans.<sup>145</sup> D’Annunzio is situating himself in this tradition and proving his mastery of classical verse forms – an important step when presenting oneself as ultimate

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<sup>144</sup> “But among the votive choruses the discordant enemy praise creeps in with the wind, sung by Basiliola’s women, perhaps in their courtyard painted ultramarine and gold.”

<sup>145</sup> Contrary to D’Annunzio’s use of the word, Carducci actually embraces the barbarian as a key element in his self- presentation as a poet, as will Marinetti.

expression of Graeco-Roman tradition. At the same time, he is placing his call to Roman imperialism within the mold of a form that originated in the pre-Roman, eastern part of the Mediterranean, within the context of female lyric poetry, allowing an eastern and ‘barbaric’ mode of expression to infiltrate the work from the outset. Furthermore, D’Annunzio’s metrical barbarism goes hand in hand with cultivated orientalizing tropes, whereas Carducci rejected what he sensed to be Byzantine effeminacy in favor of Roman strength and vitalism.

The oddity of D’Annunzio’s choice of meter here emerges when comparing *La Nave*’s metrical scheme to that of – for example – the patriotic poems contained in the aforementioned *Merope. Le canzoni delle gesta d’oltremare* (1912) book four of *Le Laudi del cielo del mare della terra degli eroi*, which are entirely in Dantean *terzine*. The metrical device chosen to express the Christian invocation to conquer the sea in the name of the past Roman glory reveals the presence of peripheral elements within that very tradition that contradict the claims to ethnic as well as cultural purity made subsequently in the play.

The word “barbaro” appears repeatedly throughout the work, in direct opposition to the civilizing endeavor of the original founders of Venice. The prologue sets up the opposition between the Romans and the Barbarians. The former are led by the tribune Marco Gratico, and organized in what appears to be a small democratic community organized around a “publico Arengo” (5), which foreshadows the pseudo-republic D’Annunzio himself would establish in Fiume more than a decade later. They are defined in politically charged terms as “popolo libero dei Profughi” – literally, “refugees” – escaped from the violence of the “Barbari.” The ‘us versus them’ opposition is particularly harsh in Marco Gratico’s first speech, in the prologue, when he

describes the destruction in the areas surrounding Venice – Cuna, Duba, Strobilo – now full of blood and corpses. “I luoghi nostri fatti castella di barbarie”<sup>146</sup> (57).

Marco’s rhetoric of aggression is again clothed in defensive terms, as the enemies are described as thieves or “ladroni”: “pigliarono Opiterno. . . pigliarono Altino . . . pigliarono Aquileia”<sup>147</sup> (58). The description of the people as refugees and their territories as in ruin is meant to both justify the use of violence and to inflame the viewers’ indignation toward perceived acts of territorial usurpation that are happening in the present day, at the hands of “ladri slavi . . . lupi di Croazia”<sup>148</sup> (13): “Nemici d’ogn’intorno, da Ravenna all’Istria; dall’Isonzo al Po trabocco di fiumi; da Cavargile al Pulanio urto di flutti, popoli asserviti in tutto il regno; Roma veneranda sforzata, svergognata, trasmutata in sasso ignudo”<sup>149</sup> (64).

Of course, the contrast between Romans and barbarians made available by the historical setting enables D’Annunzio, and his audience, to interpret the contrast between “Romans” and “Barbarians” as one between Italians – the modern-day Romans – and other peoples from the East, effectively characterizing Slavic populations as modern-day Huns and Goths. The ideological repercussions of presenting the Romans as refugees, who have had to flee from their hometowns but are still free in spirit, are evident. Elsewhere, they are referred to as “martiri” and “patriarchi,” again characterized as survivors who deserve viewers’ sympathies in their efforts to found their city anew.

The community is made up of different types of laborers working harmoniously in the shipyard, each skilled in his own craft: “il maestro degli organi,” “il mulinaro,” “il legnaiuolo,”

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<sup>146</sup> “Our lands made into fortresses for barbarism.”

<sup>147</sup> “They grabbed Opiterno . . . they grabbed Altino . . . they grabbed Aquileia.”

<sup>148</sup> “Slavic thieves . . . Croatian wolves.”

<sup>149</sup> “Enemies all around, from Ravenna to Istria; from the Isonzo to the Po overflowing with rivers; from Cavargile to Pulanio where waves collide, peoples made into slaves throughout the kingdom; venerable Rome overpowered, shamed, transformed into bare stone.”

“il vasaio,”<sup>150</sup> etc. Mentions of the different types of work carried out by the “gente Gratica” appear throughout the text. They signify both the people’s mastery over their environment through skill and inventiveness and the importance of the contributions of each member to the community. Proto-Venetian society thus resembles the corporatist state that D’Annunzio will establish at Fiume in 1920, as detailed in the Charter of Carnaro, co-authored with syndicalist Alceste De Ambris. When Sergio and Marco Gratico arrive at shore, in the prologue, their military and religious garb indicates their role alongside that of “marinari, bovari, domatori di cavalla, guardiani dei boschi, cacciatori di lupi”<sup>151</sup> (55). Their professions are basic and their tools rudimentary – “fiocine, ramponi”<sup>152</sup> (55) – but their mastery over the natural elements is unquestioned. In the “Proem,” their common belonging is made visible by their clothing: “il saio Veneto azzurreggia”<sup>153</sup> (6). The description sets up a stark contrast between old – “tombe,” “ruine” and other remnants of the past, left despite destruction – and new – the “città novella” built through hard work and collaboration. The work is both humble and heroic, as the Romans overcome “le minacce e le promesse terribili dell’Elemento, della Necessità e della Morte”<sup>154</sup> (6). The most threatening of these elements is water, which is overcome by Venice itself.

The people’s mastery over the water is emphasized throughout that work, as is natural in an account about the origins of an aquatic city like Venice, whose very existence is threatened by the lagoon’s menace of submersion. The theme also reminded readers of the repeated attempts at reclamation of Italy’s many swamp areas carried out by the government since unification, as a

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<sup>150</sup> “The organ master,” “the miller,” “the woodsman,” “the potter.”

<sup>151</sup> “Sailors, herdsmen, horse tamers, guardians of the forests, wolf hunters.”

<sup>152</sup> “Harpoons, traction cleats.”

<sup>153</sup> “The light blue of the tunic from Veneto is everywhere.”

<sup>154</sup> “The threats the terrible promises of the Element, of Necessity, of Death.”

response to continued malaria epidemics.<sup>155</sup> The project, which would be completed only under Fascism and further charged with connotations of racial purification, had been especially debated in the years immediately prior to the composition of *La Nave*. In 1907, the government instituted the “Magistrato delle Acque per le province venete e di Mantova,” in effect reviving an ancient branch of government of the Republic of Venice. In *La Nave*, Marco Gratico is made tribune of the seas and “Maestro delle Acque” (Master of Waters). The expertise of the community in domesticating the wild waters of the sea is presented as a continuation of the Latin superiority in urban and hydraulic design. The description of the setting at the beginning of “Episode one” underscores the presence of manmade objects alongside the natural elements: “Loggia lastricata,” “colonne romane.”<sup>156</sup> The character of the helmsman – *il Piloto* – recommends placing the mills used for flour-making onto the ship in order to exploit hydraulic power and claims to have seen Romans doing it in the Tiber, during a siege.

The water also functions symbolically as locus of renewal and sanctioning of God’s election, two themes that are threaded throughout the work, as the Roman populace and its leader are continually referred to as new and youthful – “genti della patria nova”<sup>157</sup> (62) – as well as configured as the ‘chosen people’ of the Christian era. Marco Gratico himself presents all of the traits of the *homo novus*. He is called “pargolo” and “garzon di fasce,” “figlio d’Ema”<sup>158</sup> (17). His enemies refer to him as “sbarbato.”<sup>159</sup> The city erected by the Venetians is constantly called “nuova” and presented in contrast to the ruins and tombs that are becoming its foundation. The text constantly implies a backward gaze at the ancient glory of the Roman lineage while

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<sup>155</sup> Bills of 1862, 1863, 1868, 1873, Baccarini Law 1883, Pavoncelli-La Cava Law 1898.

<sup>156</sup> “Paved portico,” “roman columns.”

<sup>157</sup> “People of the new fatherland.”

<sup>158</sup> “Boy . . . babe in arms . . . son of Ema.”

<sup>159</sup> “Smooth-faced.”

explicitly looking forward toward modernity and the conquest of the *oltremare*: “Chi guarda innanzi e non chi guarda indietro ci conduca. Rinati siamo. In mare ci ribattezza il nostro Dio. La nave Ei dà per cuna al popolo novella”<sup>160</sup> (17).

The thread of domination over the sea is also fraught with political implications. By situating the action on the Venetian lagoon and centering it on a shipyard, the text invokes the open sea as its horizon and explicitly situates the destiny of the Venetian people beyond the shore. The Faledri are said to come from Aquileia, the most Byzantine of the lagunar cities. D’Annunzio accentuates this ethnic and cultural element by transferring the origin of Basiliola Faledro – “Aquila di Aquileia”<sup>161</sup> – to “oltremare.” The term – literally “overseas” – evokes the lands conquered in the crusades between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries as well as Italy’s colonial enterprises at the turn of the twentieth century. Decades before the establishment of the Fascist regime, Italy’s liberal government was seeking to consolidate the nation’s political power alongside major European colonial powers that had marginalized it and to spearhead by means of empire a new construction of civilization, on the grounds of its geographical position, between North and South, West and East.<sup>162</sup>

In *La Nave* the *oltremare* is a space that threatens but also constantly beckons to the proto-Italians. The sea is the object of dispute, its conquest the sanction of political and military power, and the prize in the cultural war between East and West. The Roman prisoners promise Basiliola, in exchange for her killing them: “Ti faremo donna dell’isole, signora delle navi!”<sup>163</sup> (88), “l’estremità dei lidi saranno come gli orli del tuo manto . . . si chiameranno del tuo Nome i

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<sup>160</sup> “Let us be guided by he who looks ahead and not backwards. We are reborn. In the sea our God christens us. The ship He gives to his new people as cradle.”

<sup>161</sup> “Eagle of Aquileia.”

<sup>162</sup> See Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Modernity if Just Over There,” *Interventions* 8, no. 3 (2006): 380-393.

<sup>163</sup> “We will make you mistress of the islands, lady of the ships!”

mari”<sup>164</sup> (89). In the prologue, Marco Gratico is acclaimed by the people *Tribuno del Mare*. The explicit enjoinder is to build the ship that will allow the city’s domination to extend to the sea: “Costruisci la Nave grande! . . . Tu parla a tutto il mare!”<sup>165</sup> (62). “Arma la prora e salpa verso il Mondo”<sup>166</sup> is repeated by the chorus of the Catechumens and introduces the name of the ship that is being built – “Totus Mundus” – which indicates the space over which the Gratici will exercise power as relentlessly ‘beyond’ the local.

The exhortations recall the figure of Dante’s Ulysses, which had come to signify Italians’ innate vocation to exploration, in the name of which nationalists had invoked Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo and Amerigo Vespucci as historical embodiments of the Ulyssean desire to go ‘beyond the Pillars of Hercules’ and as proof of Italy’s longstanding imperial domination despite the lack of a colonial power comparable to that of Portugal, England, France, Spain or the Netherlands. D’Annunzio had already depicted the modern generation of Italian explorers as “Ulissidi” (161) – Ulysses’ progeny – in the 1903 epic poem *Maia*.<sup>167</sup> There, he paraphrased “Itinerario verso i paesi d’Etiopia,”<sup>168</sup> an 1895 travelog by writer and critic friend Edoardo Scarfoglio, one of the modern day Ulysses celebrated in *Maia* and a staunch supporter of the colonial enterprise in East Africa as a means to inject new life into Italy’s decaying nation.

In Basiliola’s speech to Marco Gratico, she entices him to embark on a colonizing journey, by appealing to the “sogno celato nel cuore avventuroso del navigator adriatico”<sup>169</sup> (127). She is painted as merely awakening an already present – because inherently ‘Italian’ –

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<sup>164</sup> “The borders of the shores will be like the hem of your cloak . . . the seas will bear your Name.”

<sup>165</sup> “Build the great Ship! Speak to the entire sea!”

<sup>166</sup> “Arm the prow and set sail toward the World.”

<sup>167</sup> Book 1 of *Laudi del cielo del mare della terra e degli eroi*.

<sup>168</sup> Edoardo Scarfoglio, “Itinierario verso i paesi d’Etiopia,” *Il Convito* 1, no. 1-3 (1895): 45-68; 192-223.

<sup>169</sup> “Dream hidden in the adventurous heart of the Adriatic seaman.”



thirst for adventure and exploration – and directing it “verso l’Oriente” (127). Fascism would soon continue this tradition, as witnessed by the “Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana” (Italian Civilization Building) built in Rome’s EUR neighborhood and designed to be the new Colosseum. The inscription is taken from a famous speech of Benito Mussolini, on October 2, 1935, referred to as “Discorso della mobilitazione”: “Un popolo di poeti, di artisti, di eroi, di santi, di pensatori, di scienziati, *di navigatori, di trasmigratori*.”<sup>170</sup> Note the ideological reference to migrants, as an attempt to cast in terms of adventure the experience of thousands of emigrants who left Italy during the final decades for the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century to escape economic hardship.



Figure 1.7. Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. EUR, Rome.

Online: ARTstor, accessed August 5, 2020. New York: ARTstor, Inc.

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<sup>170</sup> Benito Mussolini “Il discorso della mobilitazione,” in *Scritti e discorsi di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Valentino Piccoli (Milano: Hoepli, 1934-1940), 220. “A people of poets, artists, heroes, saints, thinkers, scientists, *seafarers and migrants*.” Translation is mine.

The core of *La Nave*'s imperialistic discourse is Basiliola's speech to Marco Gratico, which could be read as a colonialist manifesto. She describes the lands beyond the sea as a typical land of plenty: "Alla porta dei mari caldi, là già, dove il Sole è ancora un dio che ride, sopr'altri sette monti un'altra Roma splende . . . corno di dovizia . . . mai esausta, immensa preda! È quivi il luogo della tua forza"<sup>171</sup> (127). Like great part of the coeval colonial discourse, D'Annunzio is presenting imperialism toward the Adriatic sea and beyond as a response to the increased emigration of Italians toward northern Europe and especially North America, another land of plenty – the mythical *paese di cuccagna* – whose streets are said to be paved with gold. Giovanni Pascoli, also politically engaged at the time, expressed these concerns both in the 1904 poem "Italy" and in the aforementioned 1911 public speech "La grande proletaria si è mossa," in support of the military campaign in Libya. Basiliola is said to literally direct the "dream" toward the East by referencing the material goods the area has to offer: "avorio," "pinne di delfino"<sup>172</sup> (127). D'Annunzio, who is considered among other things one of the first advertising experts of his time, gives Basiliola's speech the tone of a tourist brochure: "Tutto è da prendere; tutto è da rapire . . . Tu ben sai quest'arte!"<sup>173</sup> (128).

The speech also heavily characterizes the foreign people as intrinsically inferior because of their very geographical localization: "Il fango del trivio là fermenta onde la plebe è sempre briaca e acclama chi le dà più rosso spettacolo. Il Palagio il Circo il Tempio e il Lupanare son le

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<sup>171</sup> "At the entry to the warm seas, over there, where the Sun is still a laughing god, above other seven hills another Rome is shining . . . horn of richness . . . never consumed, immense prey! This is the place for your strength."

<sup>172</sup> "Ivory," "dolphin fins."

<sup>173</sup> "Everything is yours for the taking, ready to be stolen . . . You know this art very well!"

Quattro corna della Bestia asiatica”<sup>174</sup> (128). Such an axiologically charged representation justifies the colonial enterprise on the grounds of moral, civil and even physical superiority. Given the orientalizing and female characterization of the speaker herself, it presents the colonies as actively wishing to be colonized, according to the typical gendering of the Orient in Western colonial discourse. At the same time, the framework of colonialism and the attribution of the description of the beauty and richness of the East to the character of Basiliola allow D’Annunzio space to express his genuine fascination for eastern cultures without jeopardizing his ideological stance. Oriental exoticism – such as anti-colonialist Andrea Sperelli enjoyed in *Il Piacere* – and imperialist militancy are interwoven inextricably in the poet’s imagination.

At a closer look, the land versus sea dichotomy – one of the many on which the piece rests – is undermined by the Venetian setting itself. The amphibian nature of the city is foregrounded from the very first pages of the prologue, when the workers’ toil is interrupted by a quasi-Apocalyptic moment: a storm during which earth and water seem to take each other’s places: “Tutto si trasmuta”<sup>175</sup> (15). Rivers submerge planes, and islands appear in the water. Rather than a clear-cut boundary between here and there, us and them, earth and sea, West and East, the liminal space of the Venetian lagoon is actually a space for contamination and superimposition. As Marco Gratico states in his first speech in the prologue, there is no place for the Latin people to bury their dead “in questa patria intrisa d’acque”<sup>176</sup> (59).

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<sup>174</sup> “The mud in the trivium ferments there, which is why the commoners are always drunk and clamor for the bloodiest spectacle. The Palace the Circus the Temple the Brothel are the Four horns of the Asian Beast.”

<sup>175</sup> “A transmutation takes over everything.”

<sup>176</sup> “In this land drenched in water.”

The threat of this mixing, fraught with ethnic implications, is symbolized by the recurring image of mud or “melma.”<sup>177</sup> The mud, as mixture of water and earth, functions in the stereotypical fashion as epitome of the lowly and impure in several passages culminating in the description of the menacing “Fossa Fuia.” Basiliola spurs Marco to embark on a maritime conquest by asking: “E la tua forza consumerai tu nella melma e nella sabbia...?”<sup>178</sup> (126) and contrasts the splendors of the oriental land of plenty with the “stagni amari”<sup>179</sup> (129) of the Venetian lagoon.<sup>180</sup> The area is described as “stagno del mare . . . fango e sale”<sup>181</sup> (90). The edification of the new city is the attempt to push back against the hybridity of the space, drawing earth out of water, a home out of a menacing threshold and a pure people out of an ethnically and linguistically hybrid population. The “Fossa Fuia,” the “gorgo . . . in cui il luogo sia tutto sommerso”<sup>182</sup> (118) is the ultimate threat to the lagoon city and the site for the regression to primitive instincts, for example in the episode in which the Roman prisoners masochistically demand to be killed by Basiliola. The swampy waters of the crater are also the place where Orso Faledro, who was blinded along with Basiliola’s four brothers by the Gratici, was meant to macerate, according to Ema (27). The blinding “all’uso di Bisanzio”<sup>183</sup> (31) was meant to be a carrying-out of an ‘eastern’ form of punishment for usurping and tyrannizing lands up to the

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<sup>177</sup> As Barbara Spackman points out Georges Sorel’s *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908) employs a similar image just a year later in describing as “democratic marsh” the “blurring of clearly demarcated class identities” – another instance of enmeshment that would have of course disturbed D’Annunzio. Barbara Spackman, “Il verbo (e)sangue. Gabriele D’Annunzio and the ritualization of Violence,” *Quaderni d’italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1983), 219.

<sup>178</sup> “And will you let your strength wither away in mud and sand?”

<sup>179</sup> “Bitter swamps.”

<sup>180</sup> See Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, “Grounds for Reclamation: Fascism and Postfascism in the Pontine Marshes” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 27, no. 1 (2016): 94-142.

<sup>181</sup> “Swamp of the sea . . . mud and salt.”

<sup>182</sup> “Vortex . . . in which the entire land would be submerged.”

<sup>183</sup> “According to Byzantine custom.”

Piave – an obvious reference to the contested northeastern Italian border in the early twentieth century.

The very choice of Venice as setting for a nationalist drama, while fitting given the imperialistic projection toward East and South and the participation in the debate surrounding the northeastern border of the country, opens up the space for mobilities and instabilities that push against the monolithic nationalist discourse. The most telling effect of this localization is the surprising conflation between the “patria” – which by definition evokes images of rootedness and stability – and the ship itself. In several passages, this identification is explicit: “Edifica nel mare le nostre mura . . . Voi che abitate sopra le grandi acque”<sup>184</sup> (62) The name of the ship – “Tuttilmondo/Totus Mundus” – while obviously alluding to the unlimited breadth of Italy’s colonizing impetus, also blurs the boundaries of the homeland. Rather than in ‘building a wall,’ Marco Gratico’s nationalist mission consists in abandoning the fatherland and setting out to sea: “Io mi bandisco dalla patria mia. Io mi recido dalla mia radice”<sup>185</sup> (224), “la patria è su la nave”<sup>186</sup> (248). The fatherland is not marked by stable territorial boundaries, but literally fluctuating in the open space of the sea, and reconquering it requires a certain degree of rootlessness.

The new colonies are by definition a site of transculturation in which cultural influence, while heavily determined by the unbalance of power, is not monodirectional. After her return from the mythical island of Costanziaca, Ema, mother of Marco Gratico, announces the foundation of the new city:

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<sup>184</sup> “Edify our walls on the sea . . . You who live on the great waters.”

<sup>185</sup> “I banish myself from my fatherland. I cut myself off from my roots.”

<sup>186</sup> “The fatherland is on the ship.”

Città, ti fonderò sopra i miei *cedri....oro...zaffiro...diaspro...* e tu traboccherai di beni; e tutte le vele e tutti i remi e i naviganti saranno in te per trafficar con te, ricchi per te, attoniti di te; e tu possederai *gli estrani*; e tu in ogni porto avrai la reggia tua, il Mar Latino e oltre le Colonne; e per sempre sarai glorificata sopra ogni fluttuo, entro ogni gorgo, verso ogni vento, promette l’Iddio nostro”<sup>187</sup> (221).

The speech highlights the totality of the city’s conquests abroad, again referencing the Pillars of Hercules and implicitly recalling the figure of Ulysses as well as synthetically pointing toward the Roman domination of the Mediterranean by calling it “Mar Latino.” The possession of everlasting glory and of all foreign peoples, here promised by God to his elect, is of course the ultimate imperialistic ambition. However, the mention of the foundation being made of gold, cedars, sapphire and diamonds – materials from or associated with the eastern Mediterranean – together with the insistence on totality and multiplicity are in tension with a merely assimilatory perspective. As she speaks, Ema’s arm is “teso verso Oriente”<sup>188</sup> (221), indicating the mission’s direction and also beckoning to a fascinating land, opposite to the geographical areas to which waves of Italian emigrants were indeed flooding.

The dangerous mixing symbolized by the mud presses against the purity of ancestries on which the love triangle between Basiliola, Marco and Sergio Gratico rests. By setting up the opposition between the ethnically pure Marco Gratico and the mysteriously hybrid Basiliola, the text wrestles with opposite ideals of citizenship and culture – mixed ethnically versus pure –

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<sup>187</sup> “City, I will erect you on top of me *cedars . . . gold . . . sapphire . . . diamond . . .* and you will be overflowing with riches; and *all* of the sails and *all* of the oards and the seamen will be in you to trade with you, rich for you, astonished by you; and you will possess *the foreigners*; and in *every* harbor you will have your royal palace, the Latin Sea and beyond the Pillars; and you will be glorified forever above *every* wave, in *every* vortex, toward *every* wind, Our Lord promises.”

<sup>188</sup> “Outstretched toward the Orient.”

contemplating the possibility of the former while at the same time sanctioning the victory of the latter.

The peoples' grounds for acclaiming Marco Gratico as tribune are precisely the purity of his lineage and his resistance to racial contamination – “Non fornicerà coi Greci”<sup>189</sup> (21) – which of course proves to be false. In direct contrast to this purity is the Faledro family. Basiliola is defined multiple times in typically misogynistic terms as a whore, according to the Symbolist cliché of the Salome, the Whore of Babylon. Rather than the monetary aspect of prostitution, the object of the insult is precisely the union between the woman and multiple men, specifically of various ethnicities, all of which could be designated with the blanket term of barbarians. Basiliola was given to foreigners: “*accozzaglia* dei Bulgari degli Unni e degli Alani”<sup>190</sup> (22). This feminine threat is framed explicitly as foreign – “Donde è venuta a te? Non hai fiutato ne' suoi capelli odore di barbarie?”<sup>191</sup> (115) – and oriental – she learned her seductive dance “nei quadrivii di Bisanzio”<sup>192</sup> (68). Her ethnic difference is the mark of her radical ‘otherness’: “Ell’è d’un altro ceppo”<sup>193</sup> (113).

Not only is Basiliola herself descendant from a Byzantine, and therefore eastern, lineage, but her alleged contacts with men of different barbaric populations make her a receptacle for traces of other foreign populaces, whose semen is literally mixed inside of her body: “L’Ungaro

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<sup>189</sup> “He will not fornicate with the Greeks.”

<sup>190</sup> “A rabble of Bulgarians, Huns, and Alans.” And Marco reminds her: “la tua bocca fu premuta non da me solo ma da moltitudini” (your mouth was pressed not by myself alone but by multitudes) (123). Ema challenges Basiliola by asking her where she has learned religious hymns, and the response again highlights her barbaric exchanges: “Eruli, Gepidi, Sarmati, Longobardi, Bulgari.” Traba, the man of God, equates Basiliola with mythical women from the Orient, who in varying ways signify temptation against virile qualities: “Circe, Bibli, Mirra, Pasife, Delila, Iezabel, Hogla...”

<sup>191</sup> “Whence has she come to you? Have you not smelled in her hair the stench of barbarity?”

<sup>192</sup> “In Bysanthium’s quadrivia.”

<sup>193</sup> “She is of a different stock.”

giallo e il Mauro di Numidia, l'Unno dell'Istro e il Sarmato del Tanai non lasciarono in lei le lor vestigia?"<sup>194</sup> (114). It is predicted by several characters that Basiliola will transfer her whorish ways *oltremare*: "E te n'andrai puttaneeggiando altrove con le tue terga flagellate; andrai oltremare a raggiungere il lenone, il fratel tuo Giovanni"<sup>195</sup> (92).

Basiliola is characterized by her primordial and feral instinct. The text indulges particularly in her case in grotesque, decadent imagery. Her violence is recurrently connected to her femininity, highlighted in crudely biological terms: "brama di veder corre il sangue, . . . travaglia l'oscura bestialità delle femmine umane, come se per legge di talione volessero elleno ricomperar quello perduto a ogni luna"<sup>196</sup> (95), "sei lorda come un panno mestruato"<sup>197</sup> (152). The image of blood recurs in references to Basiliola, to signify both the re-institution of religious sacrifice in pagan terms (216) and her belonging to a different lineage. "Hai l'odore degli Unni nel tuo sangue!"<sup>198</sup> (155). As she seductively strips her ornate and refined clothing she is compared to a "serpe"<sup>199</sup> (111) shedding its skin – an allusion to the Biblical episode of Eve tempting Adam, employed in typically misogynistic fashion to imply her responsibility in Marco Gratico's becoming "quasi matricida"<sup>200</sup> (111). He, in fact, betrayed his own mother, the deaconess Ema, abandoning her on the island of Costanziaca – which according to local mythology housed ten thousand refugees fleeing the barbarians from the East.

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<sup>194</sup> "Did not the yellow Hungarian, the Numidian Maur, the Hun from Istro, and Sarmat from Tanai leave their traces in her?"

<sup>195</sup> "And you shall go whoring around elsewhere with your backside whipped; you will go overseas to and meet the pimp, your brother Giovanni."

<sup>196</sup> "The desire to see blood flow torments the obscure beastliness of human females, as if they were trying to buy back the blood they lose with every moon."

<sup>197</sup> "You're filthy, like a menstruated cloth."

<sup>198</sup> "You have the stench of the Huns in your blood."

<sup>199</sup> "Serpent."

<sup>200</sup> "Almost a matricide."



The male versus female dichotomy is superimposed to the western versus eastern opposition. This allows for the exploitation of implicit sexual violence metaphors for colonization and imperialism, a mainstay of Western imperialist culture, which associated the Orient with “feminine penetrability” and “supine malleability” in order to justify its domination by Western nations.<sup>201</sup> D’Annunzio had relied on this gendered representation in *Maia*, where the Libyan and Eritrean sibyls depicted in the Sistine Chapel frescoes are asked: “il tuo fianco fecondo non è fatto pel seme del vincitore?”<sup>202</sup> (196). Marco and Basiliola’s mutual attraction, however, calls into question the autonomy of Western civilization. The sheer length of the episode in which she seduces Marco bears witness to the text’s concession to the fascinating beauty of all that she represents. Basiliola’s death by voluntarily throwing herself into the fire, before her enemies can make her into the figurehead of their ship, also grants her the status of a tragic heroine. Furthermore, it is Basiliola who reminds Marco of his mission: “Ricordati del grido che gittasti all’arnego ‘Alma la prora e salpa verso il Mondo’”<sup>203</sup> (126). Basiliola herself, as originally from Aquileia, and part of the Byzantine lineage, symbolizes on the one hand the eastern cultural and ethnic elements against which the Latin purity of the Gratici is pitted, and on the other hand the dangerous enmeshing of elements that threatens the purity of any race.<sup>204</sup>

As a descendant of the Faledro family in the Veneto town of Aquileia, Basiliola’s character reveals an anxiety over racial and cultural hybridity and multiplicity – “le due maree si

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<sup>201</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 206.

<sup>202</sup> “Is your fertile hip not made for the winner’s semen?”

<sup>203</sup> “Remember what you shouted in the assembly: arm the prow and set sail toward the World.”

<sup>204</sup> Her identity and origin are often questioned over the course of the work. “Figlia d’Orso ti so; ti so Faledra, Aquila d’Aquileia. Sento in te fremere le radici della razza terribile” (121). “I know you to be the daughter of Orso; I know you as a member of the Faledro family, Eagle of Aquileia. I feel the roots of the terrible race shuddering within you.”

alternano nel mio petto”<sup>205</sup> (160), “or tutte le radici della stirpe gridano in me”<sup>206</sup> (181) – not only as outward threats, but as something constitutive of the Venetian lagoon itself – and by extension of Italy. Toward the end of episode three, after Basiliola has been firmly established as symbol of Byzantine and eastern culture, she demands: “Riconoscimi Faledra della stirpe d’Aquileia romana” and asks: “anche me prendimi su la nave”<sup>207</sup> (240). Through this question, the text is testing the inclusiveness of the proposed cultural criterion of *romanità*, which historically proved to be rather more capacious than its early twentieth-century ideological reformulations. As amphibious as Venice itself, Basiliola is often referred to as a creature from the sea – “tornata sono dal profondo del mare”<sup>208</sup> (41), “furia del mare . . . ondeggia, ondeggia!”<sup>209</sup> (160) the prisoners chant as she dances seductively. She is the ultimate and threatening ‘other’ place.

However, her being often called a “sirena” – a hybrid by definition – reveals the seduction enacted by this ‘other.’ The aesthetic realm is the one where the superiority of the foreign over the local is most explicitly acknowledged within the work. Many descriptions of the Greeks’ luscious clothing and the abundance of gold ornamentation channel D’Annunzio’s own preferences with regard to style. Basiliola is the epitome of unrivaled beauty: “bastava un battito di ciglia perché talun di voi trascolorasse”<sup>210</sup> (237).<sup>211</sup> Her richly ornate embroidered clothing is contrasted to the simple rags of Traba, the monk, and characterized as stereotypically oriental,

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<sup>205</sup> “The two tides alternate in my breast.”

<sup>206</sup> “Now all the ancestry’s roots cry within me.”

<sup>207</sup> “Acknowledge me as Faledra, from the lineage of roman Aquileia . . . take me on your ship too.”

<sup>208</sup> “I have returned from the depths of the sea.”

<sup>209</sup> “Fury of the sea . . . Sway, sway!”

<sup>210</sup> “A bat of her eye was enough to make some of you blush.”

<sup>211</sup> Her red hair symbolizes violent seduction, according to the type of the *beauté maudite*. Conversely, Marco Gratico’s people are admittedly “gente rude” (69), “crude people.”

given its impenetrably geometric, non-representational, pattern, paralleling her nature “misteriosa come un monogramma”<sup>212</sup> (111).

Basiliola is also the figure around whom one of the strongest dichotomies on which the work pivots, that between Christianity and paganism. When Traba, the monk constantly referred to as “l’uomo di Dio,” accuses Marco Gratico of betraying his calling, he opposes him – “unto del Crisma, assunto dal tuo Dio, costituito per patto sopra il popolo”<sup>213</sup> – to the “femmina grecastra”<sup>214</sup> (201): “converso è l’inno in una cantilena meretrice”<sup>215</sup> (109).<sup>216</sup> The work is imbued with religious vocabulary and tropes and sets up the conflict between opposing religious traditions as one of the driving forces of the narrative. When Marco Gratico capitulates to Basiliola’s seduction, he claims “Iddio m’ha lasciato; non m’ha riscosso. L’Idolo è più potente”<sup>217</sup> (130).

As mentioned in reference to the prayer structure of the “Proem,” the religious framework is functional to a ‘God on our side’ rhetoric of sorts, in which the Romans’ expedition appears willed by God and thus victory guaranteed. The device is an implicit ‘manifest destiny’ argument used to justify territorial expansion in the majority of colonizing enterprises, given its service to the true God versus the Idol. D’Annunzio refashions this argument by alluding to the Crusades as the epitome of East versus West conflict and contextual framework for the story set in the sixth century. One of the threads underlying Marco’s

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<sup>212</sup> “As mysterious as a monogram.”

<sup>213</sup> “Anointed with the chrism, chosen by your God, established as covenant over the people.”

<sup>214</sup> “Greekish female.”

<sup>215</sup> “The hymn has been transformed into a whorish chant.”

<sup>216</sup> Basiliola evokes eastern spirituality understood broadly. She is represented as a sorceress, expert in “incantagione di Ecàte” (Hecate’s enchantment) (112) a preacher of a “falsa Geenna” (113) and a prophet who speaks mysteriously “simile alle sibille” (124). She also invokes a multiplicity of deities as opposed to the homogeneity of Christianity: “Uno Dio! Una Fede!” (One God! One Faith!) (170).

<sup>217</sup> “God has left me; He has not sustained me. The Idol is more powerful.”

expedition is the discourse of the chosen people, carried out through a use of biblical quotations, resemanticizing the Old Testament narrative to configure not the Israelites but the early venetian populace of Roman descent as the “*stirpe eletta*” (chosen people).

From the very first characterization as refugees and exiles – “*Rivela, o Ema, intiera la parola che Dio promette ai figli senza terra*”<sup>218</sup> (219) – to the quasi-literal quotations from both Old and New Testaments, the text exploits the biblical narrative of God’s election of the Jews and establishment of a new covenant with the Christians for political purposes. Ema’s speech in episode three is built around the trope of the “new heart,” with references to both Ezekiel (31, 11-33) and the letter of Paul to the Ephesians: “*Fatevi un cuor nuovo per camminare in novità di vita!*”<sup>219</sup> (218). Ema’s speech also mimics the book of Jeremiah, with God’s message to the exiles no longer directed toward Babylon, but to the Adriatic coast: “*Ecco, li adunerò da tutti i lidi dove gli avrò scacciati nel mio cruccio e gli farò quel patto eterno che feci co’ loro padre; e al loro Calcagno io darò da calcare non la terra molle ma la coverta delle navi, con istormo nel di della battaglia, e con turbo nel di della tempesta*”<sup>220</sup> (219-220). Her repeated injunction “*Cantate un nuovo cantico!*”<sup>221</sup> reframes Psalm 97.

As for the actual narrative arc, the most explicit connection to the Christian tradition is the reference to St Mark the Evangelist, patron of Venice. His body was buried in Alexandria of Egypt and brought to Venice in 829, transferred to what would later become the crypt of the Basilica of St Mark. *La Nave*, set at the end of the sixth century, superimposes the search for the

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<sup>218</sup> “Reveal, o Ema, the entire word that God promises his landless children.”

<sup>219</sup> “Make yourselves a new heart to walk toward the newness of life.”

<sup>220</sup> “And I shall gather them from all the coasts where I will have driven them in my anger and shall establish with them that eternal covenant that I made with their father; and I shall have their heel walk not on the brittle earth but on that covered in ships, and storms on the day of battle, and uproar on the day of squalls.”

<sup>221</sup> “Sing a new song!”

body of the saint to the theme of the crusades, framing the conquest of foreign lands as the rightful returning to the West of a sacred relic that belongs to its religious tradition. Marco Gratico claims the honor of having found the body of the saint whose name he has inherited. At the beginning of the play, the area surrounding the harbor is described as a land in ruins, where sacred and profane are disrespectfully mixed. “Le sacre Ossa” (the sacred Bones), “i Tutelari,” “i nostri morti” (our dead) are jumbled together “tra la polve la cenere e il rottame”<sup>222</sup> (58). The description is obviously meant to arouse indignation in the viewers, as well as introduce the theme of impurity as opposed to separation. Many of the characters of Marco Gratico’s faction have religious roles: his brother Sergio is appointed bishop at the beginning of the play, their mother Ema is referred to as “diaconessa,” other characters include monks, prophets and an exorcist. Religious symbols appear both in the harbor and on the ship that is being built: a cross, the Virgin Mary, the bible. The Basilica and the area directly in front of it are the setting for two of the major episodes, and an altar often dominates the scene.

The character of Sergio Gratico, who becomes Basiliola’s lover and gradually transforms Christian rites into Pagan ones, embodies the danger of eastern cultural elements infiltrating the West: “Certo tu servi un dio ma quello infame che i Gentili posero a custodia degli orti, il dio deforme di Lampsaco”<sup>223</sup> (105). Sergio substitutes the sacrament of holy communion with the rite of Agape, whose participants are “non come fedeli adunati a celebrare il natalizio del Martire, ma come Gentili in gozzoviglia notturna dedicate ai Mani”<sup>224</sup> (138), he appears inebriated for more than half of the play and his attire resembles that of Byzantine king: “tessuto

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<sup>222</sup> “Among dust, soot and scrapmetal.”

<sup>223</sup> “Yes, you serve a god, but the heinous one that the Gentiles placed as custodians of gardens, the deformed god of Lampsacus.”

<sup>224</sup> “Not like faithful united in celebration of the birth day of the Martyr, but like Gentiles during nighttime debauchery dedicated to the Manes.”

preziosissimo, ad onta all'ordine liturgico. . . fregi d'oro"<sup>225</sup> (138).<sup>226</sup> The Altar of the Martyrs becomes an Altar of Victory – signifying not only the temporary defeat of the Roman faction, but also the infiltration and gradual re-establishment of Paganism to the detriment of Christianity. The threat of this contamination is expressed through Basiliola's affair with Sergio Gratico, Marco Gratico's own brother, and seduction of Marco herself, which comes dangerously close to incest. The relationship between the woman and Marco is referred to explicitly as "mixing": "Viva ti mescoli a me vivo"<sup>227</sup> (122). Those who take part in the rite are referred to with the pejorative "plebaglia" who clamor for wine, as opposed to the "zelatori" who chant "fuori i fornicatori e gli idolatri! . . . Sia lodato il Cristo!"<sup>228</sup> (142).

Despite the critical framing of Sergio and Basiliola's establishment of pagan religious rites, one is inevitably reminded of the accusations of blasphemy and immorality to which D'Annunzio himself was subjected during the course of his far from religiously orthodox career – to the point that his complaints against the close-mindedness of Italian critics and readers alike would become cliché. The pagan-Christian syncretism that the text stages as a threat is actually represented and celebrated in the rooms of "Il Vittoriale." Syncretic accumulation to the point of disorienting *bric-à-brac* is the mark not only of D'Annunzio's personal aesthetic but also of his moral and ideological self-fashioning. In book nine of *Laus Vitae*, the god Hermes is praised as an absolute ideal because of his androgynous nature. In *Cento e cento e cento e cento pagine del Libro Segreto di Gabriele D'Annunzio, tentanto di morire* – the 'diary' that D'Annunzio left unfinished – he thus describes the "room of relics":

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<sup>225</sup> "Exquisitely precious fabric, a disgrace to the lithurgical order . . . golden decorations."

<sup>226</sup> "Alive you mix with me, who am alive."

<sup>228</sup> "Out with the fornicators and idolaters! . . . Praise be to Christ."

Di quanta lussuria belluina, di quanto piacere perverso, di quanta immaginazione impura io mi son nutrito . . . Dianzi, nel Cenacolo delle Reliquie, fra i Santi e gli idoli, fra le immagini di tutte le credenze, fra gli aspetti di tutto il Divino, ero quasi sopraffatto dall'empito lirico della mia sintesi religiosa. . . . Un senso infinito dell'ansia religiosa nei secoli, e ne' secoli de' secoli, mi amplia infinitamente il petto scarnito.<sup>229</sup> (710)

The accusation of blasphemy in the form of mixing the sacred and the profane – “hai mescolato il balsamo nell’acqua”<sup>230</sup> (171) – could very well be directed to D’Annunzio. His own hybrid, syncretic and fluid aesthetic resulted in a space of belonging that can only be described as highly idiosyncratic, to the point that even his professed religion was the expression of his own temperament, as shown by his reflections in *Libro Segreto* as well as the symbolic furnishings of “Il Vittoriale.” A tapestry in the “room of relics” of a priest holding up five fingers is set off by the motto “Five fingers, five sins,” D’Annunzio having eliminated the two cardinal sins – lust and greed – which he claimed as personal prerogatives. The statues in his personal studio include, alongside casts from the Parthenon, a plaster bust of his own lover and muse Eleonora Duse.

In contrast, *La Nave* is a text written for the theater, which was performed for the first time for the King and Queen of Italy at the “Teatro Argentina” of Rome in 1908, before moving to Venice’s “La Fenice” on St. Mark’s Day. As much a theatrical performance as a call to action,

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<sup>229</sup> “What beastly lust, what perverted pleasure, what impure imagination have I consumed . . . Di quanta lussuria belluina, di quanto piacere perverso, di quanta immaginazione impura io mi son nutrito . . . Here, in the Cenacle of Relics, among the Saints and the idols, fra i Santi e gli idoli, among the icons of all beliefs, among the images of all of the Divin, I was almost overcome by the lyric force of my religious synthesis . . . An infinite sense of the religious trepidation forever, world without end, infinitely broadens my haggard chest.” Translation is mine.

<sup>230</sup> “You have mixed balm with water.”

*La Nave* was deemed so threatening by the Austrian government that it protested its presentation. Marinetti, always attentive to D'Annunzio's projects, was inspired by D'Annunzio's *La Nave* to organize a demonstration in favor of Italian expansionism during a theatrical performance in the Austro-Hungarian Trieste, mere months after the piece's premiere.<sup>231</sup> *La Nave* was adapted as an opera by Ricordi and Montemezzi and performed in 1918 at Milan's "La Scala" at the eve of the Armistice, as a silent film in 1920<sup>232</sup> and successfully performed both in Italy and abroad – including a series of performances in the United States. A work meant to speak to many, *La Nave* by necessity relies on clear-cut distinctions between 'here and there,' 'us and them' and in order to do so forcibly organizes the fluid material of D'Annunzio's own creative world into a fixed dichotomic structure.

Both *La Nave* and *Il Fuoco* show D'Annunzio to be negotiating between a cosmopolitan cultural and artistic ideal and the ideological affirmation of Italian national superiority. In both cases, the latter ultimately takes precedence over notions of hybridity, multiplicity and foreign influence that are nevertheless their driving force. Rather than attempting to rationalize the paradoxical figure of D'Annunzio, it is more fruitful to take stock of the many unanswered questions posed by his works and offer them to the broader community of scholars invested in understanding phenomena such as hybridity, mobility, cosmopolitanism, and the ways in which they push back

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<sup>231</sup> For connections between Marinetti's actions and D'Annunzio's work, see Anna Baldazzi, *Bibliografia della critica dannunziana nei periodici italiani dal 1880 al 1938* (Roma: Cooperativa scrittori, 1977), 34.

<sup>232</sup> *La nave*, directed by the author's son Gabriellino d'Annunzio (1920), with Ida Rubinstein as Basiliola.



against nationalizing and homogenizing attempts. The case of D'Annunzio speaks to the impossibility of tracing clear-cut ideological distinctions and his extraterritorial and transnational variety of nationalism complicates contemporary discourses that equate nationalism with building walls and patrolling borders. It shows the need to open up mononational discourses surrounding colonialism, imperialism as well as literary production to include broader geopolitical spaces. It warns that xenophobia and racism insinuate themselves in subtle ways in experiences of cross-cultural contact.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Making the Self a Barbarian. F. T. Marinetti's Poetics of *Sradicamento*.

On February 20, 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto was published – in French – in the Parisian journal *Le Figaro*, after appearing the previous week in rapid succession in a series of small Italian newspapers. On February 5 “Il Manifesto del Futurismo” had been published in Bologna's *Gazzetta dell'Emilia*, on the 6<sup>th</sup> in Napoli's *Il Pungolo*, on the 8<sup>th</sup> in the *Gazzetta di Mantova*, on the 9<sup>th</sup> in Verona's *Arena*, on the 10<sup>th</sup> in Trieste's *Il Piccolo*, on the 16<sup>th</sup> in Rome's *Il Giorno*, on the 14<sup>th</sup> in the Neapolitan *Tavola rotonda*. The double circulation of the Manifesto, both hyper-local and international, as well as bilingual – in Italian and French – signals a characteristic trait of the Futurist avant-garde that would permeate its every production. The Manifesto opens with a scene that evokes an ‘Oriental’ environment, complete with mosque lamps and richly ornate rugs:

Avevamo vegliato tutta la notte – i miei amici ed io – sotto lampade di moschea dalle cupole di ottone traforato, stellate come le nostre anime, perché come queste irradiate dal chiuso fulgore di un cuore elettrico. Avevamo lungamente calpestata su opulenti tappeti orientali la nostra atavica accidia, discutendo davanti ai confine estremi della logica ed annerendo molta carta di frenetiche scritture.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “We had stayed up all night, my friends and I, under hanging mosque lamps with domes of filigreed brass, domes starred like our spirits, shining like them with the prisoned radiance of electric hearts. For hours we had trampled our atavistic ennui into rich oriental rugs, arguing up to the last confines of logic and blackening many reams of paper with our frenzied scribbling.” “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” Translated by R. W. Flint in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint, trans. R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 39.

The mention of the “electric heart” immediately conjures the Futurists’ embrace of modernity and its technologies. Their frantic writing attests to the urgency of their endeavor. Overall, Marinetti and his friends emerge from the orientalized scene as pioneers of an urgently needed new understanding that tests the limits of logic. The text goes on to narrate, in mythical terms, the futurists’ mad automobile race “toward Death, the Unknown, the Absurd” that ends in a ditch. With his face covered in mud and sweat, the first-person narrator of the Manifesto can then list the eleven imperatives of Futurism, which famously include celebrating the beauty of speed, destroying museums and academies and glorifying war to all the “men alive on earth.”

As evidenced by Marinetti’s numerous statements about the “genio creatore italiano,”<sup>2</sup> and his definition of Italians as “costruttori dell’avvenire,”<sup>3</sup> Futurism was primarily a project of nationalist renewal. However, it also aimed at placing Italy at the center of European Modernist cosmopolitanism. The decision to publish the manifesto in French, in Paris’s most important newspaper, demonstrates Marinetti’s participation in the cultural cosmopolitanism that characterized in various ways both his native Alexandria of Egypt and the cultural milieu of early-twentieth-century Paris where he came into contact with other incipient avant-gardes. Even the name Futurism was probably suggested to Marinetti by reading about a talk given in Barcelona in 1904 by Spanish poet and essayist Gabriel Alomar titled “El Futurisme” in the

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<sup>2</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “I nuovi poeti futuristi,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 187. “Italian creative genius,” Translation is mine.

<sup>3</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Discorso futurista di Marinetti ai veneziani,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 35. “Builders of the future.” “A futurist speech by Marinetti to the Venetians,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 167.

*Mercur de France*.<sup>4</sup> And yet, the Manifesto itself is rooted in the aggressively nationalistic rhetoric that most associate with Marinetti.

È dall'Italia che noi lanciamo pel mondo questo nostro manifesto di violenza travolgente e incendiaria Già per troppo tempo l'Italia è stata un mercato di rigattieri. Noi vogliamo liberarla dagli innumerevoli musei che la coprono tutta di cimiteri innumerevoli.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the Orientalizing move of the opening description in the Manifesto is perplexing. Why is it there and what is it doing? Scholars have generally interpreted the opening scene as a gesture toward Marinetti's own participation in the decadent *fin-de-siècle* cultural trends dominated by Symbolism, participation that through the energetic thrust of renewal of Futurism he has now overcome and "playfully rejected."<sup>6</sup> Yet, this reading would seem to clash with other textual details. In the paragraph in question, Marinetti and his friends are described as *already* participating in the reinvigorating force of Futurism while they are in this environment.

The allegorical reading also downplays the actual historical circumstance that saw Marinetti in 1909, at the time of the Manifesto's composition, living in a sumptuously decorated apartment in Milan. Born in Alexandria of Egypt in 1876 from Italian parents (his father was from Voghera and his mother from Milan), he participated in the lively cultural cosmopolitanism of the city that was undergoing a process of rapid modernization in the wake of the inauguration

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, Alomar accused Marinetti of plagiarism after the appearance of the 1909 Manifesto.

<sup>5</sup> "It is *from Italy* that we launch this manifesto of tumbling, incendiary violence, this manifesto through which today we set up Futurism, because we want to deliver *Italy* from its gangrene of professors, of archaeologists, of guides and of antiquarians." Translated by Eugen Weber. Eugene Weber, *Paths to the Present: Aspects of European Thought from Romanticism to Existentialism*, 245.

<sup>6</sup> Harsha Ram, "Futurist Geographies: Uneven Modernities and the Struggle for Aesthetic Autonomy: Paris, Italy, Russia, 1909-1914," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 321.

of the Suez canal in 1869. Like other members of the Italian community – made up in great part of exiled “Mazziniani” and “Carbonari,” members of an informal network of revolutionary societies active in Italy in the nineteenth century – he studied at the French Jesuit School and completed his education in Paris after risking expulsion from the school, allegedly for introducing Zola to his classmates. He then moved to Italy and at his father’s request, studied law in Pavia and completed his degree in Genoa before moving to Milan where his parents had settled. Beyond their allegorical resonances, the exotic objects present in the preface to the “Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism” – the mosque lamps, the richly ornate rug – represent actual details of the Milanese apartment in which Marinetti lived, which is still standing today in Via Senato 2, as well as his following apartment, the “Casa Rossa” of Corso Venezia 61, described by fellow Futurist Mario Dessy as “salottino in stile orientale, soffice di tappeti di cuscini di drappi e tutto arabescato di capricciosi intarsi di legno.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mario Dessy, “La ‘Casa Rossa,’” *Futurismo* 1, 8 (October 28 1932). “A parlor in the oriental style, soft with carpets, pillows, drapes, full of arabesques and wood with extravagant inlay work.” Translation is mine. A full description of Marinetti’s first apartment in Milan is offered by Aldo Palazzeschi in his “Preface” to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista*.



Figure 2.1. Interior of Marinetti's house in via Senato 2.

From the left: Marinetti, Nina Angelini, Luigi Russolo, Umberto Boccioni, Decio Cinti, Marietta Angelini, Paolo Buzzi. Milano, 1910.

Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Rovereto (Tn). Fondo "Sorelle Angelini."

Their presence gestures immediately to the paradox that will accompany Marinetti along the entire arc of his artistic production, by which he can proudly recall later in the same Manifesto, in heavily gendered and racialized terms, having been nursed as a baby by "la santa mammella nera della mia nutrice sudanese"<sup>8</sup> while in 1920 claiming to be ushering in "il grande avvenire fecondo e geniale dell'Italia."<sup>9</sup> The sumptuous oriental décor of the apartment may very well indicate the widespread *fin-de-siècle* languor that would characterize for example D'Annunzio's "Il Vittoriale" and that Futurism was rejecting, but it certainly also invokes Marinetti's very real culturally hybrid identity and the permeability of the Futurists' construction of the Italian nation to foreign influences.

<sup>8</sup> F.T. Marinetti, "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo," in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 9. "The saintly black breast of my Sudanese nurse!" Translated by Eugen Weber. Eugene Weber, *Paths to the Present: Aspects of European Thought from Romanticism to Existentialism*, 243.

<sup>9</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Contro il Lusso Femminile," in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 549. "The great masculine, fruitful and brilliant future of Italy." Translation is mine.



Figure 2.2. “Casa rossa,” Corso Venezia 61, Milano, 1911.

Raccolte grafiche e iconografiche del Castello Sforzesco, Milano. Civico archivio fotografico.  
Fondo “Raccolta iconografica.”

My aim is to explore precisely this hybridity and its bearing on Marinetti’s literary production, in order to make sense of the paradoxical intertwining of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in Marinetti’s futurist project. Through analyses of his poetics, reception history, and translation history, I argue that Marinetti’s Futurist project is a rearticulation of cosmopolitanism through the category of the barbaric, as a violent, brutish *sradicamento* or uprooting. By placing a canonical writer such as Marinetti alongside voices from the margins which constitute the object of the second half of this dissertation, I bring to the fore polyglot experimentation and cross-cultural *bricolage*. These strategies explode mono-nationalist conceptions of culture, which despite the development of migration and postcolonial studies, still permeate literary scholarship of this period.

The chapter is comprised of two parts. First, I show how Marinetti employs African settings and characters to posit continuity between Italy and North Africa, particularly in the first

futurist novel *Mafarka le futuriste*, published in 1909. By casting the intermediary figure of an Arab hero as protagonist of a rewriting of the foundational texts of western epic, Marinetti is articulating a cross-continental narrative through what I call a *sradicamento* and assemblage of western and non-western elements. In the second part, I focus on Marinetti's poetic production, particularly his experimental *paroliberismo* or freewording, in which I locate a poetics of *sradicamento* that alters our understanding of the cosmopolitan through the use of onomatopoeia and untranslated foreign vocabulary.

### ***Mafarka le Futuriste***

In a section of the memoir *La grande Milano tradizionale e futurista* significantly titled “Un Egitto italiano in Lombardia” composed in 1943 and published posthumously,<sup>10</sup> Marinetti described his first experiences of Italy, during family vacations, as those of a foreigner: “I miei piedi di adolescente abituati alla cedevolezza delle terre sabbie africane collauda nel pavimento marmoreo la Vita come conquista la Scienza come documentazione di ipotesi la Fantasia come letteratura sentimentale erotica guerriera.”<sup>11</sup> The original title of the memoir – *Viaggi italianizzatori dell'aeropoeta Marinetti* – clearly invokes the experience of traveling to Italy as a foreigner as constitutive of what for Marinetti was a *process* of Italianization. The implication of the title is that before traveling to Italy as a young boy, Marinetti was ‘not yet’ or ‘not quite’ Italian, despite having two Italian parents and being raised in an Italian household. Nationalist

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<sup>10</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *La grande Milano tradizionale e futurista; Una sensibilità italiana nata in Egitto*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milano: Mondadori, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> “My adolescent feet accustomed to the give of African lands-sands testing on the marble pavement Life as conquest Science as verification of hypotheses Imagination as sentimental erotic belligerent literature.” Translation is mine.



writer Enrico Corradini described Marinetti in 1908 as “due volte déraciné: déraciné in quanto è italiano e scrive in francese, déraciné in quanto scrive in francese e vive a Milano. E perciò questo giovane . . . ha due patrie a metà e per intero non ne ha nessuna.”<sup>12</sup> To this uprootedness between Italy and France, one must add the Egyptian origins and the presence of Africa as an ideological core from which emerges the futurist celebration of the barbaric as inextricably intertwined with the technological.

While the trans-European impact of Marinetti’s Futurism and its vast network of alliances, as well as the participation of Marinetti in a European cosmopolitan milieu, are widely acknowledged, I propose to shift towards a transnational consideration of the very conception of his literary production, reading it through the notion of *sradicamento* or uprootedness. I understand this notion to be functioning in two ways. First of all, it points to Marinetti’s own uprootedness as constitutive and generative of his poetics, impacting his imagined audience, the narrative structure of his works of fiction, and the formal experimentation of his poetry. Secondly, it indicates in his active and violent *uprooting* of transnational forms, languages and symbols a brutish and barbaric cosmopolitanism, which moves away from both the bourgeois elitism of coeval trans-European Modernism and recent reformulations of cosmopolitanism as a supranational ethics by thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah.<sup>13</sup>

To illustrate this notion, I turn to Marinetti’s many works set in more or less unspecified regions of Africa, such as the novel *Mafarka le futuriste* (1909), the play *Il tamburo di fuoco*

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<sup>12</sup> Tullio Panteo, *Il poeta Marinetti* (Milano: Società Editoriale Milanese, 1908), 186. “Twice *déraciné*/uprooted: uprooted because he is Italian and writes in French, uprooted because he writes in French and lives in Italy. So this young man . . . has two halves of fatherlands and no whole one.” Translation is mine.

<sup>13</sup> See Anthony Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006) and Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

(1922), and the dystopian novel *Gli Indomabili* (1922). With their luscious descriptions of the sights and sounds of the African landscape – which provide ample opportunity to experiment with Futurist strategies for sensory overload – these fictional works provide their European readers with the sort of virtual representation that travel literature or the nascent optical technologies of stereoscopes and magic lanterns had provided Victorian audiences at the height of Britain’s colonial empire. While in the case of Britain, audiences were offered glimpses into the reality of a sprawling Empire, Marinetti’s African works were meant to entice readers to embrace a colonial enterprise that was still very much a work in progress.

With the term *sradicamento*, I aim to underscore the untamed violence and chaotic interjection of foreign linguistic and cultural materials that permeate Marinetti’s works and set them apart from the bourgeois turn-of-the-century cosmopolitanism that generated “safe, though compelling, armchair travel”<sup>14</sup> expressed for example in the late-nineteenth-century American magazines that Annie Vivanti had contributed to, such as *Harper’s Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Leslie’s Illustrated*, as well as in fiction by writers such as Henry James or, arguably, Gabriele D’Annunzio. In the short story “Collaboration,” for example, Henry James describes the studio of an American artist in Paris as “a chamber of justice, a temple of reconciliation . . . the theatre of a cosmopolite drama,”<sup>15</sup> in striking contrast to Marinetti’s pursuit of war, cacophony and violence. In contrast with James’s space of harmony, Marinetti aims at causing uneasiness in his readers, provoking an awakening that will lead them to overthrow the *status quo*.

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<sup>14</sup> Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Henry James, “Collaboration,” *English Illustrated Magazine*, 1892, now in *Complete Stories 1892-1898* (New York: The Library of America, 1996), 235.

The 1909 novel *Mafarka le futuriste: roman africain*<sup>16</sup> was published in French and immediately translated into Italian by Decio Cinti in 1910. The novel recounts the heroic venture of Mafarka, an Arab general who conquers all the other African populaces only to renounce the throne and pass it on to his son, a winged demi-god named Gazourmah engendered without the aid of any woman through sheer “virile strength”<sup>17</sup> and destined to surpass all human limitations. The narrative – rife with racism, misogyny, colonial propaganda – allows Marinetti to depict an imperialistic fantasy of geographic conquest alongside the messianic advent of the New Futurist Man.

The setting exploits and disrupts the particular affordances of modernity that Marinetti would point to in the 1913 essay/manifesto “Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà,” in which he reflects on the profound influence of new forms of communication, travel and circulation of information, which have “made the world smaller.” In the essay, while making the point that wireless imagination is borderless imagination, he paints an ironic picture of a middle-class European who can “palpitare d’angoscia ogni giorno, mediante un giornale, con i rivoltosi cinesi” or “concedersi l’ebrietà del pericolo seguendo, in uno spettacolo di cinematografo, una caccia grossa nel Congo” while remaining “pusillanime e sedentario.”<sup>18</sup> To this removed experience of the foreign, Marinetti opposes the first-hand knowledge that his uprooted existence provided him and a much more disturbing encounter with

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<sup>16</sup> Quotations from the novel are drawn from this edition: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Mafarka Le Futuriste: Roman Africain* (Paris: E. Sansot, 1909).

<sup>17</sup> Translations from the novel are mine.

<sup>18</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 66. “Follow with trembling anxiety the newspaper reports on the Chinese revolt . . . The faint-hearted, stay-at-home citizen . . . can indulge himself with the headiness of danger at the cinema, watching a big-game hunt in the Congo.” “Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom,” in *Critical Writings*, 120.

the ‘other,’ which I have defined as *sradicamento* or uprooting, and which was in some ways announced by the 1909 Manifesto’s depiction of futurists proclaiming their dictates with bruised arms and faces covered in mud.

When speaking about the novel, Marinetti directly contrasted it to the sort of refined exoticism that other European authors had pursued: “I am not referring to Pierre Loti’s Africa, stylized and perfumed for the great academic salons of Paris.”<sup>19</sup> Conversely, he cited as models for the work the erotic comedies staged in Arab and Turkish theaters, which he had attended.<sup>20</sup>

Given the timeline of the two publications, it is safe to say that when conceiving the work Marinetti envisioned a transnational readership made up at least of French and Italian readers, who would receive the work in different ways. Indeed, the novel’s depiction of sexual violence was more easily accepted in France than in Italy, where the book was put on trial for offense against public morality (“oltraggio al pudore”) and heavily censored. As Marinetti and his lawyers stated during the Italian trial, the double reception of the novel had been expected<sup>21</sup> and it is reasonable to imagine the novel to be rhetorically addressing both readerships. Published in the same year as the Futurist manifesto, *Mafarka* appears first of all as an attempt to establish Futurism as capable of producing a sustained narrative, and not just the bold claims of the manifestoes. From this perspective, it is rhetorically functioning similarly for both audiences, although it bespeaks Marinetti’s greater intimacy with the French milieu and his reliance on French success to bolster the Italian publication.

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<sup>19</sup> F.T. Marinetti. “Il processo e l’assoluzione di Mafarka il futurista” in *Mafarka il futurista*, 241. Translation is mine.

<sup>20</sup> He mentions, for example, modeling the episode of Mafarka’s eleven-foot penis after “la commedia del Saggio e dell’Almea” and cites a similar scene in the Turkish comedy “Il Trionfo dell’Amicizia, o Caraguez.”

<sup>21</sup> Marinetti’s lawyer even attempted to undermine the legitimacy of an Italian court putting on trial a French novel.

Several scholars have pointed out the colonialist scaffolding of the novel, including Lucia Re, Barbara Spackman and Rhiannon Welch.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, from the opening pages, we are met with enumerations of colonial goods – rum, cotton, weapons – even Mafarka’s eyes are described as “yeaux de réglisse dorée [que] flambaient”<sup>23</sup> (7) and the women’s breasts in the graphic opening rape scene are the color of “café brûlé”<sup>24</sup> (30). African men and women “aux riches reflets d’ébènes”<sup>25</sup> (13) are listed alongside commercial goods as part of the spoils lying abundant for the taking. While the women are portrayed as sexualized objects who want nothing more than to be raped and killed – “Tue-moi, tue-moi ainsi. Oh! Tu me bourres d’un plaisir chaud”<sup>26</sup>! (31) African men are depicted as delicious food ready to be consumed: “ô vous, mes nègres bien-aimés, mes futurs sujets!...Je vous sens tous dans ma bouche et vous mâche avec délices, comme des belle figues mûres...Je vous avalerai bientôt”<sup>27</sup> (20).<sup>28</sup>

The detailed descriptions of “balconnades ajourées des mosquées”<sup>29</sup> (10), the vast starry skies above the “haleine fraîche du désert”<sup>30</sup> (46), the rays of the anthropomorphized Sun transfigured into a horse with rich, golden hooves (9) and an incandescent mane (71) have a lyrical quality that clashes with the dictums of Futurist style, despite the injection of deliberately

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<sup>22</sup> See Lucia Re, “Barbari civilizzatissimi. Marinetti and the Futurist Myth of Barbarism,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012): 350-368; Barbara Spackman, “Mafarka and Son. Marinetti’s Homophobic Economics,” *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 3 (1994): 89-107; Rhiannon Noel Welch “Here and There, Then and Now. Nation Time and Colonial Space in Pasolini, Oriani and Marinetti,” *Italica* 29, no. 4 (2014): 625-653.

<sup>23</sup> “Eyes of golden licorice.”

<sup>24</sup> “Burnt coffee.”

<sup>25</sup> “With sumptuous ebony highlights.”

<sup>26</sup> “Kill me, kill me. Oh! You fill me with warm pleasure!”

<sup>27</sup> “Oh my beloved negroes, my future subjects!...I feel you all in my mouth and I chew you with pleasure, like nice ripe figs...I will swallow you soon!”

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion about colonial products as exotic consumer fetishes, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, 1 (Autumn 2001): 244-269.

<sup>29</sup> “The openwork balconies of the mosques.”

<sup>30</sup> “The fresh breath of the desert.”

violent images, such as “sang caillé”<sup>31</sup> (15) meant to thwart excessive romanticism. The goal of these luscious descriptions is obviously to illustrate to readers the abundance of resources offered by African colonies. Thus, an image such as the one of the dark sky as a “cette chaude inondation de café noir, dûment sucré d’astres!”<sup>32</sup> (48) is not only conjuring a feeling of pleasure and closeness to nature, but is very deliberately pointing toward some of the potential economic resources of the region. The same can be said about the descriptions of African bodies, transfigured into piles of colonial products: “des mains de poivre dur . . . des épaules de café, des biceps boursoufflés comme des patates, des pieds semblables à de grosses pommes de terres”<sup>33</sup> (56).

The many scenes in which Mafarka attempts to incite his brother Magamal’s virility, by pointing him away from the pleasures of romance and inciting him to war by showing him the riches of his future kingdom, also support this agenda, by presenting this abundance as fairly easy to come by and extremely pleasurable to consume. Mafarka repeatedly insults his soldiers for their sexual behavior: “Chiens galeux! . . . race de scorpions! . . . vile fiente de poule!... Des vulves de femme chaînées, voilà donc les ennemis que vous aimez combattre! . . . vous avez fait de votre sexe votre épée favorite, la seule épée que vous maniez avec art!”<sup>34</sup> (35-36). Yet, the text’s indulgence in pornographic violence is functional to arising in male Europeans the fantasy of possession that only the colonial appropriation of ‘uncivilized’ populaces would seem to afford.

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<sup>31</sup> “Clotted blood.”

<sup>32</sup> “This warm flood of black coffee, duly sweetened with stars.”

<sup>33</sup> “Black pepper hands. . . coffee shoulders, biceps as turgid as tubers, and feet like big potatoes.”

<sup>34</sup> “Mangy dogs! . . . You scorpions! . . . Vile chicken droppings! . . . Vulvas of chained women... That’s the enemies you like to fight! . . . You have made your member into your favorite sword, the only sword that you brandish masterfully!”

Scholars have often underscored that Mafarka's son Gazourmah is described as the product of craft, with a solitary Mafarka carving him out of wood like a novel Geppetto – "C'est avec mes mains que j'ai sculpté mon fils dans le bois d'un jeune chêne... Et je travaille avec mon ciseau durant la nuit, à la claret des étoiles"<sup>35</sup> (211). In celebrating the birth of his son, Mafarka repeatedly claims to be the only author and creator of the winged creature: "Ma main n'a pas été inférieure à sa tâche! . . . J'ai pu dessiner tes paupières largement fendues, et ton nez droit aux narines larges et agiles, et tes lèvres épaisses, insolentes, et la carrure de tes mâchoires!"<sup>36</sup> (279). Critics, however, have not drawn attention to the equally frequent images of collective labor involved in building out of iron and oak the giant cage in which the new creature receives womb-like protection:

Les forgerons de Milmillah construisent, sous mes ordres, une grande cage de chêne et de fer qui doit défendre mon fils contre la rapacité du vent. Ils sont deux mille, balayés à coups de fouet hors des villages. . . Les tisserands de Lagahourso préparent . . . une toile indestructible tissée avec la fibre du palmier et qui se colore, sous le soleil, des nuances variées de l'or, de la rouille et du sang.<sup>37</sup> (212)

The implication seems to be that the generation of the futurist man must occur in Africa not only for symbolic cultural reasons but also because of the actual availability of slave labor on which

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<sup>35</sup> "With my own hands I sculpted my son from the wood of a great oak . . . And I work at night, in the starlight."

<sup>36</sup> "My hand hasn't been inferior to its task . . . I, I was able to draw your eyelids cut so widely, and your straight nose, with its broad and flexible nostrils, and your big, insolent lips, and your square jaw!"

<sup>37</sup> "The blacksmiths of Mimillah are building under my direction a great cage made of iron and oak that will protect my son from the wind's greed. There are two-thousand of them, driven out of their villages with whips . . . The weavers of Lagahourso are preparing . . . an indestructible tarp, woven with palm tree fibers, which the sun is dying with the multicolored hues of gold, rust and blood."

the entire enterprise appears to be founded. The text is thus indicating to its European readers the very material conditions that would make the African continent the land of the future.

I would contend that this colonialist framework is addressing the novel's two envisioned readerships differently. The French were presumably meant to read it as confirmation that Italy too had interests in northern Africa and was thus an imperial power to be reckoned with. On the other hand, the novel's constant gesture toward Africa's abundance of resources – gold, pepper, coffee, beautiful women throwing themselves at the protagonist's feet – was meant to win over Italians to a colonialist enterprise that was still incomplete. Mafarka's question to his brother: "as-tu jamais contemplé un pays plus fertile?"<sup>38</sup> (14) aligns the novel to the colonialist view of conquest of foreign territories as a solution to Italy's Southern Question. Because annexing foreign territories would have provided an agricultural outlet to Italy's working classes ("braccianti"), colonialism was viewed as the alternative to the massive exodus of emigrants toward North and South America and northern Europe, which was depriving Italy of its productive and reproductive potential. However, compared to other colonialist works of the time, such as D'Annunzio's *The Ship*, Enrico Corradini's *La guerra lontana* (1911) or Giovanni Pascoli's 1911 speech "La grande proletaria si è mossa," Marinetti's novel bespeaks a skepticism about western superiority that is consistent with Futurism's claims to barbarism and that engenders structural innovations. I am making a similar claim to the one Jahan Ramazani makes, when he states in *A Transnational Poetics* that modernist appropriation of African art was not only theft but also a disruption of binaries between the global North and the global South

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<sup>38</sup> "Have you ever seen land as fertile as this?"



“making possible new transcontinental forms without prior existence in either European or African aesthetics.”<sup>39</sup>

Certainly, the novel looks back to nineteenth-century Orientalism, such as that of Flaubert’s *Salammô*, to which it was and still is often disparagingly compared, due to the similarity in setting, themes, and graphic violence. The Africa depicted is an orientalized space of “romantic, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes” with the only perspective defined as western that of Marinetti himself, who in the preface claims a typical western “intellectual authority over the Orient.”<sup>40</sup> The African landscape is portrayed as a racialized, feminized body ready to be possessed – “l’orgueil de la dominer comme on domine le corps apprivoisé d’une maîtresse éclatait dans les yeux de Mafarka”<sup>41</sup> (89) – and the eastern world and its women are even subject to a sort of Orientalism-in-reverse, as they represent the exotic and exciting ‘other.’ However, as Barbara Spackman has pointed out,<sup>42</sup> the conceptual approach of a nonporous discursive framework determinative of the West’s interactions with the ‘Orient’ is not entirely adequate to the Italian case, given the weak and porous identity of Italian nationals compared to their French or British counterparts. Nelson Moe, Jane Schneider and George Mosse<sup>43</sup> have taught us that as Europe’s internal other, Italy was itself subject to Orientalization.

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<sup>39</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 1, 19.

<sup>41</sup> “The pride of commanding it like one commands the docile body of a lover was exploding in Mafarka’s eyes.”

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Accidental Orientalists. Modern Italian Travelers in Ottoman Lands* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> See Nelson Moe, *The View From Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy’s “Southern Question.” Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998); George L. Mosse (George Lachmann), *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1978).

As for Marinetti, being an *Italiano d'oltremare*, while reinforcing a certain patriotism, also complicated his national identity with layers of allegiances, as witnessed by his posthumous reflections in *Il fascino dell'Egitto* (1943) and *Una sensibilità italiana nata in Egitto* (1944). His corpus is riddled with references to his native Egypt (“il mio Egitto natale”). Having been saluted as a “poeta italo-francese” when he composed his first works of poetry, in French, he was apparently known as “l'Égyptien” while trying to make a name for himself in Paris as an Italian poet.<sup>44</sup> While Orientalism shaped Marinetti's representation of Arab and African identity, it also in turn shaped the project of Italianization that was still very much a work in progress for him and other Italian intellectuals mere decades after the country's unification.

My claim, that in the novel Marinetti is experimenting with possible sources of human regeneration beyond ethnically, linguistically and religiously restrictive notions of *italianità* that were being elaborated in the wake of the Risorgimento, would seem to exclude his treatment of gender. The dream of male parthenogenesis, in which the futurist hero reproduces without the aid of a female – “sans recourir à la vulve de la femme”<sup>45</sup> (215) – and thus generates Gazourmah, the Futurist demi-god located somewhere between the animal and the machine, is of course the depiction of an exclusionary impetus: “l'esprit de l'homme est un ovaire inexercé. C'est nous qui le fécondons put la première fois!”<sup>46</sup> (XI).

In the novel, women are meant to be eliminated not only as procreators, but also as “vulvas,” as objects of sexual desire. The relationships between Mafarka and his brother Magamal and then even between Mafarka and his son Gazourmah, as well as the abovementioned descriptions of most male characters, have strong homosexual overtones, as a

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<sup>44</sup> Gino Agnese, *Marinetti una vita esplosiva* (Milano: Camunia, 1900), 14.

<sup>45</sup> “Without the aid of a woman's vulva.”

<sup>46</sup> “Man's spirit is an unused ovary. We are fertilizing it for the first time.”

result of the overcoming of the female.<sup>47</sup> Of course, despite Mafarka's injunctions to reject romance – "Poésie! Poésie! . . . O sublime pourriture de l'âme!"<sup>48</sup> (219) – in accordance with statements in manifestoes such as "Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna," the novel actually includes many romantic scenes between men and women, including Mafarka himself who only at the end of his quest and with great difficulty rejects his lover Colubbi: "Coloubbi, ô ma divine jeunesse! oui, je t'aime de tout mon sang... Mais, hélas! Je ne m'appartiens plus, je ne sais plus adorer que mon fils!"<sup>49</sup> (258-259).

The novel is strikingly rich in explicit depictions of heterosexual encounters, for a text whose declared aim is to overcome both the sentimental and the reproductive need for women: "j'ai tué l'Amour, en le remplaçant par la sublime volupté de l'Héroïsme!"<sup>50</sup> (215). Not only do these devices bespeak Marinetti's reliance on sex and romance to further the novel's plot and spark interest in his readers, but the imagery of heterosexual reproduction that accompanies the very scenes of Gazourmah's generation calls into question the success of the misogynistic enterprise. Although Mafarka imagines his role as that of an egg from which "le poussin idéal"<sup>51</sup> (219) will emerge and it is his kiss on his son's mouth that animates Gazourmah's inert body, the entire episode is riddled with images of procreation through the union of masculine and feminine elements. Mafarka himself seems to be making love with the stormy sea, "la déesse noire"<sup>52</sup> (221), in the center of which two black boats are dancing "et leur ligne de flottaison écumante

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<sup>47</sup> For in depth analyses of gender relations in the novel, see Barbara Spackman, "Mafarka and Son: Marinetti's Homophobic Economics," *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 3 (September 1994): 89-107; Alice Yaeger Kaplan. *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> "Poetry! Poetry! O sublime rotting of the soul!"

<sup>49</sup> "Colubbi, my divine youth! Yes, I love you with all my blood, but alas, I don't belong to myself anymore, I can no longer adore anyone but my son."

<sup>50</sup> "I have killed Love, substituting it with the sublime pleasure of Heroism!"

<sup>51</sup> "The ideal chick."

<sup>52</sup> "The black goddess."

ricanait sur l'ébène des vagues, comme la bouche d'un nègre"<sup>53</sup> (221). In the description of burning logs used to build Gazourmah, Mafarka is depicted as a gobetween, encouraging sex between the female "flammes" and the male "troncs" (266):

L'essence crépitante du désir éternel se muait en des langues dardées pour lécher les sarments, nerfs tordus de délices. La première flamme se dégrafa brutalement et, jaillissant toute nue de sa robe de fumée, se coucha sur un tronc qu'elle couvrit de caresses. Puis elle retomba sur son dos, épuisée, tandis que le tronc sursautait sur elle . . . Et Mafarka, ne se lassait pas de courir ça et là come un proxénète lugubre, préparant des lits de volupté pour les amours de ces déesses rouges! Il disposait les jeunes troncs.<sup>54</sup> (260-261)

The ensuing storm that causes the death of many seamen is also described in sexual terms. The boat from which the men are violently thrown off is depicted as an orientalized woman, who undresses for the hurricane with swaying movements, and gradually takes off veils, bracelets and braids:

"Je te loue, bel Ouragan, de t'acharner ainsi! Je loue ton geste lugubre et grossier de nettoyage!" Mafarka se penchait par instants pur contempler l'émouvante escarpolette de la houle, où la tartan se balançait en se déshabillant, comme une femme épuisée de chaleur se délivre de ses voiles. Et nue, toute nue, montrant le cul et puis le ventre, elle s'arrachait ses bracelets de fer et ses colliers de chaines, en se balançant toujours de haut en bas, d'avant en arrière, à droite, à gauche, pour ventiler sa luxure torride et distraire sa solitude. . . Et par instants elle secouait de ses épaules nues une sombre vermine. . . . Lentement sa tête alourdie par de volumineuses tresses de cables entraînait son corps

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<sup>53</sup> "The line they made against the sea, white with foam, cackled on the ebony of the waves like the mouth of a negro."

<sup>54</sup> "The crackling essence of eternal desire morphed into tongues that darted about to lightly brush the tree limbs. The first flame violently ripped off her gown of smoke . . . she lay down on the trunk completely naked. She jerked . . . And Mafarka like a gloomy pimp went around preparing beds of lust for the loves of those red goddesses! He laid out the young tree trunks."

décharné. . . l'Ouragan . . . lui lavait les fesses, les lui frottait, les lui griffait infatigablement.<sup>55</sup> (264-265)

After Gazourmah's birth is complete, Mafarka first engages in a threesome with the young Luba and Habibi and then indulges in a romantic and declaredly pleasurable act of love with his faithful lover Colubbi, before abandoning her to commit suicide. While the novel declaredly throws femininity and heterosexual love out the door, they seem to invariably re-enter through the window. Thus, even the most striking attempt at expelling 'otherness' from the futurist project – the complete overcoming of the female – retains a certain ambiguity.

While, as regards female characters, the novel stages an absolute removal of the 'other' in frankly ridiculous ways – including the description of Mafarka's eleven-meter penis (54) – other factors show that what Marinetti imagines as an antidote to the middle-class traditionalism of liberal Italy is more capacious than the racially and linguistically pure *italianità* that Fascism would soon espouse. The protagonist of the novel is Mafarka-el-Bar, with el-Bar, which means the-Sea, immediately conjuring the image of the Mediterranean as bridge between Italy and North Africa. The features of the Arab general are heavily racialized. The text calls attention numerous times to Mafarka's "épaules cuivrées et ...bras tatoués d'oiseaux"<sup>56</sup> (6). The text associates Mafarka's qualities directly with his Arab identity: "C'était bien le mâle arabe dont le sang coulait en des membres harmonieux aux mouvements infaillibles et gouvernés par la plus

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<sup>55</sup> "I applaud you, my beautiful Hurricane, for your determination! I applaud your gloomy and obscene gesture of brutal surgeon . . . swing of the stormy sea, on which the little boat rocked, undressing, like a woman who, worn out by the heat, throws off every veil. And naked, completely naked, alternately showing her buttocks and her stomach, she ripped off her iron bracelets, and her chain necklaces, always rocking . . . to air out her torrid lust . . . Occasionally she would shake her naked shoulders, throwing off dark tangles of worms . . . her head weighed down by voluminous braids of rope, she dragged her stripped body. Hurricane . . . washed her buttocks, rubbed them, scratched them tirelessly."

<sup>56</sup> "Copper shoulders...arms covered in tattoos of birds."

savante économie des efforts”<sup>57</sup> (102). In contrast, the indistinct African populaces that Mafarka’s army subjugates bear the brunt of the text’s racism. Their gait is like that of most “grands mammifères”<sup>58</sup> (121), and their description often includes mention of stench, filth, urine and mud.

This hierarchy is in tune with the unofficial racial codification espoused by Italians at the time,<sup>59</sup> at least since Cesare Lombroso’s 1871 treaty *L’uomo bianco e l’uomo di colore. Letture sull’origine e varietà delle razze*.<sup>60</sup> The physical description of Mafarka as being the color of terracotta and possessing a voice able to “fly from one continent to the other” underscores the continuity between southern Italy and the African continent and assigns the Arabs the coveted role of intermediaries between the two regions. A comparison with D’Annunzio provides a measure of the significance of assigning the role of Futurist hero to Mafarka. In his “Canzone di Garibaldi,” D’Annunzio characterizes the hero of Italy’s unification as a “cavaliere biondo”<sup>61</sup> (v. 754), a description that imperialist author Mario Morasso later expanded in terms that D’Annunzio’s disgust for the Teutons would have disavowed: “l’eroe sempiterno della bella e dominatrice razza Ariana . . . di alta statura, biondo come l’oro dei tramonti italiaci ed ellenici, dagli occhi azzurri come il suo Tirreno.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “He truly was an Arab man, whose blood flowed through harmonious limbs, which moved infallibly and were governed by a carefully measured economy of exertions.”

<sup>58</sup> “Great mammals.”

<sup>59</sup> See Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad. Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *L’uomo bianco e l’uomo di colore: letture su l’origine e la varietà delle razze umane* (Torino, Firenze: Fratelli Bocca, 1892).

<sup>61</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *La canzone di Garibaldi* (Milano: Treves, 1901), 46. “A blond knight.” Translation is mine.

<sup>62</sup> Mario Morasso, *L’imperialismo artistico* (Torino: Bocca, 1903), 30. “The eternal hero of the beautiful and dominant Aryan race . . . tall, as blond as golden Italic and Hellenic sunsets, eyes as blue as his Tyrrhenian Sea.” Translation is mine.

Conversely, Mafarka is characterized explicitly as non-white, non-European and non-Christian. The effect is markedly distant from a colonialist work like D'Annunzio's *La Nave*, which rests entirely on the rigid dichotomy between the Christian, Roman and civilized populace and the Pagan, Byzantine and barbaric enemy. Because Marinetti's protagonist and his heroic quest are displaced onto African people, readers are called to identify with the Arab protagonist and his cohort. Through the character of Mafarka, the Arab with terracotta skin, who is thus not quite white, not quite black, Marinetti overcomes this dichotomous structure by creating an intermediary figure, who seems to participate in the best qualities of both the European and the African continent. As an African, Mafarka is a "barbarian" – category that *fin-de-siècle* primitivism had exploited as the ultimate orientalized 'other' and that was being invoked to justify all civilizing or colonizing missions.

The appropriation of barbarism is a *Leitmotif* of Futurism, as Lucia Re has pointed out.<sup>63</sup> In the preface to *Mafarka*, Marinetti dedicated the novel to his futurist brothers and asked "Ne suis-je pas, tout au moins, un barbare?"<sup>64</sup> (IX) invoking both his African birth and his rejection of traditional codes of civilization. In the 1912 "Discorso futurista di Marinetti ai veneziani," appendix to the manifesto "Contro Venezia passatista," he stated "Alzate pure le spalle e gridatemi che sono un barbaro, incapace di gustare la divina poesia che ondeggia sulle vostre isole incantatrici!"<sup>65</sup> Umberto Boccioni even theorized barbarianism as a means for renewal, pointing toward ethnic and cultural miscegenation as the source of aesthetic, political and

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<sup>63</sup> Lucia Re, "Barbari Civilizzatissimi. Marinetti and the Futurist Myth of Barbarism," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012): 350-368.

<sup>64</sup> "Am I not, at the very least, a barbarian?"

<sup>65</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Discorso futurista di Marinetti ai veneziani," in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 37. "Go ahead and shrug and yell at me that I am a barbarian, unable to enjoy the divine poetry that sways above your enchanting islands." Translation is mine.

broadly cultural innovation: “Noi italiani abbiamo bisogno del barbaro per rinnovarci. La nostra razza ha sempre dominato e si è sempre rinnovata coi contatti barbarici.”<sup>66</sup>

While I have argued that D’Annunzio’s works exhibit a tension between the view of the barbaric as radically opposite and inferior to the Roman ideal of civilization and an undeniable fascination for the barbarian as other, in casting Mafarka as the hero of his Futurist epic Marinetti is once again openly and brazenly embracing the barbaric. Although scholars have often conflated the creation of a hero like Mafarka with Marinetti’s prideful mention of having been breastfed by a Sudanese nurse in an effort to appropriate Africanity, I would contend that the choice of an Arab protagonist – distinct from and yet somehow in conversation with both white Europeans and the sub-Saharan African peoples that he subjugates – more subtly gestures toward racial continuity and miscegenation.

Consistently with Marinetti’s anticlericalism, Mafarka is also a Muslim. The novel ultimately stages Gazourmah’s overcoming of human limitations and even of God/Sun, like a victorious Icarus. Over the course of the narrative, however, Mafarka frequently invokes Allah. He salutes his brother Magamal with a “baiser augural . . . au nom d’Allah”<sup>67</sup> (117). The idea for the ploy that ultimately allows him to overcome his enemies appears to come to him while he is in prayer and he answers “Je te rends grâces, ô Dieu!”<sup>68</sup> (22). After his victory over the other African populaces in chapter 3, Mafarka exclaims “je sens ta main paternelle . . . Allah! Je m’agenouille et j’embrasse tes pieds! . . . Allah! Allah! Allah!”<sup>69</sup> (107-108). Mafarka is thus characterized as a religious man destined to establish a new civilization. The ease with which the

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<sup>66</sup> Umberto Boccioni, *Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Zeno Birolli (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1971), 40. “We Italians need the barbarian to renew ourselves. Our race has always been dominant and renewed itself through contacts with the barbarians.” Translation is mine.

<sup>67</sup> “Good fortune’s kiss in the name of Allah.”

<sup>68</sup> “I thank you God.”

<sup>69</sup> “I feel your fatherly hand, Allah! I kneel and kiss your feet! . . . Allah! Allah! Allah!”



name Allah substitutes that of Jesus, God or Zeus in the many references and reworkings of classical or biblical sources shows that for Marinetti, eastern religions are preferable to western ones, and particularly to Catholicism and the long history of its institutionalization.

This characterization of Mafarka also recalls that of pious Aeneas in the foundational epic of Roman civilization that is Virgil's *Aeneid*. For all of Marinetti's injunctions to burn museums and reject "the language of Homer," the novel is structured like a classical epic. The narration is divided into twelve chapters and the events roughly correspond to the first twelve books of the *Odyssey* and the twelve books of the *Aeneid*. As Lorenza Miretti has shown,<sup>70</sup> the character of Mafarka can be described as a recasting of the mythical hero Ulysses both in terms of his craftiness – chapter two is aptly titled "Le stratagème de Mafarka-el-Bar" – and of the main trajectory of his journey, at least until chapter eight, when Mafarka descends to the netherworld to meet the spirit of his dead mother Langourama. Chapters nine through eleven look instead to Dante, an even more unlikely model for the novel of futurist rupture with tradition, fashioning Mafarka's desire to produce a being capable of surpassing human limitations after the trope of Dante's Ulysses, who wants to overcome the pillars of Hercules.

The text plays constantly with epic tropes, such as the repetition of the number three in formulaic clauses – "Trois fois Mafarka-el-Bar essaya de vaincre la poussé giratoire de cette masse fumante et criarde"<sup>71</sup> (27) – the use of certain personifications – "le bruit de la victoire avait couru avec la brise du soir"<sup>72</sup> (111) – and the participation of the Sun as supernatural character supporting Mafarka in his battles. Sometimes the tropes are reversed, such as in Mafarka's speech to his soldiers, when instead of "fatti non foste a viver come bruti"/"vous

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<sup>70</sup> See Lorenza Miretti, *Mafarka il futurista. Epos e avanguardia* (Bologna: Gedit, 2005).

<sup>71</sup> "Three times Mafarka-el-Bar tried to overcome the power of that smoking rotating mass."

<sup>72</sup> "The voice of victory had run off with the evening breeze."

n’êtes pas fait pour vivre comme des bêtes,” as in Ulysses’s famous “orazion picciola” of *Inferno* 26, Mafarka states: “Je n’ai pas le temps d’ergoter avec des brutes et des laches!... Vous n’avez donc pas une idée à vous, une volonté...?”<sup>73</sup> By reversing the quote from the *Commedia*, the text indicates not the dignity of human inquiry, but the limitations of humanity – which the novel stages particularly through the death of Mafarka’s beloved brother Magamal. The highest level of humanity available in the novel, a man whose organism is almost superhuman in its perfection – “qui par la perfection de son organisme presque surnaturel dominait”<sup>74</sup> (102) – and whose unquenchable thirst for conquest is often expressed in existential terms – “Je veux me surpasser . . . J’ai fui parce que j’ai eu peur de vieillir avec ce miserable scepter entre les mains! . . . je vous rends le scepter conquis!...J’en fus aussitôt assouvi”<sup>75</sup> (208-210) – is an Arab. This cannot be underestimated given the racialized colonialist discourse in which the novel intervenes.

As noted in regard to D’Annunzio, during the period of composition of *Mafarka*, colonialist rhetoric was invoking *Mare Nostrum* – as the Mediterranean was called during Imperial Roman times – to shore up a notion of Italian dominion as legitimately extending across the Mediterranean, thus framing imperial military enterprises as restoration ventures. While Marinetti shared this view with many colonialist thinkers, his investment in the cultural continuity of the Mediterranean was a personal one. He highlighted the continuity between Italy and North Africa in many speeches to southern Futurist circles. In the aeropoem “L’aeroplano

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<sup>73</sup> Decio Cinti maintains the allusion to the Dantean “bruti” in his translation: “Io non ho tempo da perdere ad arzigogolare con dei bruti e dei vigliacchi!...Non avete dunque un’idea vostra, una volontà vostra?” (158). “I don’t have time to waste chatting with brutes and cowards! . . . Don’t you have an idea of your own, a will of your own?”

<sup>74</sup> “Who, thanks to the perfection of his almost supernatural organism, dominated.”

<sup>75</sup> “I want to surpass myself....I ran off because I was afraid of growing old with this scepter in my hand!...I’ll give the conquered scepter back to you...I was tired of it immediately.”

del papa” (1912) he would define Sicily the “nuovo cuore d’Italia”<sup>76</sup> and make Vesuvius a metaphor for the revolutionary power of Futurism. In the 1914 essay “Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica,” Marinetti explicitly attributed the vitality of freewording to the “esuberanza comunicativa e . . . genialità epidermica che è una delle caratteristiche delle razze meridionali.”<sup>77</sup>

Marinetti’s enthusiastic embrace of Italy’s southern qualities is all the more striking when read against the racializing anti-immigration discourse that conflated Italy with the Southernmost territories – to which poet Emanuel Carnevali was subject during his time in the US – that viewed Italians and others from southern Europe as “undesirables.” It also clashes with the colonialist rhetoric of the time, which was attempting to eschew the logic of otherness applied to Italy or parts of it by projecting otherness outside of the nation’s borders through the construction of a racially inferior ‘other’ beyond the Mediterranean.<sup>78</sup> The characterization of the futurist hero as an Arab pushes against the view according to which southern Italy was degenerate because of the similarity between African, Arab and southern Italian people, which had been theorized by early anthropologists such as Giuseppe Sergi and Alfredo Niceforo. This rhetoric was employed to explain the problems of southern Italy as opposed to the flourishing of the North, inhabited by Aryan and European races. Marinetti’s work turns on its head the project of saving a degenerate South thanks to northern support, and advocates here, as in the manifesto “Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna,” for a regeneration by turning South and East.

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<sup>76</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *L’aeroplano del Papa: romanzo profetico in versi liberi* (Milano: Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1914), 7. “The new hart of Italy.” Translation is mine.

<sup>77</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 104. “Communicative exuberance and . . . instinctive genius that it one of the traits of southern races.” Translation is mine.

<sup>78</sup> See Lucia Re, “Italians and the Invention of Race. The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913,” *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1-58.

The layering of literary references also contributes to the novel's undermining the superiority of western European culture. To underscore the highly individualistic nature of Mafarka's quest, the text reverses the evangelical quote "No longer do I call you servants . . . I have called you friends" (John 15:15) into "pas de sujets que je veux, mais des esclaves"<sup>79</sup> (212). Mafarka's claim to supreme authority and power through violence is diametrically opposed to the evangelical injunction toward brotherhood and peace between creator and creatures. The section titled "Le ventre de la Baleine" recalls the biblical character of Jonah, as well as the corresponding episode in Carlo Collodi's *Le Avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un burattino*, the novel that provides the blueprint for Mafarka's construction of his own son in the character of the woodworker Geppetto. Additionally, Mafarka's desperation after his brother Magamal's death closely resembles Achilles mourning his best friend Patroclus in book sixteen of the *Iliad*.

Alongside these and other references to the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, *Odyssey*, *Divine Comedy*, and foundational myths of western culture such as the battle between brothers Romulus and Remus, there are numerous references to the *Arabian Nights*, both as a structural model and for specific episodes. The story collection might even have inspired the misogynistic foundation of *Mafarka le futuriste*, since Shahrazad's storytelling originates as a response to sultan Shahriyâr's contempt for women and his plan to murder them one by one each night. Of course referring to Shahrazad provides European readers with familiar coordinates to accommodate their orientalizing preconceptions. But the intersection of uprooted and juxtaposed eastern and western references also engenders an inextricable enmeshment of the very paradigms that homogenizing notions of *italianità* were pitting against each other. Marinetti creates the same effect by injecting un-translated Arabic words such as "galabieh, dahabieh, fellah, hallahua, karamendin"

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<sup>79</sup> "I want you not as subjects, but as slaves."

within the textual fabric – a device that he will explore more thoroughly in his *poesia parolibera*.

### Freewording as an Uprooted Poetics

On of June 11, 1912 Marinetti published a polemic essay titled “Risposta alle obiezioni,” meant to illustrate further the dictates of the “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista,”<sup>80</sup> which included destroying syntax and abolishing punctuation. As appendix to the essay, Marinetti included a poem titled “Battaglia Peso + Odore”:<sup>81</sup>

Mezzogiorno  $\frac{3}{4}$  flauti gemiti solleone **tumbtumb** allarme Gargaresch schiantarsi  
crepitazione Marcia Tintinnio zaini fucili zoccoli chiodi dannoni criniere ruote . . .  
sterco-di-cavallo carogne filc-flac ammassarsi cammelli asini tumb-tuum cloaca Souk-  
degli-argentieri dedalo seta azzurro galabieh porpora aranci moucharabieh archi  
scavalcare biforcazione piazzetta pullulo  
conceria lustrascarpe gandouras burnous formicolio<sup>82</sup>

The poem stages an episode of the Italian-Turkish war that took place in Tripoli, which Marinetti witnessed as a war correspondent for the French newspaper *L’Intransigant*. Even more than in *Mafarka the futurist*, Marinetti is opposing to a comfortably removed experience of the exotic typical of Modernist Orientalism, his own direct experience as witness to the battle, which marked the beginning of Italy’s colonization of Libya. The setting offers the poet the

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<sup>80</sup> Which had been published exactly one month before.

<sup>81</sup> Part of his longer *La Battaglia di Tripoli* published the previous year. Marinetti first published the poem in French in 1911, and then translated it into Italian, most likely with the aid of Decio Cinti. He would not begin to write works directly in Italian until 1913.

<sup>82</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Battaglia Peso + Odore,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 59-60.

chance to enact the kind of explosion of traditional syntax and analogical accumulation for which the Manifesto advocated. Through these techniques, the poem seems to attack the readers from all sides, as though they too have been uprooted from their comfortable homes and plunged into the battlefield.

While the multisensory battle staged in the poem inevitably reproduces the asymmetries of military and economic power embedded in colonialism, its formal devices engender one of the most innovative experiments of multilingual poetics in the Italian literary tradition up to that point. Arabic words appear untranslated alongside Italian ones, uprooted from the context of Tripoli and incorporated into the text. The device relies partly on the ability of Italian readers, who were presumably following the developments of the colonial conquest through newspapers, to decipher some of the foreign terminology, such as Gargaresch, the town in which a particularly bloody battle took place. By incorporating this foreign vocabulary within the poem, Marinetti is thus signaling that it is becoming part of Italian vocabulary as well. The poem, in a sense, uproots and transports to Italy the language of Tripoli in the same way that Italy was conquering and shipping colonial products and economic capital back to the metropole.

At the same time, however, through the technique of *paroliberismo*, the poem endows the foreign words with expressive and constructive power, regardless of the reader's ability to decode them. "Gargaresch," "souk," "galabieh," "moucharabieh," "gandouras," "burnous," like Emily Apter's "untranslatables," preserve a "kernel of the foreign"<sup>83</sup> that defies interpretation on the part of literate European readers. Just as in *Mafarka le futuriste* Marinetti was marshaling his Egyptian origin to strike the comfortable urban cosmopolitanism with the brutal violence of appropriation and the disturbing casting of an Arab as the hero of a foundational Western epic,

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<sup>83</sup> Emily Apter, "Untranslatables: a World System," *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 584.

here the uprooting of foreign words injected into the textual fabric mobilizes opacity as a strategy for revolt.

The foreign words listed above designate for the most part local architectural features and types of clothing. This choice in itself is telling of Marinetti's wish to incorporate eradicated elements of African culture 'as is' without a prior assimilating homogenization. Colonial discourse at the time was, in fact, drawing attention precisely to North African architecture and local attire inasmuch as it could allegedly be made to derive from "the era of the Roman Empire," in an attempt to "link them directly to Italians," legitimize Italian claims to its occupation and possession as former possession.<sup>84</sup> Rather than referencing the traditional Arab "galabiah" and Berber cloak "gandoura," contemporary Italian descriptions of the Lybian and Eritrean populaces tended to focus on the "barrakan," a clothing item that was frequently linked to the ancient Roman toga.<sup>85</sup> Marinetti's choice to invoke the autochthonous items is already striking. Furthermore, to most European readers the words end up functioning similarly to the abundant onomatopoeias that depict the battle through pure sound, without proper signification. Souk, galabieh and moucharabieh reproduce the sounds of the battle as much as tumb-tumb or – flic-flac. While Marinetti's strategy of uprooting strips Arabic vocabulary of its signifying potential, thanks to the lack of the hierarchical structuring of syntax, it assigns it significant expressive power within the textual fabric.

While Marinetti's interjection of foreign words might seem limited compared to coeval experiments in multilingualism of global Modernism, the difference between such an openly hybridizing gesture and the rigorously monolingual accounts of colonial encounter and violence

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<sup>84</sup> Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism*, 52.

<sup>85</sup> See G. Haimann, *Cirenaica (Tripolitania)* (Milan: Hoepli, 1886), 178; R. Pianavia Vivaldi, *Tre anni in Eritrea* (Milan, Cogliati, 1901), 48, 99.

by D'Annunzio, both in poems within *Merope – La Canzone d'Oltremare* and in *La Nave*, is striking.

I miei lauri gettai sotto i tuoi piedi,  
o Vittoria senz'ali. È giunta l'ora.  
Tu sorridi alla terra che tu predi.

Italia! Dall'ardor che mi divora  
sorge un canto più fresco del mattino,  
mentre di te l'esilio si colora.

Oggi più alta sei che il tuo destino,  
più bella sei che la tua veste d'aria;  
e di lungi il tuo volto è più divino.

Odo nel grido della procellaria  
l'aquila marzia, e fiuto il Mare Nostro  
nel vento della landa solitaria.

Con tutte le tue prue navigo a ostro,  
sognando la colonna di Duilio  
che rostrata farai d'un novo rostro.

E nel cuore, oh potenza dell'esilio,  
il nome tuo m'è giovine e selvaggio  
come nel grido delle navi d'Ilio.

Italia! Italia! Non fu mai tuo maggio,  
nella città del Fiore e del Leone



quando ogni fiato era d'amor messaggio,  
  
sì novo come questa tua stagione  
maravigliosa in cui per te si canta  
con la bocca rotonda del cannone.<sup>86</sup> (vv 1-24)

The excerpt shows D'Annunzio employing a refined and lexically conservative language for his celebration of Italy – exemplified by his use of “novo,” according to the codification established in the *Novo Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana secondo l'Uso di Firenze*, commonly referred to as “Giorgini-Broglio,” published between 1870 and 1897, at the request of the newly formed Italian government. The exile from which D'Annunzio was writing writes does not appear to be marring in the least the purity of his poem of praise, in which the vocabulary constantly points to Italy's Roman past – “lauri,” “l'aquila marzia,” “Colonna di Duilio,” “navi d'Ilio” – and the *terzina* rhyme scheme connects the work to the illustrious tradition of Dante.

Consider also the difference between Marinetti's use of foreign words and that of Giovanni Pascoli in his long poem “Italy,”<sup>87</sup> in which the use of un-translated English language clearly signals the unfortunate loss of ‘Italianness’ that the tragedy of emigration has caused to Molly, the daughter of emigrants to the US, who has returned to Italy due to poor health.

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<sup>86</sup> “I threw my laurels under your feet,/wingless Victory. The time has come/You smile at the land you take./Italy! From the passion that devours/me rises a song fresher than the morning/while exile takes on your color./Today you are greater than your destiny/more beautiful than your gown of air/and your face is much more divine./In the petrel's cry I hear/the martial eagle, and I smell Our Sea/in the wind of the solitary moor./I sail South with all my prows,/dreaming of Duilio's pillar/that you will make into a new rostrum./And in my heart, power of exile/your name is to me as young and wild/as in the cry of Troy's ships/Italy! You never knew a May/in the city of the Flower and the Lion/where every breath is a message of love/as new as this wonderful/season in which your song is sung/by the open mouth of a cannon.” Translation is mine.

<sup>87</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, *Primi Poemetti*, ed. Nadia Ebani (Parma: Guanda, 1997), 449-450.

*"Oh yes"* "Un bel passaggio  
 vi tocca, o Ghita. Il tempo è fermo al bello"  
*"Oh yes"* Facea pur bello! Ogni villaggio  
 ridea nel sole sopra le colline.  
 Sfiorian le rose da' rosai di maggio.  
*Sweet sweet...* era un sussurro senza fine  
 nel cielo azzurro. Rosea, bionda, e mesta,  
*Molly* era in mezzo ai bimbi e alle bambine.  
 Il nonno, solo, in là volgea la testa  
 bianca. Sonava intorno mezzodì.  
 Chiedeano i bimbi con vocio di festa:  
 "Tornerai, *Molly*?" Rispondeva: – Sì!<sup>88</sup> (vv. 21-32)

The little girl, who has contracted tuberculosis due to the difficult living conditions of immigrants in New York, regains her strength only when she is able to pronounce her first Italian word – a resounding “Sì” – and reclaim belonging to the Italian nation. The connection between migration and sickness is a common thread during this time – as my discussion of poet Emanuel Carnevali in chapter three will show. In Pascoli’s poem, health is symbolized by the old but still productive grandmother, who has lived her whole life in the sunny countryside of Tuscany’s Garfagnana region. The child’s illness is directly attributed both to the inherent sickness of modern industrialized society in its most advanced form and to the condition of migration itself, which by cutting citizens off from their roots literally deprives them of the lifeblood that allows them to thrive.

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<sup>88</sup> “*Oh yes*” “You’re due/quite a passage, Ghita. The whether will be nice”/”*Oh yes*” It really was! Every village/laughed above the hills./The roses in May’s rose gardens were wilting/*Sweet, sweet...* it was an endless whisper/in the blue sky. Rosy, blond and sad/*Molly* was among the little boys and girls./The grandfather, alone, had his white head/turned toward her. The bells of noon were ringing./The children asked with festive voices:/Will you be back, *Molly*? She answered: Sì!” Translation is mine.

In Pascoli's poem, true 'Italianness' is expressed linguistically in the embrace of "sì," the word that had defined geographical regions and respective literary traditions of the early vernaculars distinguishing between *lingue d'Oil*, *lenga d'Oc* or *Occitan* and *lingua del sì* – well before the establishment of modern nation states. The final verse echoes the Dantean definition of Italy as "bello paese là dove 'l sì suona" (Inferno XXXIII, 80)<sup>89</sup> and succinctly reaffirms the linguistic basis of Italian cultural unity. On the contrary, the foreign words injected in Marinetti's text question the equation between national belonging and homogeneous linguistic expression, which is the very basis of all strategies aimed at 'making Italians' elaborated during the Risorgimento.

The dystopic novel *The Untamables*, published as *Gli Indomabili* in 1922 and translated by Marinetti some twenty years later into French in a version that is currently still unpublished, stages the power of multilingualism in the character of Kizmicà, the Untamable who is able to decipher all of the books found in the reign of the Paper People: "Io ho girato tutta la terra e conosco tutte le lingue. Combinandole insieme a fiuto, capirò anche questa lingua che non conosco."<sup>90</sup> Thanks to his multilingual expertise, Kizmicà is able to decipher the book that is generating the Paper People and that contains the secret to overcoming them, which turns out to be, unsurprisingly, a collection of Marinetti's own manifestoes. Even his later works, such as the posthumous memoir *Una sensibilità Italiana nata in Egitto*, in which Marinetti nostalgically contemplates the trajectory that led him to Futurism and its flourishing as true Italian art, are peppered with untranslated foreign language quotes, in this case in French and Milanese dialect.

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<sup>89</sup> Dante had referenced the distinction between the three vernacular regions also in his treaty *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

<sup>90</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Gli Indomabili," in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 996. "I have traveled all around the world and I know every language. Putting them all together, I should be able to make out this one language I don't know." "The Untamables," trans. Arthur A. Coppotelli, in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, 231.

The “Italian sensibility” the memoir is meant to account for ends up emerging somewhat nebulously out of the intersection between the regional and the international, expressed through the juxtaposition of languages.

The anomaly of a project of Italian nation-building and renewal divorced from concerns about linguistic homogenization and refinement cannot be underestimated.<sup>91</sup> Even D’Annunzio, who – as I have argued – also operated between opposing conceptions of homogenization and cosmopolitanism, and was equally invested in achieving success beyond the Alps, posited the Italian language as un-renounceable terrain on which to evaluate the literary innovations of a new generation of writers. In an 1899 interview with writer Ugo Ojetti, D’Annunzio described a man of letters as, a creator who possesses absolute mastery over “ il genio della grande lingua italiana, lo strumento primo dell’arte letteraria.”<sup>92</sup> As recently as 2011 Umberto Eco succinctly stated the linguistic foundation of Italian national unity in an interview about the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification: “Pour moi, l’Italie est avant tout une langue. La langue italienne a fait les Italiens.”<sup>93</sup>

Having grown up in a condition of multilingualism, speaking Italian at home, French at school, and hearing and using basic conversational Arabic in Alexandria, it is reasonable to imagine that Marinetti would have been keenly aware of the possibilities and impossibilities of

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<sup>91</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the linguistic foundation of Italian national identity, see Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs. The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

<sup>92</sup> “The genius of the great Italian language, the main instrument of literary art. Ugo Ojetti, *Alla Scoperta Dei Letterati* (Milano: F. Dumolard, 1895), 304. Translation is mine.

<sup>93</sup> Umberto Eco, “L’Italia, c’est avant tout une langue,” *Le Monde Magazine* (March 18, 2011). “As I see it, Italy is above all a language. The Italian language made Italians.” Translation is mine.

translation across languages.<sup>94</sup> His freewording pushes language to the limits of signification, with the widespread use of onomatopoeia. As the form in which signified and signifier are at their closest, onomatopoeia bridges linguistic differences, albeit imperfectly, and tends toward a universality of communication that is unthinkable in any other linguistic expression. Yet, this transnational communication resists the “transparency” which Édouard Glissant identifies as the requirement western thought posits in order to attempt understanding of the ‘other’ and instead preserves the opacity of the foreign, not in order to make the ‘other’ a citizen, as Glissant had envisioned, but to make the self a barbarian.<sup>95</sup> Marinetti’s uprooted poetics is able to transfer beyond linguistic borders precisely by virtue of what it does not translate: sound into meaning, Arabic into Italian or French.

When facing Marinetti’s rejection of the Italian literary tradition, scholars have been quick to point out the many ways in which Marinetti’s poetry is anti-traditional, but, I would contend, they have not paid sufficient attention to the extent to which it is *anti-Italian*, in a linguistic sense. *Paroliberismo* and the pervasive use of onomatopoeia, in freeing language from the boundaries of meaning and representation through phonic expression meant to adhere as closely as possible to the dehumanized sounds of modernity, reaches beyond the boundaries erected by what Yazemin Yildiz calls the “monolingual paradigm.”<sup>96</sup> I claim that Marinetti’s poetics of uprooting rests on its geospatial stretch beyond and across national borders, which is often overshadowed by his aggressive ideological nationalism.

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<sup>94</sup> While he might have first grasped the relevance of onomatopoeia thanks to the Symbolist experiments in phono-symbolism, its communicative potential across linguistic and national borders became clear when it came into his hands, as multilingual subject.

<sup>95</sup> See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, ed. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>96</sup> Yazemin Yildiz, *Beyond the mother tongue. The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

In the manifesto “Il teatro di varietà,” published in London’s *Daily Mail* on November 21, 1913, Marinetti theorizes multilingual and multicultural pastiche as the means by which to:

Prostituire sistematicamente tutta l’arte classica sulla scena, rappresentando per esempio in una sola serata tutte le tragedie greche, francesi, italiane, condensate e comicamente mescolate. – Vivificare le opere di Beethoven, di Wagner, di Bach, di Bellini, di Chopin, introducendovi delle canzonette napoletane. – Mettere a fianco a fianco sulla scena Zacconi, la Duse, e Mayol, Sarah Bernhardt e Fregoli. . . Incoraggiare in ogni modo genere degli eccentrici americani . . . brandire réclames lumineuse . . . **FUMEZ FUMEZ MANOLI FUMEZ MANOLI CIGARETTES**

...

**GIOCONDA ACQUA**

**PURGATIVA**

incrociarsi di trrrrrr trrrrrr Elevated trrrr trrrrrrrr sulla testa trombeeebeeebeeette fiiiiisch  
sirene d’autoambulanze . . .

+frastuono del Music-hall

**FOLIES-BERGERE**

**EMPIRE CREME-ECLIPSE<sup>97</sup>**

The injunction to abandon rigid distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, mixing musical pieces by classical composers with Neapolitan folk songs, goes hand in hand with another exhortation, that against linguistic purity. The text itself enacts the proposed accumulative technique by juxtaposing Italian, French and English words to the onomatopoeias meant to convey the urban

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<sup>97</sup> “Systematically prostitute all of classic art on the stage, performing for example all the Greek, French and Italian tragedies, condensed and comically mixed up, in a single evening – put life into the works of Beethoven, Wagner, Bach, Bellini, Chopin by inserting Neapolitan songs. – put Duse, Sarah Bernhardt, Zacconi, Mayol and Fregoli side by side on the stage . . . In every way encourage the *type* of the eccentric American . . . blaze with electric signs . . . SMOKE SMOKE MANOLI SMOKE MANOLI CIGARETTES . . . GIOCONDA PURGATIVE WATERS crisscross of trrrr trrrrr Elevated trrr trrrrrrrr overhead trrrrhone whissstle ambulance sirens . . . + music-hall uproar FOLIES-BERGÈRE EMPIRE CREME-ECLIPSE.” *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, trans. R. W. Flint. 121-122.

cacophony of trains, ambulances and late-night entertainment. Again, the text's multilingualism and reliance on onomatopoeia posits an increasingly transnational and translingual audience.

A similar argument could be made about Marinetti's freewording collage poems, in which the disposition of the words on the page, the use of different types and fonts and what Marinetti defines as "lirismo multilíneo" destabilize the semantic structure of natural languages.

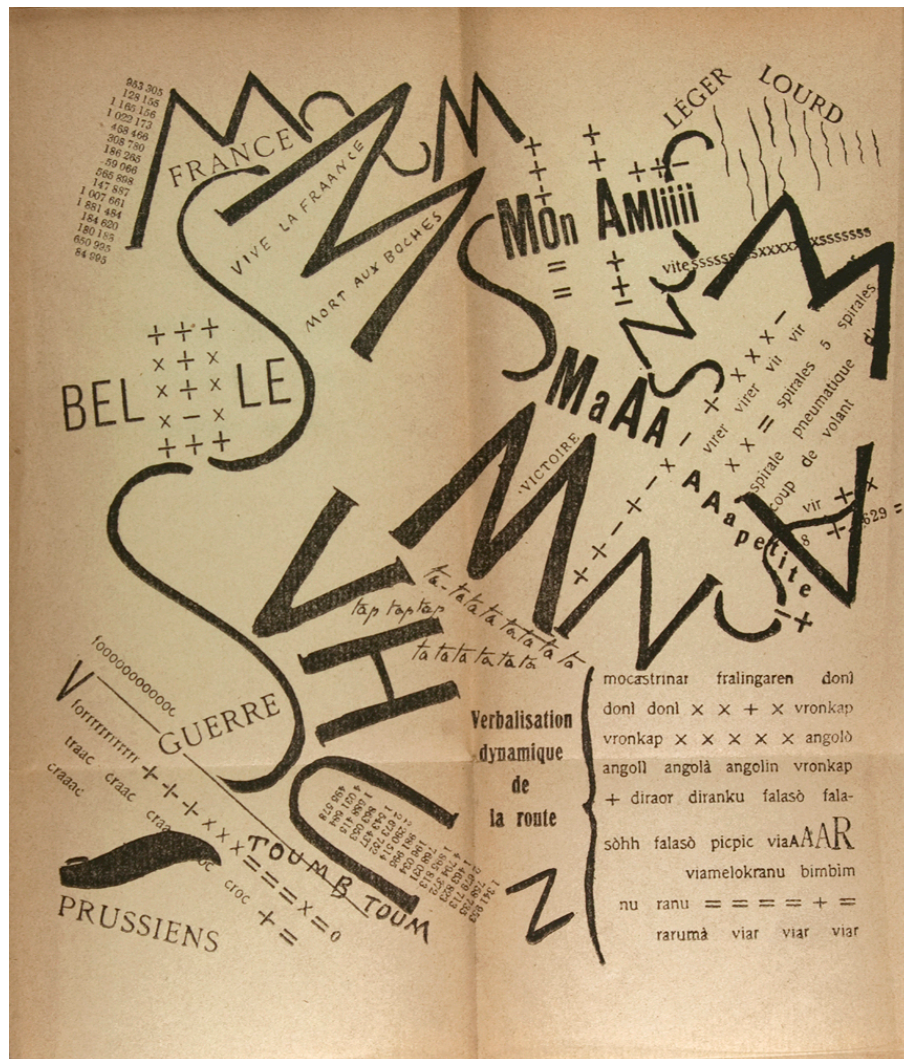


Figure 2.3. F. T. Marinetti, *Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto*, 1919.

Brooklyn Museum. Bequest of Richard J. Kempe.

In the example, titled “Après la Marne, Joffre visita le fronte en auto” (1919) and published in the aftermath of the First World War, any reader can perceive the poem as a “roadmap to victory” through the mountainous Ms that frame the page, thanks to the semanticization of the visual dimension of the text.<sup>98</sup> Marinetti’s own tours throughout Europe as a “declamatore,” performing his poetry out loud, without the need for a translator, show him to be well beyond the framework of nation-based literary production and reception.<sup>99</sup> Some twenty years before Eugène Jolas would dream of a “super-tongue for intercontinental expression,”<sup>100</sup> Marinetti was crafting his own form of expression between and beyond the domain of natural languages.

In the 1916 essay “La declamazione dinamica e sinottica,” he situated his performances beyond national boundaries, claiming to hold a “primato mondiale” in declamation, and to be more effective than “tutti gli altri declamatori di Europa.”<sup>101</sup> The fact that even larger sections of the text would have resisted interpretation on the part of foreign audiences simply intensified the aggressive function of the performances, described by Marinetti as “assalto” and “pugno nella lotta artistica.”<sup>102</sup> Among the factors contributing to the efficacy of the performances, Marinetti lists vocal spasms, velvety softness and brutality, facial and gestural mimicry, movements of the

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<sup>98</sup> See John J. White, “Iconic and indexical elements in Italian Futurist poetry F. T. Marinetti’s ‘words-in-freedom’” in *Signergy*, ed C. Jac Conradie, Ronél Johl, Marthinus Beukes, Olga Fischer, Christina Ljungberg and Bart Van den Bossche (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010): 129-158.

<sup>99</sup> He describes one of these performances, which occurred in London on April 28, 1948 in Doré Gallery, in the essay “La declamazione dinamica e sinottica” (March 11, 1916, in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 122).

<sup>100</sup> Eugène Jolas, *Man from Babel*, ed. Andreas Kramer and Rainer Rumold (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>101</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “La declamazione dinamica e sinottica,” March 11, 1916, in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 122. “World primacy . . . all the other declaimers of Europe.” *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, trans. R. W. Flint, 142-143.

<sup>102</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Prime battaglie futuriste,” section of “Guerra sola igiene del mondo,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 235. “Attack . . . punch in the artistic battle.” Translation is mine.



arms and legs, images drawn on blackboards as well as accompaniment by instruments such as hammers, bells, wooden boards and drums, according to the practice that had been inaugurated by the Futurist *rumoristi* Luigi Russolo and Ugo Piatti in 1913, later perfected thanks to the invention of the *intonarumori*.<sup>103</sup>

The primacy of expressive thrust over the interpretive moment represents a poetic embodiment of Marinetti's claim about the futurist embrace of the barbaric – understood in the etymological sense of that which sounds like stuttering to speakers of the dominant language. The most extensive experiment in *paroliberismo* is the famous “Zang Tumb Tumb. Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912” published in 1914 by Marinetti's own “Edizioni di Poesia.” The text was inspired by Marinetti's eyewitness account of the battle of Adrianopolis, which took place during the first Balkan War in 1912, as a reporter for the journal *Gil Blas*. Both a sound poem and a concrete poem, the text relies primarily on phonetics and typography to portray the Bulgarian bombing of the Ottoman city, depicted primarily as an accumulation of sensory material. While the use of a variety of fonts, text sizes and their disposition on the page contribute to a visual representation of the event, audio recordings such as that of Marinetti's 1924 reading of the section “Bombardamento”<sup>104</sup> show to what extent language is reduced to mere sound.

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<sup>103</sup> See Luigi Russolo, *L'arte dei rumori* (Milano: Poesia, 1916).

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpetJdoiGik>.

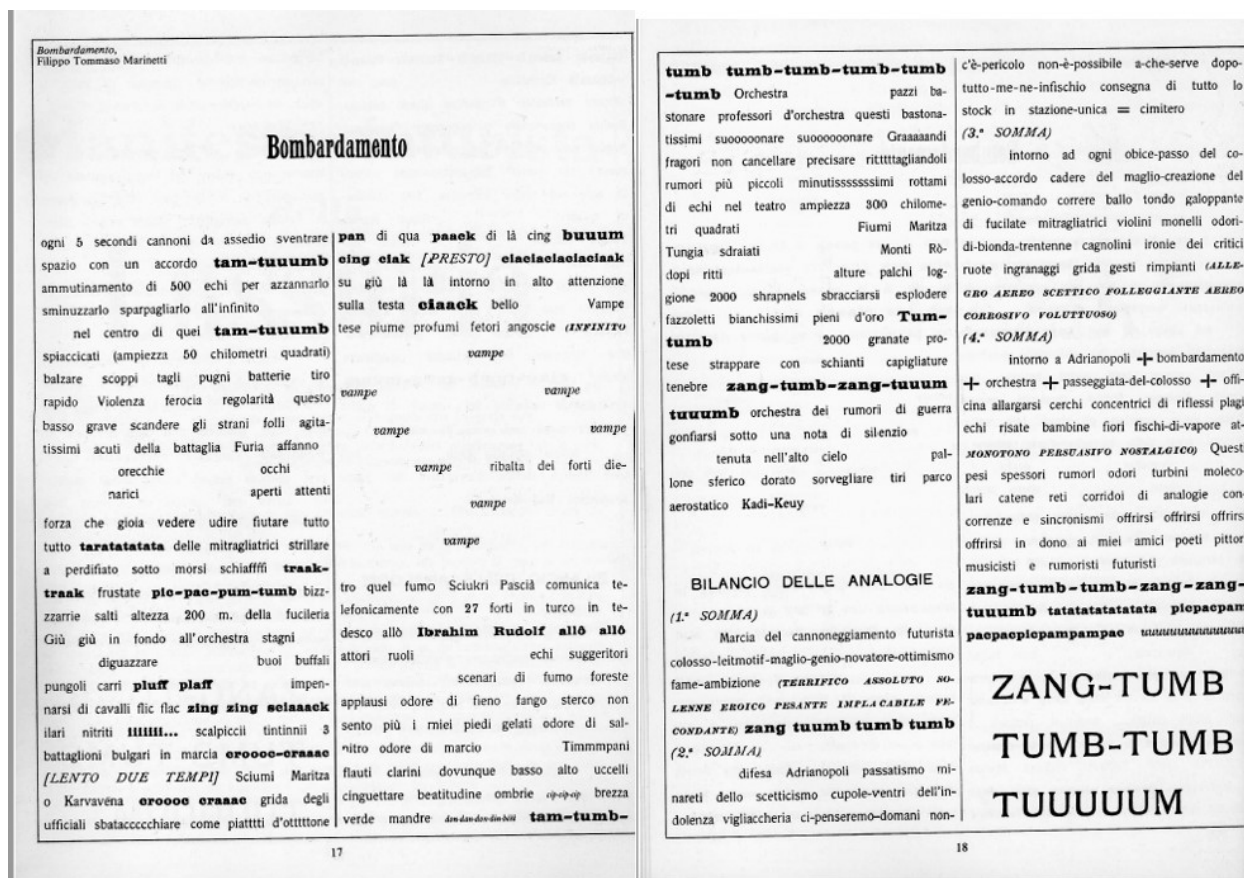


Figure 2.4. "Bombardamento."

*Zang Tumb Tuuum: Adrianopoli, Ottobre 1912: Parole in Libertà.* Milano: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia," 1914.

In Marinetti's reading, the insistence on the "r" sound in words such as "sventrare," "ferocia," "frondi" and "fragori" produces a growl that expresses violence more viscerally than the semantic force of the words – which are not even clearly discernible due to the isolation of sounds and syllables within them. Marinetti accelerates the pronunciation of word strings such as "azzannarlo sminuzzarlo sparpagliarlo," "furia affanno orecchie occhi narici" and "grida degli ufficiali sbataccocchiare come piatttti d'ottttone," while progressively increasing the volume of his voice, in an effort to recreate the urgency and exhilarating excitement of battle. On the other hand, his reading of onomatopoeias such as "tam-tutuuum" – a variation on the published "tam-

tuuuum” – is decelerated and isolated by silences in imitation of gunshots and bombs dropping. In reproducing the sound of a horse’s ‘neigh’ – written as “iiiiiiii...” – he produces variations in pitch.

The text is thus treated like a score that allows for certain liberties, such as the repetition of “pie-pac-pum-tumb” three times and in increasing speed and volume. There are actual indications for performance in brackets, such as “[LENTO DUE TEMPI]” and “[PRESTO],” although they do not begin to cover the extent of Marinetti’s idiosyncratic interpretation, which includes singing “Sciumi Maritza o Karkavena,” the Bulgarian national anthem at the time. As in “Battaglia Peso + Odore,” the poem incorporates foreign language words, which make up the soundscape of battle alongside the noise of machine guns and the whinnying of horses. These words range from “Siukri Pascià” to the accented German speech “Ibrahim Rudolf allô allô.” In some instances, Marinetti plays with the relationship between sound and meaning, for example, a word like “infinito,” which appears normally in the printed text, is lengthened to “infiniiiiiiiito,” and “regolarità” is pronounced with a rhythmic scansion of the syllables “re-go-la-ri-tà.” In other passages, one might say the opposite, that without a transcript they would be perceived as mere growls, explosions, shrieks or yells.

Whether mimicking or overriding the semantic potential of the text, in Marinetti’s declamation speech is secondary to voice. To use the ancient Greek distinction between *phone* and *logos* – the acoustic phenomenon of voice versus the articulate discourse endowed with rational meaning – Marinetti’s *paroliberismo* interjects the former into the latter. His experimentations abandon what Adriana Cavarero identifies as “Western logocentrism”<sup>105</sup> and instead embrace the pure expressive and structural power of voice, albeit in the service of

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<sup>105</sup> Adriana Cavarero, “Logocentrismo della tradizione occidentale,” in *A più voci. Filosofia dell’espressione vocale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003), 154.

militarism. Thus, the injunction to embrace the barbaric that permeates futurist writing is not merely metaphorical. Marinetti's employment of the expressive power of the voice, divorced from the semantic function of language, attests to the creative potential of injecting Italian poetry with uprooted non-western sonic materials. Later, in the 1922 theatrical work *Il tamburo di fuoco: drama africano di calore, colore, rumori, odori* Marinetti would take this experimentation further, alternating the performance of the text with musical pieces by composer Balilla Pratella and sounds produced by Luigi Russolo's *intonarumori* sound machine.

Differently from the case of migrant authors, whose displacement causes them to write from the interstitial third space that Homi Bhabha would describe as born of the "imaginative negotiation of incommensurable difference,"<sup>106</sup> Marinetti's intercultural exchanges remain inscribed within an ideological hierarchy of colonialist, racial, gender-based, economic and military disparity and violence. His *uprooted poetics* is very much in service to imperialism. It does however represent a paradoxical attempt at "thinking and feeling beyond the nation," to use the phrase with which Pheng Cheah, Bruce Robbins and later Rebecca Walkowitz describe an ideologically very different, critical, kind of Modernist cosmopolitanism that developed within British imperial culture.<sup>107</sup> The matrix of Marinetti's transnationalism was the European cosmopolitanism with which Futurism was in conversation, as illustrated by an open letter that Marinetti wrote to Belgian futurist A.F. Mac Delmarle. In the letter he claimed that *Futurism was not parochial* – "*una chiesuola*" – *nor was it a school* and envisioned a time when, after a stage of "ultra-violent nationalism" due to Italy's particularly dire illness of "passeism," Futurism could unleash its "global energy" and convene "all the innovative spirits under [its] flag."

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<sup>106</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 217.

<sup>107</sup> See Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style. Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Marinetti's literary production, however, reinflects this cosmopolitanism through the paradigm of military colonization and linguistic disturbance and points to a capacious notion of nationality that contests both the homogenizing impetus of post-Risorgimento "Italian making" and the autarkic model that Fascism would soon impose.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Migration and Disability in the Poetry of Emanuel Carnevali

#### **Disturbing America.**

“His writings are the record of a personality that burned with twentieth-century flames, and that was marvelously alive to the intensities and contrasts of American life.”<sup>1</sup> This is how Carl Sandburg eloquently summed up the figure of Emanuel Carnevali and the impact of his brief presence in the United States on the world of American poetry between the First and the Second World Wars. In 1931, in a letter published in *Poetry* magazine, Ezra Pound presented Carnevali as one of the most promising poets of his generation, although he did not yet express a definitive judgment on his value as a writer – and seemed to have taken offense at French critic Regis Michaud’s definition of Carnevali as “one of the two American poets whose work attained an international standard,” the other one being, presumably, William Carlos Williams.

One has known of Carnevali’s existence for a decade. The work as shown temperament, “fire,” a refusal to be controlled, an intensity of feeling without which no poet is ever satisfactory, though this fury is not in itself a complete poetic equipment.

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *The Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali*, ed. Kay Boyle (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 19.

For a number of years one has recognized that Carnevali was one of the few who might, and one has speculated as to whether his handicap was too great. It seems to me that the time has now come when one can without reservation recognize his validity as a writer.<sup>2</sup>

To Emanuel Carnevali, Sherwood Anderson dedicated the poem “A Dying Poet”<sup>3</sup> and the short story “Italian Poet in America”<sup>4</sup> and Louis Grudin – whom Carnevali defined “the dearest friend of my life”<sup>5</sup> – a poem titled “Emanuel.”<sup>6</sup> Ernest Walsh devoted a piece to him in *This Quarter* titled “A Young Living Genius,” in which he succinctly claimed: “Carnevali is a major poet and primarily a poet who has given us the life of the youth of this age . . . We have Sandburg, Pound, Williams, and Carnevali. These are assured.”<sup>7</sup> Kay Boyle, who edited Carnevali’s posthumous *Autobiography* (1967) and was one of the American intellectuals with whom he maintained a relationship after his return to Italy, recalled hearing about him from poet Lola Ridge in the late 1920s, when his “radiant vision, unextinguished by the misery of his defeat, was already metaphor to the poets of America for all that daily circumstances demanded they endure.”<sup>8</sup>

These quotes, despite their sometimes hyperbolic quality, typical of many tributes reserved by Modernists to each other, show that for a small but crucial number of years, an Italian poet, Emanuel Carnevali became a symbol to a group of American poets of “the rebel, the man on the run, the stranger beating his head against the stars.”<sup>9</sup> William Carlos Williams, who

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<sup>2</sup> Letter quoted in Louis Zukofsky, “Program: “Objectivists” 1931,” *Poetry* 37, no. 5 (February 1931), 269. Zukofsky mentions Carnevali primarily because of his translations from Rimbaud, which had appeared in the same issue.

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood Anderson, “A Dying Poet,” in *New Testament* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927): 90-100.

<sup>4</sup> Sherwood Anderson, “Italian Poet in America,” in *Decision* 1 (August 1941): 8-15.

<sup>5</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Louis Grudin, Emanuel,” in *Poems and Tales* (New York: Horizon Press, 1976), 57.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Walsh, “A Young Living Genius,” *This Quarter* (Fall-Winter 1925-1926), 328.

<sup>8</sup> Kay Boyle, “Preface,” in Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

mentions Carnevali in his own autobiography as “a lost soul,”<sup>10</sup> was among the most affected by the immigrant poet, as he wrote in “Gloria!” the final issue of *Others* magazine in 1919, which he dedicated to Carnevali as a response to the attack<sup>11</sup> he had pronounced against the Modernist circles of New York and Chicago: “It is for you we went out, old men in the dark. It is for you that the rubbish stirred and a rat crawled from the garbage, alive...! The reason for our having been alive is here!”<sup>12</sup> Williams goes as far as crediting Carnevali with being one of the main inspirations if not behind American Modernism as a whole, at least behind the drastic change in his own poetics that led him toward *Spring and All* and *Paterson*.

The acknowledgement confirms the already mentioned observation by Jahan Ramazani that “although creolization, hybridization, and the like are often regarded as exotic [and marginal] to literary histories of formal advancement or the growth of discrete national poetics, these cross-cultural dynamics are arguably among the engines of modern and contemporary poetic development and innovation.”<sup>13</sup> An Italian immigrant forced to devote his time to menial jobs to make a living, whose language bore the marks of a foreigner in the process of negotiating between a mother tongue steeped in erudition and a second language absorbed from the streets of the most modern metropolis, a self-proclaimed poet bringing the gaze of a newly arrived outsider to the US, was credited for injecting new life into the most celebrated literary circles of his time.

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<sup>10</sup> William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions 1967), 266.

<sup>11</sup> Carnevali first pronounced his attack at a party in New York organized by Alfred Kreymborg on February 22 1919, directing it to William Carlos Williams, in the presence of Harriet Monroe, Marianne Moore, Muna Lee, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Lola Ridge, William Saphier and Babette Deutch, among others. A month later, he transferred the attack to paper, in an essay that Helen Hoydt, assistant director of *Poetry* magazine, praised but refused to publish. It was printed only in 1925 in *A Hurried Man*, with the title “Maxwell, Bodenheimer, Alfred Kreymborg, Lola Ridge, William Carlos Williams,” and later partially included in his *Autobiography*, with the title “My speech at Lola.”

<sup>12</sup> William Carlos Williams, “Gloria!” *Others* 5, no. 6 (July 1919), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, 3.



Through his poetry as well as his work as critic and translator, Carnevali strove to inhabit the paradoxical space of one trying to belong and at the same time to be the critical conscience providing correction and enlivenment from the outside. The title chosen by Argentinian writer and critic Gabriel Cacho Millet<sup>14</sup> for his 1980 edition of Carnevali's collection of letters – *Voglio disturbare l'America* – effectively sums up the elements of his self-positioning as an artist and intellectual: on the one hand, an obsessive need for recognition, and on the other a desire to point to the limitations of his new milieu; on the one hand, a desire to become “an American poet” and on the other a constant attempt at presenting himself as a truly international writer straddling old and new continents. His aspiration to “disturb” is spelled out in his project for international literary journal which he planned on titling “New Moon” and which he intended to be “an invasion . . . a relentless invasion and in this case an invasion of the whole field of American literature . . . the new!”<sup>15</sup>

## A Lost Poet

Despite the acknowledged importance of his contribution to American poetry, Carnevali has faded into oblivion and his work remains absent from the canon of twentieth-century

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<sup>14</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Voglio disturbare l'America: Lettere a Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Papini e altri*, ed. Gabriel Cacho Millet (Firenze: La casa Usher, 1981). Gabriel Cacho Millet's interest in Carnevali probably arose through his studies on Dino Campana, who shared with Carnevali a Tuscan birthplace, a similar poetic persona, an illness that caused him to live the final years of his life in a hospital, and a premature death.

<sup>15</sup> Draft of letter sent by Carnevali to the writers and intellectuals he hoped would become involved in the project. Two typed pages numbered 2 and 3, with handwritten corrections. Property of Rose Dawson (Chicago). A photocopy is in the David Stivender Archive in New York and it also appears in Emanuel Carnevali, *Voglio disturbare l'America*, 87-88 (footnote 15).

literature. Even the scholars who mention him, more recently, allude to his stature as an “almost Mythological figure”<sup>16</sup> rather than to his poetry: “Anyone who knows anything about poetry written in English between the two World Wars knows the name Carnevali, but almost no one knows the words of the wonderful work he wrote.”<sup>17</sup> Mario Domenichelli provides a similar definition, stating that he “embodies the late-Romantic myth of the poet in which life and poetry . . . take one and the same shape.”<sup>18</sup>

In Italy, Carnevali is missing from anthologies and collections of twentieth-century poetry as well, primarily because having written almost exclusively in English excluded him from the canon of Italian literature. Up until the 1970s, there are only a few sporadic mentions by the intellectuals most interested in Anglo-American literature, such as the *anglista* Carlo Linati, who mentioned him in a 1934 article published in *Nuova Antologia*, or Giuseppe Prezzolini, who resided in the US for decades, taught literature at Columbia University and dedicated to Carnevali a chapter of his volume on Italian American authors—*I Trapiantati*—in 1963.<sup>19</sup> In the 1970s, thanks to the publication of *Il primo Dio*, translated and edited by Maria Pia Carnevali in 1978 and to the efforts of David Stivender, the chorus master of the NY Metropolitan Opera who developed an obsession with his poetry, Carnevali enjoyed a slight increase in interest—but more on the part of journalists than of literary critics.<sup>20</sup> Within a couple of years, his work had taken second stage compared to the legend of the *poète maudit*.

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<sup>16</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Furnished Rooms*, ed. Dennis Barone (New York: Bordighera Press), 83

<sup>17</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Furnished Rooms*, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Mario Domenichelli, “Emanuel Carnevali’s ‘Great Good Bye.’” in *Beyond the Margin: Readings in Italian Americana*, ed. Paolo A. Giordano and Anthony Julian Tamburri (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 83.

<sup>19</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I trapiantati* (Milano, Longanesi, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> See Maria Corti, “Scoppia il caso Carnevali,” *Il Giorno* (Sept. 24, 1978), 3; Beniamino Placido, “Il bastardo, il sapiente e la gallina,” *La Repubblica* (Sept 21, 1978): 13-14; Jacqueline Risset, “Fuori e dentro la follia,” *Il Messaggero* (Sept. 25, 1978), 3; Teresa Campi, “Carnevali: il

As for American scholars, the attention given to Carnevali's works is not much greater. His name circulates in memoirs of the 1920s, but his work has received overall very little attention from Modernist studies, despite having appeared in *Others*, *The Little Review* and *Poetry*, and gained the admiration of the likes of, as we have seen, William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Lola Ridge, Robert McAlmon, Ezra Pound, Kay Boyle and Ernest Walsh. The lack is unfortunate, not merely for Carnevali's sake, but because, as Erin E. Templeton notes, "Carnevali's work gives us a different perspective on many of the familiar faces of modernist literature, especially Pound and Williams, and it also gives us a unique point of view from which to examine the urban experience in post-war New York and Chicago: the immigrant perspective, the perspective of a person living in poverty, and the perspective of one whose body has begun to fail."<sup>21</sup> One might say that his decentered perspective also sheds a different light on coeval developments in Italian literature, helping to complete a picture that has too often focused on the powerful voices at the center of the intellectual establishment.

Even anthologies specifically devoted to ethnic modernism, such as Werner Sollors's 1998 publication *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity and the Languages of America*, fail to mention Carnevali.<sup>22</sup> This is due most likely to his exclusive adoption of the English language. By choosing to present himself as an American, first and foremost from a linguistic perspective, Carnevali effectively signaled his desire to avoid ethnically-based categorizations. This explains his absence also from publications such as *Poets of the Italian*

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grido straziante d'un poeta misero e vagabondo," *Paese Sera* (Sept. 14, 1978), 7; Ruggero Bianchi, "Parti emigrante e ritornò poeta," *Tuttolibri* 4, no. 31 (Aug. 10 1978), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Erin E. Templeton, "'For Having Slept Much the Dead Have Grown Strong': Emanuel Carnevali and William Carlos Williams," *William Carlos Williams Review* 30, no. 1-2. (Fall 2013): 155.

<sup>22</sup> Werner Sollors, *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

*Diaspora: A Bilingual Anthology*, edited by Luigi Bonaffini and Joseph Perricone in 2014.<sup>23</sup> As a migrant author who in many ways eschewed the codified coordinates of migration literature, Carnevali resists language- and nation-based classifications and points to the need to approach modern literature obliquely and cross-culturally. Andrea Ciribuco's newly published volume *The Autobiography of a Language: Emanuel Carnevali's Italian/American Writing*<sup>24</sup> represents an important contribution in this direction.

From the perspective of his literary career, his success and recognition in the context of American modernism was impressive. Having arrived in the US speaking little to no English – a friend he met on the ship crossing the Atlantic was his first tutor<sup>25</sup> – in just a couple of years he managed to have work published in prestigious literary magazines and gained recognition among fellow writers, both for his poetry and as a symbol of the late-Romantic tormented and rebellious poet wandering around the urban landscape. Biographically, however, his trajectory is the inverse of the stereotypical rags-to-riches immigrant narrative.

Throughout the remaining sections of this chapter, I argue that in order to understand how Carnevali's poetry functions within and between Italian and US literature, we must look closely at the marginalizing forces that hindered his Americanization and ultimately caused his demise and subsequent scholarly neglect. First, I analyze Carnevali's poetry as translingual writing, resulting in a textual fabric that marked his work as different within the Anglo-modernist milieu in which it circulated. Secondly, I explore Carnevali's shifting situatedness between European and American cultural milieus, through his work as a translator, his project

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<sup>23</sup> Luigi Bonaffini and Joseph Perricone, *Poets of the Italian Diaspora: A Bilingual Anthology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Ciribuco, *Autobiography of a Language: Emanuel Carnevali's Italian/American Writing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 71.

for a new international journal titled *New Moon*, his work as a literary critic and his creation of an international community of poets and intellectuals while isolated from society in his hospital room in Bazzano, Italy. His interstitial position and his linguistic ‘difference’ arguably contributed to Carnevali’s immediate success as a poet, as it represented an alternative to purist modes of expression that were gaining traction in the wake of Mencken’s linguistic theorizations and the US’s increasingly protectionist policies. However, it also impeded Carnevali’s assimilation as an immigrant into the societal fabric of early twentieth-century America. This hindrance was of course exacerbated by his physical condition. In the final section of the chapter, by tracing the imbrications of disability and migration in some of his poems, I draw out the disabling rhetorical forces that act on all migrants and thus make a broader claim about the generative potential of reading migration literature as a whole through the lens of disability studies, which joins forces with migration and post-colonial studies in “prob[ing] the peripheral so as to view the whole in a fresh way.”<sup>26</sup>

In many ways, Emanuel Carnevali is the emblem of early twentieth-century dislocation and its consequences on identity and language. He was born in Florence, Italy in 1897, after the separation of his parents – something that marked him as an anomaly in mainstream Italian culture from the very start of his life. He lived with his mother – depressed and addicted to narcotics – and aunt Melania, near Biella in the Piedmont region between 1905 and 1907, when he entered a boarding school in Correggio, where his older brother Augusto was already studying. In 1908 his mother died and he was officially entrusted to the care of his father, who soon remarried and had other children. Between 1910 and 1912, Carnevali spent two years at the famous “Collegio Foscari” in Venice, from which he was expelled because of a homosexual

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<sup>26</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomas, *Extraordinary Bodies. Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5.

relationship with another student, as he recalls in his *Autobiography*. In 1913 he transferred to a technical school in Bologna, where he studied with writer Adolfo Albertazzi. The following year, at the age of 16, possibly due to interest sparked by the fact that the relatives of a close friend lived in America, he emigrated to the United States, thus escaping his authoritarian father and a fatherland which he felt to be oppressive and out of tune with his artistic aspirations.

The year of his emigration, 1914, coincides with the onset of the First World War, and although Italy was still declaredly neutral at the time, a desire to escape possible military draft may have contributed to his decision. In his *Autobiography*, Carnevali merges his difficulties at school in Bologna with the episode of his expulsion from the “Collegio Foscarini” in Venice, after the discovery of a homosexual affair with a schoolmate, presenting his migration as an almost forced escape from a very provincial and repressive society. He also fails to mention that he emigrated with his older brother, who appears in the *Autobiography* only at a later time, and who returned to Italy in 1915, having been drafted. In his *Autobiography*, Carnevali states, about leaving Italy: “I must confess that I felt no great sorrow or nostalgia, for Italy meant my father to me; it meant the beatings my brother gave me, and it meant my terrible grandmother.”<sup>27</sup>

Like many European immigrants, he opted for New York City, where he experienced the first of many disappointments facing a young man who spoke little English and had even less money. In his *Autobiography* he describes his reaction to the skyscrapers – an almost stereotypical episode codified by the genre of travel logs to the US: “one of the great disillusionings of my entire unhappy life. These famous sky-scrapers were nothing more than great boxes standing upright or on one side, terrifically futile, frightfully irrelevant, so commonplace that one

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<sup>27</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 63.

felt he had seen the same thing somewhere before.”<sup>28</sup> The greatest and most modern of urban landscapes, with its “awful network of fire-escapes” provided a “miserable panorama.” This impression, together with the difficult financial situation Carnevali endured as an immigrant, motivated the choice of “black” for the New York section of *The Autobiography*, in which he color-codes the succeeding phases of his life. Despite his claimed desire for modernity and excitement, the fast pace of life in the big city troubled Carnevali and distanced him from the position of the Futurists. Fortunato Depero, for example, who would describe his impact with the metropolis in *Un futurista a New York* in different terms: “Folla-coriandoli, folla-formiche, folla di sabbia umana che scorre, scivola e sgranella; che si rarefà e si condensa con ordine e continuità esasperante. E va e viene, evaevieneevaevieneevaeviene...davanti agli occhi sempre due magnifici polpacci.”<sup>29</sup> Depero’s text mimics and celebrates the speed and energy of the city as creative force, whereas Carnevali generally describes New York as a hostile environment, due in part to his socio-economic status as a working-class immigrant, very different from Depero’s experience as a tourist.

While performing a series of menial jobs, such as dishwasher, waiter and janitor, Carnevali began writing, in 1916, interestingly choosing to begin with the most recent of art forms: cinema. With a Dutch friend, he wrote several film screenplays – *Sette uomini neri*, *Il richiamo della cornamusa*, *La legge morale* – but failed to sell them.<sup>30</sup> In 1917 he studied French

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<sup>28</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> “Confetti-crowd, ants-crowd, crowd of human sand flowing, sliding and de-graining; rarefying and condensing with exasperating order and continuity. And it comes and goes, comesandgoesandcomesandgoesandcomesandgoes . . . before your eyes always two magnificent calves.” Fortunato Depero, *Un futurista a New York* (Montepulciano: Edizioni del grifo, 1990), 27. Translation is mine. Carnevali was at odds with Futurism, but shared with it the belief in the “necessità di Americanizzarsi” in the sense of leaving behind the weight of tradition and celebrating the new. See Umberto Boccioni, *Opera completa* (Foligno: Campitelli, 1927), 143.

<sup>30</sup> See Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 85.

and American poetry along with friend Louis Grudin and began writing and submitting his own poems for publication. After many rejections, James Oppenheim, director of *Seven Arts*, accepted a few poems, but the journal ceased publications before Carnevali's works were published. The acceptance still constituted a turning point in his career, since through Oppenheim Carnevali met Waldo Frank, destined to remain a close friend, and gained access to élite literary circles, meeting Max Eastman, Louis Untermeyer, Babette Deutsch, and Alfred Kreymborg. It was Oppenheim who suggested that Carnevali contact Harriet Monroe, editor-in-chief of *Poetry* magazine in Chicago, to whom he wrote, presenting himself as an admirer of "Poe, Whitman, Twain, Harte, London, Oppenheim and Waldo Frank."<sup>31</sup>

In 1918 Harriet Monroe agreed to publish his series "The Splendid Commonplace," for which he would win the Young Poet's award for that year.<sup>32</sup> In order to support himself and his new wife – Emilia Valenza, an Italian immigrant from Piedmont like himself – and to pursue his newly embraced desire to become a writer, he accepted a position as research assistant to critic Joel Elias Spingarn at the "New York Public Library," where he discovered the work of contemporary Italian poets Giovanni Papini, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Scipio Slataper, Ardengo Soffici and Aldo Palazzeschi, effectively finding a group of compatriots who shared his literary ideals only after his move across the Atlantic. Besides engaging with several of these Italian writers through epistolary exchanges, Carnevali also began his work as translator and literary critic and continued to publish poems in journals such as *Poetry*, *The Little Review* and *Youth*, *A Magazine for the Arts*.

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<sup>31</sup> *Poetry* archive, XI, March 6, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> The prize, awarded annually "for a poem or group of poems by a young beginner in the art," was announced in *Poetry* 12, no. 2 (Nov. 1918), 112–13.



After attacking the writers who gravitated around the journal *Others*, and being fired by Spingarn for allegedly stealing books from his collection, Carnevali abandoned his wife in New York and moved to Chicago where he befriended William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and the lawyer Mitchell Dawson, who would help support him financially over the next few years. In 1919, he accepted Harriet Monroe's offer to work as associate editor of *Poetry* magazine. Carnevali himself, who had previously been fired by the Italian American newspaper *The Citizen*, for which he was responsible for "writing notes concerning the criminals of Chicago and soliciting advertisements and subscriptions,"<sup>33</sup> admitted to having been far from the model employee: "I was an undesirable worker and Harriet Monroe was dissatisfied with me. I must admit I deserved her reproaches for I was a lazy good-for-nothing sort of cub."<sup>34</sup>

Carnevali's professional relationship with Monroe ended in 1920, also due to the worsening of his health conditions. Having contracted syphilis from a prostitute and later receiving the diagnosis of lethargic encephalitis, Carnevali spent a great part of the next few years either in mental health institutions or as a homeless beggar. Williams, Monroe herself, Robert McAlmon and Ezra Pound contributed to his medical bills, but by 1922, extremely poor and terribly ill, Carnevali was sent back to Italy, where he was hospitalized,<sup>35</sup> He spent the rest of

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<sup>33</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 155.

<sup>34</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 157.

<sup>35</sup> Pound was the object of translations and critical essays by Carnevali. The April-May 1931 issue of the Genoa-based journal *L'Indice*, contains Carnevali's translation of a long essay by Louis Zukofsky "I "Cantos" di Ezra Pound," aimed at defending Pound's poetry. His translation of Pound's *Canto Ottavo* occupies part of the November issue of the same magazine. At one point, Pound was one of Carnevali's greatest advocates, including him in the volume *Profile. An Anthology Collected in 1932*, mentioning him in several interviews, and even extending a plea to help Carnevali in the *New York Herald* in the 1933 article "A Writer with Encephalitis." Their relationship, however, appears to have ended rather harshly, possibly for political reasons, as well as financial ones. In a 1937 letter to Pound – the last one available from their epistolary exchange – Carnevali asks "caro Ezra" to make peace and resume sending him the monthly two hundred lira that Pound was contributing to his hospital stay, adding "Amico, finirei anche di

his life in various hospitals, including a sanatorium in Bazzano, and the “Villa Baruzziana” in Bologna, where he died in 1942.

## A Translingual Poet

In 1920 Carnevali wrote to Giovanni Papini: “l’America è orribile, ma è il mio paese.”<sup>36</sup> In a famous letter to Harriet Monroe, he claimed: “I want to become an American poet.”<sup>37</sup> His decision in favor of the English language is deeply connected to his poetics of urgency, authenticity and modernity. In this sense, as well as because he wrote his very first verse in the US,<sup>38</sup> his poetic vocation is truly American.<sup>39</sup> Much like Dante whom he so admired because he was able to write “for the people of his time and tongue”<sup>40</sup>, Carnevali aspired to meet the challenge of finding “one voice in the chaos of voices.”<sup>41</sup> He wanted to give poetic voice to the “mechanical cities [that] loom like the menace of the future over [...] rivers” to the “railways [...] that hold the earth in a terrible embrace,” to “businessmen [...] and workers,” to the “modern tremendous factory [...] this factory of neurosis, the modern world.” He wished to express the modern worry about “the JOB, that damnable affair, THE JOB. Nightmare of the

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tradurre i trenta Cantos.” The promise seems to imply that Pound himself had asked Carnevali to be his Italian translator, or at the very least had appreciated his work. In addition to the published Canto Ottavo, six other translated cantos exist in draft form but were never published. See Andrea Ciribuco, *The Autobiography of a Language: Emanuel Carnevali’s Italian/American Writing*, 166.

<sup>36</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Voglio disturbare l’America*, letter XVI.

<sup>37</sup> In Emanuel Carnevali, *Voglio disturbare l’America*, 20, footnote 33.

<sup>38</sup> See *Il Primo Dio*, 95-97 “L’amore è una miniera nascosta nelle montagne della nostra vecchiezza.”

<sup>39</sup> Paolo Valesio sees this as the trait that makes Carnevali unique in the realm of literature produced in between cultures and languages, see “I fuochi della tribù,” *Poesaggio: Poeti italiani d’America*, ed. Peter Carravetta and Paolo Valesio (Quinto di Treviso: Pagus, 1993), 276.

<sup>40</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Dante and Today,” *Poetry* 18, no. 6 (Sept. 1921): 323-327.

<sup>41</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *A Hurried Man* (Paris: Contact editions, 1925), 186.

hunted, THE JOB, the misery, this anxiety, this kind of neurasthenia, this ungrateful, this blood-sucking thing.”<sup>42</sup> And at the same time, by giving poetic space to these elements of modernity, he wished to somehow oppose their brutality and to uncover their “big/Beauty rumbling on.”<sup>43</sup> As Dorothy Dudley Harvey wrote in her “Foreword” to the Autobiography, later included in *A Hurried Man*: “He is the new modern, one of the first rebels against the ugliness of revolution.”<sup>44</sup>

In addition to his fascination with the English language for its potential to express the chaos of modernity, Carnevali was led to abandon Italian as a means of poetic expression by his desire to reject “Italian standards of good literature”<sup>45</sup> – namely D’Annunzian prose and poetry.<sup>46</sup> In a sense, his embrace of the American language can be viewed as an alternative mode of anti-traditionalism to the one Marinetti had begun less than a decade earlier, by destroying linear syntax, abolishing punctuation and, as chapter two has shown, interjecting foreign words and onomatopoeias within the linguistic texture. In the words of Luigi Fontanella, what moved Carnevali to abandon the Italian language in favor of the English one was “il sentimento di lavorare con maggiore ‘libertà’ e in spazi, geografici e letterari, più ampi, magari con la segreta ambizione di poterne riempire un vuoto ‘unico.’”<sup>47</sup> This partly explains why Carnevali would continue to write in English even after his return to Italy, together with the fact that his imagined

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<sup>42</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer – Morning,” *Poetry* 14, 6 (September 1919), 315.

<sup>44</sup> Dorothy Dudley Harvey, “Foreword to Autobiography,” in Emanuel Carnevali, *Furnished Rooms*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, letter to Harriet Monroe, *Poetry* 6, no. 2 (March 1918), 343.

<sup>46</sup> Although Carnevali explicitly rejects D’Annunzio’s style, certain aspects of his poetics recall the ideal of the “poeta vate,” whose role in society is to awaken people to the “vivere poetico.” Not incidentally, both poets were in a sense elaborating their personal versions of the poetics of the “seer,” central to French Symbolism.

<sup>47</sup> Luigi Fontanella, *La parola transfuga: scrittori italiani in America* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2003), 14. Actually, Fontanella fails to grasp the American nature of Carnevali’s poetic vocation, and groups him together with Arturo Giovannitti as Italian authors who decided to present themselves as American after immigrating to the United States, mainly in order to gain recognition among their new public.

readership was primarily Anglophone and more generally international. In embracing the tradition of American literature, Carnevali often described it in rather simplistic terms – as universally expressing an adherence to ‘real life’ and a spontaneity completely removed from formal concerns: “The artist is no specialist. The artist is not an expert worker, a craftsman, a technician, he belongs nowhere because he belongs everywhere . . . he is not a judge, not a scholar . . . he is a MAN and judge, scholar.”<sup>48</sup> This viewpoint in many ways anticipates the imaginary surrounding American literature that writers such as Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese and Giaime Pintor in the 1930s would cultivate and distill in the so-called *mito americano* and marshal against the restrictions and classicist aesthetics imposed by the Fascist regime.<sup>49</sup>

In the essay “Dante and Today,” Carnevali clearly stated his own ambitions: “We are waiting for the poet who will give us a Divina Commedia of our own times,” one called to describe “a hell more terrific . . . an immense, eyeless, stupid machine that batters, mangles, crushes, distorts, tortures, crazes men”:<sup>50</sup> the machine of modernity. His starting point – Dante – shows the extent to which Carnevali was culturally a son of Italy – but his literary destination is America – by far the most modern country at the beginning of the twentieth century – and his choice of language a necessary consequence. His celebration, in the same article, of Walt Whitman, to whom he had also dedicated a short poem by the same title,<sup>51</sup> not only serves to outline his poetic ideals for American readers, but also functions in a similar way as the references to Dante do in a work such as 2015 novel *Adua* by Somali Italian Igiaba Scego. The

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<sup>48</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *A Hurried Man*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> See Saveria Chemotti, *Il mito americano: origine e crisi di un modello culturale* (Padova: CLUEP, 1980) and Jane Dunnett, *The ‘mito americano’: Italian Literary Culture under Fascism* (Ariccia: Aracne, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *A Hurried Man*, 185.

<sup>51</sup> “Noon on the mountain!-/And all the crags are husky faces powerful with love for the sun;/All the shadows/Whisper of the sun.” Emanuel Carnevali, “Walt Whitman,” *Poetry* 14, no. 2 (May 1919), 60.

homage paid to one of the greatest literary authorities of the mainstream culture of arrival allows immigrants to seek legitimacy for their own literary endeavors and to prove their membership to the national literature, as opposed to a marginal ethnic niche.

The only book-length publication of Carnevali's issued during his lifetime – *A Hurried Man* (1925) – appeared in Robert McAlmon's Paris-based Contact Editions, alongside such works as Hemingway's *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, the first of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* to be published,<sup>52</sup> Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, and William's own *The Great American Novel*. Williams defined the volume:

A book that is all of a man, superbly alive. Doomed. When I think of what gets published and what gets read and praised and rewarded regularly with prizes, when such a book as that gets shoved under the heap of corpses, I swear never to be successful, I am disgusted, the old lusts revive. What else can a book do for a man?<sup>53</sup>

Aside from recognizing his importance as a poet, it is notable that his contemporaries considered this newly arrived Italian immigrant an American writer. The defining factor is Carnevali's decision to write exclusively in English, and to reproduce spoken American in particular, consistently with his aim to become "an American poet." In reference to his language, writer Dorothy Dudley Harvey, to whom he dedicated his poem "Return," wrote: "our limber, informal, clanging slang became a part of him." And, as she acknowledged, Carnevali's commitment to America and its culture went beyond its tongue: "He fought the drabness of this country he had given himself to."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ezra Pound, "A Canto," in Barnes, Djuna et al. *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers*. Paris: Contact Editions; Three Mountains Press, 1925.

<sup>53</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, 267.

<sup>54</sup> Dorothy Dudley Harvey, "Foreword to the Autobiography," *A Hurried Man*, 5.

At the same time, his works are riddled with references to Italian language, literature and to his home country as a whole, and he is forced to acknowledge in 1919 to Waldo Frank: “Je suis l’étranger. Je suis un déraciné,”<sup>55</sup> and to Giovanni Papini “Non ho niente – non ho più un paese nemmeno. Sono *lo straniero*, qui.”<sup>56</sup> In many ways, Carnevali’s success at the time and his influence on contemporary poets is due to the fact that many elements of his poetics and traits of his self-positioning as a writer are shared by other authors and intellectuals of the early twentieth century, even those whose cultural hybridity is less obvious. As Erin E. Templeton states “as modernist studies become increasingly transnational in scope and focus, figures like Carnevali and his hybrid textualities should receive more attention” (154).

Carnevali’s poetic language is a particular brand of American English, behind which the Italian is visible in his constant efforts at self-translation, and bears the marks of an operation similar to the one described by Deleuze and Guattari when describing the deterritorialization of language in the hands of Kafka, a Czech Jew writing in German: “writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow.”<sup>57</sup> The speaker of a language marginalized within the US, is excavating a space of poetic expression within the matrix of the dominant language. Carnevali’s own description of his first encounter with the English language clarifies that he found it suited to this task:

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<sup>55</sup> In Emanuel Carnevali, *Saggi e recensioni*, XXV-XXVI.

<sup>56</sup> December 1919, in Gabriel Cacho Millet (ed.), *Emanuel Carnevali. Voglio disturbare l’America*, letter XIV, 99.

<sup>57</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature?” in *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 18.

There was a time, when I did not know English, that English as I saw it written had a very strange effect on me; it appeared to be like freight trains clanging along; the W gave it a most mechanical air. It seems the most modern of languages, the machine language.<sup>58</sup>

This page, from his *Diario Bazzanese*,<sup>59</sup> also points to the English language as ontologically possessing, according to Carnevali, a primordial force, by virtue of the brevity of its most effective words. In his diary he tells the story of a man who, after reading a few lines of a “certain book,” found his body to be infected with words, until he vomited them out one by one, to the point of being left to cry out “only a little word, a monosyllable . . . and it was an English word, such as love and death, such as big and great, nice and fine, a monosyllable . . . One little English word gave him back his dreams, but in each dream there was a little of death.”<sup>60</sup> The story also points to the association between language and sickness, which permeates Carnevali’s poetics, as I will argue in the final section of this chapter.

In the essay “Our great Carl Sandburg,” Carnevali commended the American poet for his language, in particular his use of slang and the resulting “mixture of the best English there is with the language of workers and criminals. [...] A purely and original American language [...] and a language of today.”<sup>61</sup> Carnevali’s aspiration to create a similar language in his own works is evident in the abundance of slang, and other mimetic devices intended to reproduce the inflections of speech. Not coincidentally, he recalls that the “first American novel in English” (71) he ever read was *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, aboard the ship that brought him to America. In the poem “Morning,” for example, Carnevali exhibits awareness of the peculiarities

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<sup>58</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario Bazzanese e altre pagine*, ed. Gabriel Cacho Millet (Bazzano: biblioteca di Bazzano, 1994), 8.

<sup>59</sup> The *Diario Bazzanese*, published as a bilingual text in 1994, corresponds to the section of *The Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali* titled “A History.”

<sup>60</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario Bazzanese*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Our great Carl Sandburg,” *Poetry* 17, no. 5 (Feb 1921), 271.

of the different accents heard on the streets, and reproduces them faithfully: “Pota-a-a-a-t-o-u-d, yeh-p-l-s, waa-ry meh-l-n?”<sup>62</sup> The din of the city is expressed visually through a transliteration of what his Italian ears perceive. The distance between these poems and writing by D’Annunzio and Carducci is obvious. Interestingly, while choosing a different path toward poetic renewal – that of an entirely foreign language – this sort of experimentalism draws Carnevali closer to coeval practices of Marinetti, given their shared interest in the sonic materiality of language, which results in devices such as syllabification to reproduce the length and speed of pronounced words.

Several poems also exhibit self-consciousness about the difficulties of communication between immigrants or speakers of different languages more generally, as well as the opportunities for falsehood and disguise afforded by the mastery of a second language. “A Girl-E” narrates the affair with a Polish woman named Kasha, whom Carnevali presents through the belittling image of the “doggie.” While he states that the comparison is due to her being “good and faithful,” his lack of knowledge of her language also contributes to his perceived superiority: “She loved me well/by way of OOOOOOOOHHHHH! and AAAAHHHHHHHHH!/looking into my eyes:/for she spoke no English/as I spoke no Polish.” He repeats the disparaging refrain “Ah! Doggie, doggie!” and refers to her language as a “whine.” The poem ends with an explanation about the end of the affair, due to Kasha’s sister’s understanding of both languages, proof that in a multicultural society linguistic knowledge equals power:

But it ended in nothing  
as her sister,  
who feigned sleep,

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<sup>62</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer – Morning,” 316.



heard me say:  
When we be married,  
your sister must go!  
she understood English,  
she,  
the little bitch!

The disturbing ending expresses the sense of marginalization and powerlessness experienced by migrants by virtue of their linguistic subalternity. The short story “Portrait: Miles Broad Statement”<sup>63</sup> shows his self-consciousness about the most common mistakes made by non-native English speakers, when reproducing the “majestic” sentence of a “Greek” – “*To* my country, no rheumatism at all” – and highlighting the use of the wrong preposition in italics. The phrase also provides a slightly comical representation of the stereotypical immigrant, who blames America for any illness and claims that in the ‘home country’ there was nothing of the sort.

As far as lexicon, Andrea Ciribuco notes the presence of many cognates – with “tremendous,” “splendid,” “sentimental” and “glorious” among his favorite words – resulting in a “Latin” element within the text,<sup>64</sup> which effectively judges the American reality from the outside. In a few cases, Carnevali employs actual false friends or calques, and the resulting text resembles what could be called “translationese,” with the exception that the source text exists only in the author’s mind and can be reconstructed solely by conjecture, through a back translation of sorts. One example is the sentence “may I claim to be left alone?”<sup>65</sup> where

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<sup>63</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Portrait: Miles Broad Statement (A Short Story),” *The Little Review* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1925): 35-36.

<sup>64</sup> Andrea Ciribuco, “Carnevali’s Cultural Translation: Modernism, Dante and the Italian America,” *Scrittura migranti* 7 (2013): 47.

<sup>65</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer: Morning,” *Furnished Rooms*, 24.

Carnevali seems to be trying to translate the Italian “pretendere.” Another is the emphatic “O” for invocations, which can often be found oddly placed mid-sentence: “Oh, listen, *O* Street!”<sup>66</sup>

Linguistically, there appears to be no difference between the first texts written by Carnevali in English, only a few months after his arrival in the US, and the ones dating to his final year in America, or even the period after his return to Italy. The *Autobiography*, edited by Kay Boyle by collecting material written between 1922 and 1942, presents similar lexical and syntactical features. For example, in Cossanto, a village in Piedmont where Carnevali lived with his aunt, he describes “the walk *in order to* reach the hills” (30), calque of “il sentiero *per* raggiungere le colline.” In translating four verses from Leoncavallo’s opera *Pagliacci*, for the *Diario bazzanese*, he uses the abovementioned vocative: “Laugh, *O* clown.” (June 1, 22).

The textual marks of this “imperfectly erased palimpsest”<sup>67</sup> are the so-called “untidy traces” that Steven G. Kellman<sup>68</sup> describes as characterizing the written and oral language of immigrants, who are by necessity ‘translingual.’ In Kellman’s description, the translingual writer leaves textual marks of his attempt at forging a “new voice” and inventing “a new self.”<sup>69</sup> The term “traces” is particularly suited to Carnevali’s writing and his aspiration to become a full-fledged “American poet.”<sup>70</sup> While he certainly exploited his bilingualism in forging an idiosyncratic style, he did not usually employ his bilingualism openly within the text, for

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<sup>66</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer – Morning,” *Poetry* 14, no. 6 (September 1919): 314-321.

<sup>67</sup> Andrea Ciribuco, “Carnevali’s Cultural Translation,” 45.

<sup>68</sup> Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 82.

<sup>69</sup> Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination*, 76. See also Elias Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free. Remembrance of a European Childhood*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

<sup>70</sup> One could say that he emphasized the moment of “consent” over that of “descent” – to employ Werner Sollors’ famous articulation – at least in his poetic practice. See Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity. Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

example interjecting Italian words – one of the most common devices used by those who write “with an accent,”<sup>71</sup> – to use Edvige Giunta’s expression – who deliberately incorporate bilingualism in their writings as a political gesture to legitimize diversity. Even cultural references to Italy, though present, are slight when compared to works by Italian American authors such as Pietro Di Donato and Arturo Giovannitti. One example is the face of a Greek man, which Carnevali describes as “like a bologna” in “Portrait: Miles Broad Statement.”<sup>72</sup>

Kellman’s observations about the general features of translingual writing hold true in Carnevali’s case, and show him to be making the most of his perception of strangeness when facing English words and expressions:

It is hard to take words for granted when writing in a foreign language. Translinguals represent an exaggerated instance of what the Russian formalists maintained is the distinctive quality of all imaginative literature: *ostranenie*, making it strange.<sup>73</sup>

The traces can be slight, such as an uncommon word order. Examples are “a mouse hungry” instead of “a hungry mouse,”<sup>74</sup> “And so saying,”<sup>75</sup> an obvious syntactical calque of “e così dicendo” and “around/The weeping willows let fall their hair/Into the water,”<sup>76</sup> with the first word corresponding to the adverb “attorno” and the direct object placed between verb and preposition. Other signs are as visible as a word with a distinctly Latin root, such as “malediction,” from the section “Noon” of “The Day of Summer.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See Edvige Giunta, *Writing with an Accent* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Portrait: Miles Broad Statement (A Short Story),” 35.

<sup>73</sup> Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination*, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Interior,” *Furnished Rooms*, 65.

<sup>75</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “When It Has Passed,” *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (March 1918), 301.

<sup>77</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer – Noon,” 323.

My malediction on the cowards who are afraid of *the word*  
(*the word* is a kind sweet child, a kind sweet child)  
Malediction on the sacrifices of the dumb and deaf!

The syntax often reveals the Italian substrate, through word order or the incorrect use of prepositions, such as “a little of death” for “un po’ di morte” in the *Diario bazzanese*.<sup>78</sup> Italian is evident as the source-text of many sentences, which make heavy use of either cognates or calques and neologisms. In “Morning,” the poet chooses a rare synthetic adverb rather than an equivalent expression to describe the houses that “in a thick row/*Militarily* shut out the sky.”<sup>79</sup> “In this Hotel” includes expressions such as “One day *I would* come down to the world,”<sup>80</sup> where the use of the conditional appears to be modeled off of “verrei,” but strikes the English-speaking reader as odd when compared to a future tense.

The result is certainly poetic. One could argue rather convincingly that this effect is unintentional, but given the poet’s eye for accents and the idiosyncrasies of speech, one could also imagine that he was partly conscious of inhabiting a space – the interstice between two languages – that can be a vantage point for a poet. Carnevali visibly delights in the creative possibilities offered by the English language and makes ample use of the hyphen to create new words. In “Morning,” we find “dew-full” alongside “tearful” to equate Petrarch’s sorrow to the flowers among which he walked. Morning is a “swollen-faced” hour, again with a hyphen allowing for a synthetic attribution, whereas Italian would require a longer expression such as “dal viso gonfio.”<sup>81</sup> In some cases, the hyphen wouldn’t be necessary, but Carnevali appears to enjoy its synthetic effect, even in prose. “Pre-ten-year-olds” become a single entity thanks to this

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<sup>78</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer – Morning,” 314.

<sup>80</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “In This Hotel,” *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (March 1918), 298.

<sup>81</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Day of Summer – Morning,” 314.

device. Even as late as the *Diario Bazzanese*, Carnevali describes the local *podestà* as an “image of doing-nothingness,” creating a calque of “nullafacenza.”<sup>82</sup> In a single page of the *Autobiography* we can find several instances of this use, for example: “cherry-trees,” “apple-trees,” “rope-railway,” “hard-looking,” “thirty-one,” “chesnut–trees [*sic*].”<sup>83</sup>

A further poetic layer in which Italian is perceivable as source language is that of versification and prosodic structure. In most cases, Carnevali is consistent with his declaration to Harriet Monroe “I believe in free verse.”<sup>84</sup> He does not, however, renounce employing rhyme schemes – preferring alternate rhymes such as ABAB and occasionally AABB. Exact rhymes are more frequent in his early work, and contribute to the musicality and at times childlike effect of these poems. “Colored Lies,” his first published work, presents several of these devices: “these coffins of motionless air/With a fat, silly stare,” “Gulping respectably their hate/At the wanton gait,” “They respectably try/To smile/A red lie/For a while/In a long row/As the winds blow.”<sup>85</sup>

Carnevali achieves similar effects through the frequent use of a refrain, such as the repetition of “Sweetheart, what’s the use of you” in “Sentimental Dirge.”<sup>86</sup> Another example is the 1921 poem “Encounter”:<sup>87</sup>

*Little grey lady* sitting by the roadside in the cold,  
My fire is to warm you, not to burn you up.

*Little grey lady* in your little grey house in the warmth,  
Your warmth is to loosen my frozen arms and tongue,

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<sup>82</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 18.

<sup>83</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 30.

<sup>84</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, letter to Harriet Monroe, *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (March 1918), 343.

<sup>85</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Colored Lies,” *The Forum* (Jan 1918): 83-84.

<sup>86</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Sentimental Dirge,” *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (1918).

<sup>87</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Encounter,” *Poetry* 19, no. 3 (Dec. 1921): 140-141. Emphases are mine.

Not to drowse me.

The repetition that functions as a refrain appears even in later works, such as “Some Things” (1930),<sup>88</sup> in which each of the sixteen sentences that make up the poem begins with the title phrase. Carnevali’s interest in the sound effects of poetry is confirmed by the sheer number of titles employing musical terminology: “Morning Song,” “Italian Song,” “Song,” “Sentimental Dirge,” “Russian Barcarolle,” “Aubade,” “Chanson de Blackboulé,” “Serenade,” “Nocturne,” “Marche Funèbre.” His attachment to music is connected to his Italian roots, as testified by his self-presentation as a ‘cantastorie’ in several occasions, particularly after 1920, when in his struggle to make a living he would read his work and perform Italian folksongs in local theatres. A notice in the *Milwaukee Leader*, from 1920 reads: “Carnevali will speak under the auspices of the Wisconsin Players in the Play house 455 Jefferson St. at 8.15 tonight. He is an accomplished singer as well as writer and will sing a group of Italian folk songs to illustrate one phase of his talk.”<sup>89</sup>

These musical effects, along with the image of the *poète maudit*, probably contribute to the interest that his poetry has aroused in musicians, including the underground Italian band “Massimo Volume,” which dedicated the song “Il primo Dio” to Carnevali in 1995, the pop band Panoramics, whose “Bugie Colorate” is a musical tribute to his “Colored Lies” and David Stivender, chorus master of the Metropolitan Opera, who collected and edited a great part of Carnevali’s writings, later published by Kay Boyle as *The Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali*. Rather than a generic search for musical effects, it is the line length that reveals the poet’s native Italian and education in Italian poetry, particularly in his early work. “Sentimental Dirge,” for

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<sup>88</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Some Things,” *Poetry* 35, no. 5 (Feb 1930): 255-256.

<sup>89</sup> “Editor of Poetry Magazine to Speak Here,” *Milwaukee Leader* (December 3, 1920), 5.

example, contains a majority of lines made up of 11, 5 or 7/8 syllables – corresponding, albeit with different accent patterns, to the hendecasyllable, *quinario* and *settenario*, the most common meters in Italian poetry. The first stanza is sufficient to observe this phenomenon:

Sweetheart what's the use of you –  
When the night is blue,  
And I'[m?] sad with the whisper of the skies,  
And I'm heavy and I'm weary  
With my many lies?  
There is no music around me –  
Not a sound  
But the whisper of the skies:  
I am bound  
To my sadness with so slender, so thin ties –  
Oh, so thin, still you can't break them.  
Sweetheart, what's the use of you?<sup>90</sup>

In terms of meter, the poet moves from trochees to anapests to spondees with no apparent order. The regulative prosodic structure appears to be the number of syllables rather than the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so although the poem is in English, it retains something of the rhythm of Italian poetry, accentuated by the rhyme scheme  
AABCBCDBDBEAFFGFGHIHIHIJJKK.

Even in the case of rhythm, there is probably an unconscious component at play in Carnevali's attempts to fit the English language into an Italian prosodic structure, particularly in an early poem such as this one, whose lexicon is extremely reduced, contributing to an abundance of easy rhymes (away-yesterday, pain-rain-pain). At the same time, however, given

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<sup>90</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, "Sentimental Dirge," *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (1918), 302.

the poet's familiarity with American poetry by the year 1918, testified at the very least by his own declarations of admiration for Whitman, Sandburg and others, it is reasonable to consider the decision to experiment with the convergence of English language and Italian meters as at least partly deliberate. This hypothesis is confirmed by several instances in which Carnevali overtly exhibits the resources provided to him by the straddling of languages. In some cases, the intervention can be as simple as noting the corresponding idiomatic expression and playing with its lexical or metaphorical possibilities.

In the *Autobiography*, for example, Carnevali comments on the religion of his professors at boarding school: "that was their bread and butter, and often bread without butter at all."<sup>91</sup> The equivalent Italian expression would be "era il loro pane quotidiano." The discovery of the English figure of speech lends itself to a comment about the dry and unappealing nature of the school's religious proposal. As Steven G. Kellman's comments generally about translingual writing: "Working with a strange language is an obvious way to defamiliarize verbal expression . . . Repeated use of a native language automatizes writing, reduces idioms to formulas depleted of expressive power. But a foreign language does not permit the writer, or the reader, to take any phrase for granted."<sup>92</sup> In commenting on Carnevali specifically, Ciribuco points to an example of this conscious creation of "metaphorical novelty out of linguistic conventions" when noting Carnevali's description of "great horses" that the sea flings on the shore, literalizing the Italian "cavalloni" and remarking later that he found the Italianate expression fitting "so solid they were, large, majestic waves."<sup>93</sup> Carnevali also recalls having an experience common to many

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<sup>91</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination*, 81.

<sup>93</sup> Andrea Ciribuco, "Carnevali's Cultural Translation," 47.



second-language learners, that of falling in love with certain words, such as “disparagingly” (92), and using it generously, without fully understanding “the real significance.”

Carnevali’s language, which according to Luigi Fontanella is one of the reasons he never achieved full recognition as an American poet, truly is the “connubio senza soluzione di continuità”<sup>94</sup> between two different linguistic codes that characterizes the translingual, and transnational, writer. This reading is in contrast with the majority of critics, particularly Italian scholars, who tend to view Carnevali as an ‘Italian in American clothing,’ so to speak. One of Carnevali’s first critics and translators, with whom the poet engaged in an epistolary exchange, Carlo Linati, in “Un poeta italiano emigrato” (1934) pointed to his Florentine origin and defined him “italianissimo,”<sup>95</sup> praising him for the ability to successfully “inalveare nella lingua inglese tutto il suo mondo emotivo e poetico” and speaking in relation to his poems about the similarity between “poesia tradotta” and “un raggio di luna impagliato.” Régis Michaud defined his poetry “le triomphe d’une sensibilité latine,”<sup>96</sup> despite including it in an anthology of American literature. A notable exception is Andrea’s Ciribuco, who acknowledges the interstitial origin of Carnevali’s language beyond attempts to frame his writing as that of an imperfect user of a second language. While Ciribuco engages in a psychological inquiry into the motivations for Carnevali’s abandonment of his mother tongue, I have focused on the formal and expressive devices that make up his poetics and that witness to the generativity of translingualism as a motor for renewal of poetic language.

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<sup>94</sup> Luigi Fontanella, *La parola transfuga*, 15.

<sup>95</sup> “Pur italianissimo, riuscì a inalveare nella lingua inglese tutto il suo mondo emotivo e poetico.” Carlo Linati, “Un poeta italiano emigrato,” *Nuova Antologia* 69, no. 1491 (September 1934), 60.

<sup>96</sup> Régis Michaud, *Panorama de la littérature américaine contemporaine* (Paris: Kra, 1930), 201.

## Translations, “New Moon” and the Dream of Transnational Connections.

Carnevali’s self-placement at the intersection of Italian, American and French literatures is evidenced in part by his work as a translator, from both Italian and French into English. His poetic ideal of letting the environment speak through the poet is transferred to the context of translation. In this case, the translator seems to inhabit the role of mouthpiece for the author. The effect is similar to the foreignizing translation historically opposed to a domesticating or assimilating translation and formulated in contemporary terms by Lawrence Venuti.<sup>97</sup> In 1931, almost a decade after Carnevali’s return to Italy, *Poetry* magazine published two of his translations of Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*,<sup>98</sup> following Ezra Pound’s recommendation. Pound himself was the object of other translations and critical essays by Carnevali. The April-May 1931 issue of the Genoa-based journal *L’Indice* contains his translation of a long essay by Louis Zukofsky titled “I ‘Cantos’ di Ezra Pound,”<sup>99</sup> and his translation of Pound’s *Canto Ottavo* occupies part of the November issue of the same magazine.<sup>100</sup>

At one point, Pound was one of Carnevali’s greatest advocates, including him in the volume *Profile. An Anthology Collected in 1931*,<sup>101</sup> mentioning him in several interviews, and even extending a plea to help Carnevali in the 1933 article “A Writer with Encephalitis,”

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<sup>97</sup> See Lawrence Venuti, *The Invisibility of the Translator: A History of Translation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995) and *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, “Wakes – III; To One Reason,” Trans. Emanuel Carnevali, *Poetry* 37, no. 5 (February 1931), 262.

<sup>99</sup> Louis Zukovsky, “I ‘Cantos’ di Ezra Pound,” trans. Emanuel Carnevali, *L’Indice* 2, no. 6; 7; 8 (April 10; April 25; May 10, 1931): 4, 3, 4.

<sup>100</sup> Ezra Pound, “Canto ottavo,” trans. Emanuel Carnevali, *L’Indice* 2, no. 17-18 (November 10, 1931), 5.

<sup>101</sup> Ezra Pound, *Profile. An Anthology Collected in 1931* (Milano: Scheiwiller, 1932).

published in the *New York Herald*. Their relationship, however, appears to have ended rather harshly, possibly for political reasons, as well as financial ones. In a 1937 letter to Pound – the last one available from their epistolary exchange – Carnevali asks “caro Ezra” to make peace and resume sending him the monthly two hundred lira that Pound was contributing to his hospital stay, adding “Amico, finirei anche di tradurre i trenta Cantos.”<sup>102</sup> The promise seems to imply that Pound himself had asked Carnevali to be his Italian translator, or at the very least had appreciated his work.

A comparison between two of Carnevali’s translations from Rimbaud shows him to be as respectful of syntax and word order as he appears to be when composing his own poems as translations of an unwritten Italian source text. His admiration for Rimbaud, who can be considered his greatest poetic inspiration, probably contributed to his hesitation to take liberties with the texts.<sup>103</sup>

*Veillés – III*

Les lampes et les tapis de la veillée font le bruit des vagues, la nuit, le long  
de la coque et autour du steerage.  
La mer de la veillée, telle que les seins d'Amélie.  
Les tapisseries, jusqu'à mi-hauteur, des taillis de dentelle teinte  
d'émeraude, où se jettent les tourterelles de la veillée.

*Wakes – III*

The lamps and the carpets of the wake make the noise of  
waves  
in the night, along the rut and around the steerage.

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<sup>102</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Saggi e Recensioni,” ed. Gabriel Cacho Millet, trans. Maria Pia Carnevali, (Bazzano: municipio di Bazzano, 1994), XXXIV.

<sup>103</sup> It is unclear whether the French texts were suggested by Pound as well, or chosen by Carnevali himself.

The sea of the wake, such as the breast of Amelie.  
The tapestry, just at medium height, the wood of laces  
dyed  
in emerald, where the turtle-doves of the wake throw  
themselves.

Word order is meticulously maintained, with the exception of the final verse, thus preserving what critics have called a ‘Latin’ feel when commenting on Carnevali’s own poetry. The poet also tends to reproduce prepositions and adverbial expressions as closely as possible, such as “les tapis de la veillée,” which becomes “the carpets of the wake” and “jusqu’à mi-hauteur,” translated as “just at medium height.” The latter example shows one of Carnevali’s priorities as a translator to be the reproduction of sound and musicality. The use of cognates enables him here to recreate the rhythm of the French expression, with its succession of stressed and non-stressed syllables, as well as the sequence of consonants ‘j-m-h.’

In some cases, it is unclear whether Carnevali’s lexical choices have expressive purpose or are due to his imperfect grasp of one of the two languages. “La bruit des vagues,” for example, could be translated either as “the sound of waves” or as “the noise of waves.” His translation of “Des taillis de dentelle teinte d’émeraude” as “the wood of laces dyed in emerald” provides another example of strict word order reproduction and preservation of the preposition, to the point that “dyed in emerald” constitutes a strong trace of the French source text. As for the lexical choice of “wood” for “taillis,” it does not render the original image as effectively as “underbrush” or “thicket” would have, but it’s unclear whether the decision is intentional or due to lack of familiarity with the French or the English word.

*À une Raison*

Un coup de ton doigt sur le tambour décharge tous les sons et commence la nouvelle harmonie.

Un pas de toi, c'est la levée des nouveaux hommes et leur en-marche.

Ta tête se détourne: le nouvel amour !

Ta tête se retourne, - le nouvel amour !

“Change nos lots, crible les fléaux, à commencer par le temps” te chantent ces enfants.

“Elève n’importe où la substance de nos fortunes et de nos vœux” on t’en prie.

Arrivée de toujours, qui t’en iras partout.

*To one Reason*

A hitting of your fingers on the drum shoots out all the sounds and begins the new harmony.

One of his steps is the levy of new men and their *mise-en marche*.

Your head turns: the new love! Your head turns back to its place; the new love!

“Riddle with disaster, to begin with the time,” sing to you those children. Raise never mind where the substance of our fortunes, and of our vows, I beg you.

Having arrived from always, you will go everywhere.

The second translation invites similar observations. The decision to translate “une” with a numeral and not merely an indefinite article could be an unintentional modification or, at the

opposite end of the spectrum, a voluntary act of interpretation. The first hypothesis seems the most likely simply due to the presence of other inaccuracies, such as “une pas de toi” translated as “one of his steps” instead of “one of your steps.” In the case of “on t’en prie” translated as “I beg you,” the change of subject seems instead to be motivated by the desire to avoid impersonal or passive verb forms, not as common in English as in Romance languages. A difficulty in finding an appropriate English equivalent may also be the reason for the introjection of the French expression “mise-en-marche,” not entirely obscure to an English speaker but not so common as to warrant its inclusion in the text, without a specific aim or at least tolerance for a sense of foreignness. Once again, Carnevali maintains word order to the point of hindering comprehension, in expressions such as “sing to you those children” for “te chantent ces enfants,” which muddles the meaning for the English speaking reader, not accustomed to finding the subject at the end of the sentence.

Carnevali employs similar techniques in his translation of Palazzeschi’s “L’incendiario,” where he avoids the passive form, making “*è stata posta la gabbia di ferro/con l’incendiario*” into “*they put the iron cage, in it, the incendiary.*” The translation was never published, and is part of the Mitchell Dawson papers at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Carnevali chose a cognate for the title of the poem – “Incendiary” – despite its use more frequently as an adjective than as a noun, and its rarity, actually equivalent to that of the Italian word. The translation displays the same attention to word order and strict adherence to the syntax of the source text as observed in regards to the translations from French. Carnevali takes greater liberties in both syntax and lexicon when rendering Palazzeschi’s colloquial expressions, such as “Guarda un pochino dove l’anno messo,” which becomes “Say, look at him, where they put him!” and “Sembra un pappagallo carbonaio” translated as “He looks like a parrot come out of the coal.” In

the first example, the addition of “say” at the beginning of the sentence and the division into two parts of the second half of the phrase contribute to the colloquialism that in Italian is conveyed almost exclusively through the diminutive “pochino.” In the second example, Carnevali sacrifices the colorful image of the ‘coal merchant-parrot’ to a smoother expression that expresses the sooty and dark appearance of the incendiary no less effectively.

Carnevali’s translations also offer clues as to the inspiration behind some of the poet’s own works, given the similarities between some of the source texts and his own poems. An example is “Felicità” (1915) by Corrado Govoni, which Carnevali included in his article “Five Years of Italian Poetry (1910-1915),” published in *Poetry* in 1919.<sup>104</sup> In the same article, Carnevali defined Govoni “the writer of the most musical and humane free verse I have read,”<sup>105</sup> pointing to two traits that he particularly strove toward in his own works. After a phase in the *Crepuscolare* movement and a series of Futuristic poems, Govoni devoted the majority of his production to playful descriptions of everyday modern life. “Felicità” describes a morning in which the poet is happy and contains a series of questions about the possible reason for this state, culminating in the declaration: “I am happy,/perhaps because there far away/the cuckoo -/. . . asks himself questions and answers them;/because the spikes of the ripe wheat/are like blond tiny braids.”<sup>106</sup> Carnevali’s poem “His Majesty the Letter-Carrier,”<sup>107</sup> published in the same magazine a few months earlier, does not contain a similar celebration of the countryside and expresses a feeling closer to preoccupied expectation. Many elements, however, appear in both texts, beginning with the “morning” itself, as well as the “letter-carrier,” whose voice Govoni

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<sup>104</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Five Years of Italian Poetry (1910-1915),” *Poetry* 8, no. 4 (January 1919): 209-214.

<sup>105</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Five Years of Italian Poetry (1910-1915),” 210.

<sup>106</sup> Corrado Govoni, “Happiness,” trans. Emanuel Carnevali, *Poetry* 8, no. 4 (January 1919), 214.

<sup>107</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Splendid Commonplace – His Majesty the Letter-Carrier,” *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (March 1918), 299.

thinks he may have heard “through the streets of the village.” The character appears also in Carnevali’s description of his morning in New York: “Ah there he is!/Who? . . . The letter-carrier, of course!/(What do you think I got up so early for?)” and is developed into a “proud” man who knows “he’s got my happiness in that dirty bag.” The final allusion to Carnevali’s struggles as a would-be poet who keeps receiving rejection letters from editors, introduces a reference to economic and artistic frustration that is absent in Govoni’s text.

Carnevali’s activity as a translator was in part connected to his desire to foster international relationships between authors he admired and the creation of a new multicultural space for poetic exchange. One of the expressions of this aspiration was his project for a journal that he planned on publishing in Chicago in 1919, titled *New Moon*. He described it as an “international” version of *Poetry*, modeled in part after *La Voce* and *Others* and supported by Sandburg, Kreymborg, Frank, Williams, Frost, Eliot and Lawrence, as well as Giovanni Papini in Italy and Jules Romain and Jean Catel in France. The letter to Papini,<sup>108</sup> in which he outlines the project, clearly shows his ambition to give life to a cultural product that would be truly American and at the same time truly international, as a way to solve a problem he had pinpointed: “there is no actual connection between Europe and America.” The proposed title alludes to Carnevali’s ambition – particularly relevant given that the year is the one immediately following the end of the First World War – to completely renovate every genre of literature:

A new magazine! It is the attempt to begin anew . . . The desire is to lay waste the past and all its appurtenances, its reviews, its chairs of English, its running comments on the present, its funny writer fellows whose habit of being *au courant* with the world gives them sacred tastes for mild excellence which they must mock for a weekly stipend . . .

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<sup>108</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, letter to Giovanni Papini, dated August 1919, in *Voglio disturbare l’America*, 90-91.



The new is standing as always upon the shoulders of the new, never the old. It is a tree whose roots are in a spring . . . It is not a revolution. It is an invasion. It must always be a relentless invasion and in this case an invasion of the whole field of American literature that is planned . . . It is to come out in regions never explored in any literature. It is the new! . . . The lance point of the new magazine must open the way for the new theater blasting the past out of existence, the new novel, the new essay, the new short story and most of all the new poetry that enkindles everything else.<sup>109</sup>

This text, taken from the letter that Carnevali sent in 1919 to the various intellectuals he hoped to involve in his project, explicitly addresses American literature and its perceived need for renewal. His intentions, with the aim to “stand on the shoulders of the new, never the old,” again recall the Futurists’ project to rejuvenate Italian literature, but the specification “it is not a revolution. It is an invasion” shows how for Carnevali the antidote to traditionalism is to be found in the introduction of foreign literatures into the dominant one. In the letter he sent to Papini, Carnevali also made clear that he did not want to be relegated to the Italian-American community, to which he did not feel a sense of belonging.

Critic Giuseppe Prezolini’s opinion of Italian American literature, and culture in general, may offer insights into the stance assumed by Carnevali, whom he admired. In the work *I trapiantati*, Prezolini does not include him in the group of Italian-American authors he judges creators of “poesia imbalsamata,” but rather among “i poeti italiani che scrissero in lingua americana.” Prezolini’s judgment about Italian emigration is overall negative, as he highlights the heavy price paid in exchange for relative economic success, in linguistic and cultural terms.

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<sup>109</sup> Fragment of letter sent to possible contributors of *New Moon*. Two typewritten pages numbered 2-3 with handwritten corrections. Now in *Voglio disturbare l’America*, 87-88.

He speaks of a “migrazione mutilata nel linguaggio”<sup>110</sup> and criticizes the radical adaptive measures taken by the Italian American community: “Si sono più spesso “adattati” che “mescolati” o “fusi.” Non rappresentano la riunione delle qualità italiane con quelle americane, ma la confusione di alcune abitudini pratiche e lo smussamento di due culture assolutamente estranee fra di loro.” He calls the immigrants “Italiani sperduti in America,” who rather than bridging the two cultures, “hanno rappresentato un ‘diaframma’ fra i due paesi: Hanno impedito agli americani di sapere che cos’era l’Italia. Sono stati fra i due paesi una ‘frattura.’”<sup>111</sup>

While Carnevali never produced a comparably articulate reflection on the condition of his compatriots in the US, it is easy to see an overlap between these and some of his own statements, particularly as concerns the lack of “connection between Europe and America.” His obsession with creating poetry for modern times also suggests that he might have agreed with Prezzolini’s view of Italian American literature, as expressed in the chapter “Il cadavere imbalsamato della poesia.” On the one hand, American writers had remained excessively tied to the Italian school systems and failed to engage with the new and exciting poetic practices of the United States. On the other hand, their stylistic models continued to be “autori del tempo romantico”<sup>112</sup> taught in the 1880s and 1890s, such as Giovanni Prati or Aleardo Aleardi, making their works more retrograde and provincial than those written in Italy at the same time: “Mentre l’Italia del 1900 si era andata assimilando le esperienze di pensiero e di stile di tanti paesi stranieri, il gusto patriottico, il tono provinciale, il vocabolario sfibrato e sfilacciato dell’ultimo romanticismo

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<sup>110</sup> “Mutilated migration of language.” Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I trapiantati* (Milano, Longanesi, 1963), 9. Translation is mine.

<sup>111</sup> “Italians lost in America . . . represented a diaphragm between the two countries: They kept Americans from knowing what Italy was. They represented a rift between the two countries.” “Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I trapiantati*, 13. Translation is mine.

<sup>112</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I trapiantati*, 252.

italiano, si manteneva, come conservato sotto una vetrina di museo.”<sup>113</sup> As for the writers who chose English as their language – such as novelists Pascal D’Angelo, John Fante and Jerre Mangione – Prezzolini judges them superior, but still criticizes their “formula veristica.”<sup>114</sup> Carnevali’s poor health, which made him unable to perform labor for extended periods at a time, also contributed to his distance from the poetic production of other writers in the Italian American community, such as Arturo Giovannitti and Onorio Ruotolo, directly involved in labor organizations.

Carnevali’s decision to return to Italy was motivated by necessity: extremely ill and without means to sustain himself, he accepted a friend’s offer to pay for his return passage across the Atlantic. On September 11, 1922 he arrived in Genoa. The next evening he was in Bologna and the following day in Bazzano, where he checked into a civil hospital. I would contend that the choice to leave the US went hand in hand with the acknowledgement that he had, at least from a socio-economic standpoint, failed in his mission to become an “American.” This failure, though personal in reasons and circumstances, echoed the broader fate of Italian Americans, given that Carnevali’s return to Italy happened exactly a year after the 1921 Emergency Quota Act, a reaction to the wave of immigration following the end of the First World War, which greatly restricted access to the US on the part of Italians and other immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and reflected the growing fear that citizens of these countries were unable to integrate properly into American society. The “black poet,” thus nicknamed by his Modernist friends because of his rebellious nature,<sup>115</sup> was enacting, against his own will, the fate of his ethnic group, considered “non-white” by the Anglo-Saxon standards of North America, as the

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<sup>113</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I trapiantati*, 253.

<sup>114</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, *I trapiantati*, 299.

<sup>115</sup> William Carlos Williams was the first to use this epithet in “Gloria!” *Others*. 5, no. 6 (July 1919): 2-3.

derogatively racializing term “guinea” implies.<sup>116</sup> Carnevali’s return to Italy also coincided with the establishment of the Fascist *ventennio*, the effects of which on small town life he ruthlessly chronicled in his journal, until his death in 1942.

Several critics, including Maria Pia Carnevali, the step-sister who edited *Il primo Dio*, view his final Italian years as a period of withdrawal from writing, as well as of renunciation of his American and international identities. Ciribuco also comments that Carnevali’s “journey across languages and cultures ended in silence and oblivion.”<sup>117</sup> However, while his hospitalization forced him to isolate himself from society, Carnevali continued to write including a personal diary, poetry, translations and letters. And while his late work declares an allegiance to his native country, I argue that even in the final decades of his life Carnevali continued to inhabit an interstitial space between nations, due in part to his disability, and testified by the international community with which he continued to be in contact and to address in his English-language writing.

His poetry written shortly after his return to Italy professes loyalty to “my Italy,” which he felt as his “family,” whereas America is the country of “orphans.” “The Return,”<sup>118</sup> written in 1924, makes the opposition clear:

I come from America, the land that gathers  
The rebels, the miserable, the very poor;  
The land of puerile and magnificent deeds:  
The naïve skyscrapers – votive candles  
At the head of supine Manhattan.

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<sup>116</sup> See Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, eds, *Are Italians White?: How Race Is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>117</sup> Andrea Ciribuco, *The Autobiography of a Language*, 20.

<sup>118</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Return,” *Poetry* 24, no. 2 (May 1924): 85-89.

. . . where everything  
Is bigger, but less majestic;  
Where there is no wine.  
I arrive in the land of wine-  
Wine for the soul.  
*Italy is a little family;*  
*America is an orphan*  
Independent and arrogant,  
Crazy and sublime,  
Without tradition to guide her,  
Rushing headlong in a mad run which she calls progress.

The reference to wine underlines how inhospitable the American land actually is, from a decidedly Italian perspective, while the description of the United States as devoid of tradition and thus in arrogant and mad flight toward a progress that is, effectively, self-destruction, falls in line with the typical view of America held by European intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>119</sup> This attitude contrasts with Carnevali's openness to American culture in the late 1910s, when what attracted him was precisely its newness, and of the consequent freedom to pursue art and inquiry outside of the boundaries of tradition. The resentful tone of the poem may also be a reaction to the Immigration Act of 1924, which further restricted access to the US on the part of specific nationals, including Italians, and which would have made Carnevali's actual return to America virtually impossible.

Nevertheless, the mention of America's sublimity and the final description of its "mad run" toward progress betrays a continuing admiration for a land of "puerile and magnificent

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<sup>119</sup> This view is documented, for example, by travel writing such as Mario Soldati's *America Primo Amore* (Roma: Einaudi, 1945).

deeds,” where “naïve skyscrapers” are the equivalent of “votive candles.” Given Carnevali’s knowledge of Dante, I argue that it is possible to read the final “mad run” as a modern version of Ulysses’s “folle volo” in *Inferno* 26. Just as Ulysses was not held back by “dolcezza di figlio,” “pieta del vecchio padre” or “l debito amore lo qual dovea Penelope far lieta” (vv. 94-95), so does America have no regard for family ties or the customs of the homeland. Carnevali seems to share the same ambivalence Dante expresses toward his hero, when describing America, the country from which he is coming. On one hand, the “ardore . . . a divenir del mondo esperto” (vv. 97-98) and the primacy of “esperienza” are viewed as admirable, in opposition to life as “bruti,” on the other hand there is something “folle,” (mad), in both of their endeavors, which can only end in self-destruction.<sup>120</sup>

Reading the poem in light of its probable Dantean subtext shows Carnevali to retain an ambivalent attitude toward the US, which is more consistent with his continuing interest in American literature and culture, his enduring relationships with American intellectuals and his employment of the English language, even in a private text like his *Diario Bazzanese*. This ambivalence is conveyed also by the abundance of adversative conjunctions: “America, where everything/Is bigger, *but* less majestic,” “laborious America,/builder of the mechanical cities./*But* in the hurry people forget to love;/*But* in the hurry one drops and loses kindness.” And while the poet states: “I . . . have found you/All new and friendly, O Fatherland!,” he also appears nostalgic for the great city that never sleeps:

How everything has grown small since I went away –  
 Since I am away!  
 And how early the city goes to sleep!

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<sup>120</sup> Note how Carnevali’s reference to the Dantean passage functions differently from Marinetti’s in *Mafarka le futuriste*, particularly as regards “bruti” and the consideration of destructiveness.

Remember Broadway in the night,  
Bejewelled?"

The "bejeweled" Broadway is in stark contrast with Bologna's "Prefettura" Palace, described in even more explicitly feminized terms as "a squatting hydropical woman." Furthermore, in the same poem Carnevali criticizes America for being "young and hurried" – "what threatens you,/That you rush so, America?" – but only a year later will have his collection of poems and short stories published with the title *A Hurried Man*, thus identifying with that "crazy going and coming" of American society.

Once again, Carnevali was writing from a space of displacement and belonging, of betrayal and allegiance, of nostalgic evocation and biting attack. His return was only partial and can also be viewed as one of the many gestures of openness and retrieval that often make returns more fruitful than exiles, as in the case of D'Annunzio's triumphant return from France, or Marinetti's and Ungaretti's return to their acknowledged fatherland from Egypt. Although in his case the Great War had not been the cause of departure, the words he had written in 1919 for those who had participated in the conflict appear fitting to his own condition after re-entering his home country. Surrounded by people who "live with their old things/in their old houses" and have never left their hometown, Carnevali's existence resembles the posthumous existence of a transnational, rather than the assimilated life of a prodigal son.

## 2. No return<sup>121</sup>

For those who live with their old things  
in their old houses:

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<sup>121</sup> Second part of "Utopia of the men who come back from the war," *Touchstone* 5, no. 4 (July 1919), 308.

To go to war  
is to go very far from this world,  
to go beyond it.

The veterans  
never come back.  
And the dead also  
have gone beyond this old world  
forever. (July 1919)

Even after choosing to embrace his ‘Italianness,’ Carnevali created an international and heavily American circle of intellectuals whom he considered kindred spirits of sorts, through epistolary relationships, and by entertaining visitors in Bazzano and at the “Villa Baruzziana” – Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon, Harriet Monroe, Edward Dahlberg, Ezra Pound, Dorothy Dudley Harvey, among others. The radio brought to him by Ezra Pound in January 1936 as a gift from his American friends and the gramophone given to him by Ernest Walsh can be seen as symbols of the connection to the outside world that he strived to maintain even during his bed rest. Because of his forced isolation, he failed to integrate into Italian society, just as his illness had hindered his assimilation into American society. However, in the immobility of his hospital room he was able to transcend national borders and create a community of artists and thinkers that brought to him news of the outside world.

In 1925, the selection of Carnevali’s writings titled *A Hurried Man* was published in Paris in Robert McAlmon’s Contact Editions, effectively acknowledging the poet’s belonging



from afar to the group of American expats living in Paris in the 1920s.<sup>122</sup> His writings had, in fact, appeared in the Paris-based journals *This Quarter* founded in 1925 by Ernest Walsh and Ethel Moorhead and *Transition*, founded by Eugène Jolas and Maria McDonald in 1927. The latter journal, which showcased experimental writing and featured surrealists, expressionists and Dada art, published the short story “Almost a Fable” in 1930.<sup>123</sup> The Autumn-Winter issue of *This Quarter* (vol. 1, n. 2) edited in Milan in 1925 features the name of Carnevali – whose six part poem “Girls” was included – on the cover alongside those of Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Carl Sandburg, William Carlos Williams, Robert McAlmon, Ernest Hemingway, Kay Boyle, and Carlo Linati – of whom appeared Carnevali’s translation of the short story *L’ultima moglie di Barbablù*. The issue also contains an enthusiastic essay on Carnevali, written by Ernest Walsh, titled “A Young Living Genius,” between reviews of Hemingway’s *In our Time* and Robert McAlmon’s *Distinguished Air*. About the group of poems called *Neuriade*, Walsh states: “Most of the poetry I read put beside it seemed the chirping of grey birds exactly alike and sitting on a fence on a grey morning in any dull country.”<sup>124</sup>

Paradoxically, it is an article on these Americans abroad that first mentions Carnevali’s name to Italian readers: Carlo Linati’s 1925 interview with Ezra Pound on the so-called Lost Generation, published in *Corriere della Sera* as “I Fuoriusciti.”<sup>125</sup> The paradox is further evidenced by Carnevali’s inclusion – with six chapters of *The First God* – in the 1932 anthology *Americans Abroad*, edited by Peter Neagoe.<sup>126</sup> Carnevali himself approved of this decision, and

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<sup>122</sup> Much like the poet himself, the volume’s acceptance within the American literary world was troubled from the start, with the first dispatch of *A Hurried Man* held at customs for suspected obscenity.

<sup>123</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Almost a Fable,” *Transition* 19-20 (June 1930): 72-73.

<sup>124</sup> Ernest Walsh, “A Young Living Genius,” *This Quarter* (Fall-Winter 1925-1926), 323.

<sup>125</sup> Carlo Linati, “I Fuoriusciti,” *Corriere della Sera* L, 163 (July 10, 1925), 3.

<sup>126</sup> Peter Neagoe, *Americans Abroad* (The Hague: The Service Press, 1932).

lay claim to a space within the American world of letters, in a letter to Neagoe: “I do not brag of being a major poet, still I believe that I fill a certain space, unique in American literature.”<sup>127</sup> This opinion was shared by several critics, contemporaries of Carnevali. Eugène Jolas in his *Antologie de la nouvelle poésie américaine* called him “un des plus grands poètes de notre époque” and Régis Michaud included him in his *Panorama de la Littérature Américaine Contemporaine* in 1928. Here, he defined his role as that of purging North American poetry “de tout artifice,” thanks to his status as a “émigrant italien”: “Pendant que les Imagistes pillaient les musées et les bibliothèques, Carnevali butinait sa poésie dans les bouges et les ghettos de New-York.”<sup>128</sup> Gabriel Cacho Millet summarizes this poetic stance by describing Carnevali as “più ‘fratello’ dei Kerouac che dei Fitzgerald.”<sup>129</sup>

Carnevali continued to write in English – even something as intimate as a diary – and in a 1933 interview went so far as to state “In italiano non so scrivere. La lingua è una creatura, sangue, nervi, muscoli: bisogna conoscerla.”<sup>130</sup> The type of knowledge Carnevali is referring to is obviously something different from the mere fluency in a language. Language is pictured as a living being with whom one must become acquainted and then enter into a relationship that engages one’s entire body. The possession of words themselves, then, becomes the writer’s ultimate goal, as if their referential quality were secondary, again following the footsteps of Rimbaud, as he stated in a letter written in French to Waldo Frank: “mais on cherche, on cherche les mots . . . Et moi, je suis l’éternel mendiant de mots et de silence, j’implore, moi aussi, les

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<sup>127</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, letter to Peter Neagoe, quoted in F. Di Biagi “Emanuel Carnevali: un ‘American poet,’” in *La letteratura dell’emigrazione: gli scrittori di lingua italiana nel mondo*, ed. Jean-Jacques Marchand (Torino: Edizioni Giovanni Agnelli, 1991): 423-436.

<sup>128</sup> Régis Michaud, *Panorama de la Littérature Américaine Contemporaine*, 201.

<sup>129</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Racconti di un uomo che ha fretta*, ed. Gabriel Cacho Millet (Roma: Fazi editore, 2004), XXVI.

<sup>130</sup> E. F. Palmieri, “Destino di un poeta,” *Il Resto del Carlino* L, no. 280 (November 25, 1934), 3.

mots ou le silence . . . Il n'y a pas cette chose vague qu'on appelée la vie – il n'y a que la littérature, les mots . . .”<sup>131</sup>

Multilingualism seems to exacerbate this perception of words as concrete objects that the writer attempts to grasp but at times can only beg into existence. The foreigner, the newly arrived immigrant, is always reaching for words that constantly elude him. In Carnevali's case, the tentativeness of his linguistic possessions invests all of his languages, as the confession “in italiano non so scrivere” is echoed by “even tho I don't speak English very well,” a verse from a poem in letter form sent to Harriet Monroe in 1918.<sup>132</sup> Linguistic analysis once again complicates the matter and allows for a truly hybrid identity to emerge even from the later writings of Carnevali, specifically his letters to the few Italian intellectuals – Carlo Linati, Giovanni Papini, Benedetto Croce – with whom he maintained an epistolary relationship, “infarcit[e] di anglismi e frasi direttamente in inglese, inserite in modo del tutto spontaneo nel testo epistolare, specialmente laddove l'italiano non soccorre immediatamente lo scrivente.”<sup>133</sup> The language of these texts confirms Carnevali's own impression when he wrote to Papini as early as 1919: “Non so più tanto l'italiano.”<sup>134</sup> It is not possible, then, to talk about an Italian linguistic substrate onto which English words are implanted more or less consciously, but rather of a fluid and somewhat organic interference between languages, resulting in an inextricable interlacing.

In his *Diario Bazzanese*, Carnevali reflects on the English language, having, in his view, learned it and also distanced himself from it, since he now resides in Italy, although it continues

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<sup>131</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Saggi e recensioni*, XXV-XXVI.

<sup>132</sup> Letter dated January 2, 1918, part of the “Harriet Monroe Collection” at the University of Chicago Library.

<sup>133</sup> Luigi Fontanella, *La parola transfuga*, 16.

<sup>134</sup> Letter dated May 16, 1919, now in *Voglio disturbare l'America*, 76.

to be his language of choice for writing. The poet reflects on the change that has occurred in his perception of the language, which “has gained the look of an Italian dialect.” He quickly notes that “all languages have a similar look,” and thus, resemble dialects, “the Russian too, judging from Russian names, which are all I know of Russian: Nastasya, Timofey, Afanasy, etc. etc.” The example, while not entirely clear, seems to imply that Carnevali is using the term dialect to indicate a specific quality of language, namely the tendency to bend sounds to express affection, as well as possibly an actual similarity in root forms, due to the common origin of most western languages from a single matrix.

As for the relationship between standard language and dialect, Carnevali views a similar relation between written English and spoken American: “for example, Discòrrere, Italian, becomes Discarer, as Hot becomes Haht.” The example once again seems to point toward sound, and the pliability that language possesses at the hands of speakers with different accents. He then goes on to add: “This is probably due to Italian dialects being a jungle of arts of the language,” where the word “jungle” alludes to the unorganized variety of linguistic performances. His reflection ends with a profession of superiority of language over dialect, although it is not clear whether such superiority is to be understood in genetic or aesthetic terms.

In any case, it is striking that a multilingual writer in Italy in the late 1920s compared a foreign language to a dialect, which would have been the more obvious choice for an author interested in expressing immediacy and resistance to academicism and technical refinement. In making ample use in his poetry of spoken American, even in its most colloquial aspects, with the explicit purpose of rendering the authenticity of everyday speech, Carnevali is offering his personal response to the age old problem of the artificial and academic nature of standard Italian, to which Italian writers had and would continue to respond most frequently with the infusion, to

various degrees, of dialect within their texts. While dialect would have afforded similar qualities of spontaneity and anti-literariness, it was not a medium suited to a poet who strove first and foremost to be “modern” and to find a language adequate to his day, nor to someone educated in French and American poetry who wanted to achieve international recognition and escape the regionalism and provincialism of early twentieth-century Italy.

The diary reveals Carnevali not to have abandoned these aims after returning to Italy. His cultural and literary references continue to transcend national boundaries, as testified by the mention, in passing, of both “Boccaccio and [Sixteenth century French historian] Brantôme,”<sup>135</sup> in describing the antics of a local woman tricking her husband and of La Rouchefoucauld and Sherwood Anderson shortly after Casti and Cavalier Marino. When Carnevali mentions Carducci, it is to distance his own happiness from the “boisterous and big”<sup>136</sup> happiness that prompted the older poet to write his song of love. While describing Marino, the barber, one of the many inhabitants of Bazzano colorfully sketched out in the diary, Carnevali states “here is the Pagliacci psychology once more” and then translates four verses of Leoncavallo’s opera – “Laugh, O, clown./of your broken love,/laugh of the sorrow/that poisons your heart.” – adding the suggestion: “hear it on the gramophone disc. His Master’s Voice, sung by Caruso...Prince?...to [sic] much.”<sup>137</sup> In this case the reference is to Italian culture, but mediated by the American record series “His Master’s Voice” and subsequently by the poet’s own English translation of the text.

When discussing a book sent to him by a publishing house – the *Adventures of Felicita* by the Chevalier de Nerciat – he compares a man depicted in an included photograph to the

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<sup>135</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 8.

<sup>136</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 12.

<sup>137</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 22.

English and French detectives Sherlock Holmes and Arsène Lupin. The discussion about their physical appearance leads him to remember his first encounter with Sherwood Anderson, whom he had imagined to be “a very tall man with a very long and very black moustache” when he read his work in *Seven Arts*. He was surprised upon meeting him in Chicago, where he “mistook him for Llewellyn Jones, just because said gentleman was taller than anyone”<sup>138</sup> there. Much in the same way, in the *Autobiography*, written during the same years, he claims that he knew about love affairs between boys from reading Romain Rolland’s novel “Jean Cristophe”<sup>139</sup> and he quotes Keats in several occasions.

Most importantly, from his seclusion in the hospital of Bazzano, his gaze continues to be that of an outsider. The diary documents his amusement and bewilderment at Italian customs as well as at the changes brought about by the ascent to power of Fascism: “since Mussolini has decided to make Italy look Roman or medieval, there are no longer mayors but only *podestàs*.”<sup>140</sup> A particularly telling passage is the entry for April 5, which would not be out of place in the diary of an American traveler visiting Italy for the first time:

How noisy are Italians! It seems as though there were a theater, between the acts, downstairs. Four Italians can beat a score of Americans in loud talking. And as though talking aloud were not enough to be understood, they gesticulate ferociously. And the cause of it? Simply, generally, a simple question of opinion as to some difficult point of card playing, a peaceful, though belligerent in its form, discussion. They appear to want to tear the house down. More boisterous than a fascist revolution, more prepotent than Mussolini, roaring louder than Niagara, these Italian card players!<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 26.

<sup>139</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 56.

<sup>140</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 10.

<sup>141</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 11-12.

The poet who declared America to be a place where “a man must yell if he wants to be heard”<sup>142</sup> now paints a rather stereotypical portrait of Italians as “loud” and prone to “gesticulate ferociously” for the most trivial of reasons.

In many instances, the addition of a single sentence brings about a comparison with an American custom. This device recalls the style of travel literature, in which writers are constantly using similes to compare what they see in the new country to their homeland, also as a way to help their readers – imagined as fellow countrymen – better understand and envision what is described.<sup>143</sup> In a similar way, Carnevali is establishing “a point of comparison that frames the unknown in terms of the known,”<sup>144</sup> where what is known and unknown is determined from the perspective of an American reader. When speaking about wine, for example, he specifies: “by black wine I mean what in America is called red wine.”<sup>145</sup> In several cases, Italy now appears as the winner in the battle between the two cultures. Women, for example, are a topic on which Carnevali had written profusely when in the US, lamenting their ‘Puritanism.’ In Bazzano, he finds a positive female figure in Mrs. Rossi “the best kind of Italian lady there is on the Italian map . . . for to hear her talk of men’s drawers, of fotters, of s—t and piss and f—k is no drawback at all.” To her description he adds: “How different from those American ladies for whom *for Christ’s sake* and *for God’s sake* are blasphemous words!”<sup>146</sup>

Sometimes the comparison is implicit, such as in his response to the assertion that living for a long time in a small country village makes one’s soul small and constricted: “NO, a cramped soul thrives better in the mysterious streets of the city; a cramped soul finds more

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<sup>142</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “The Book of Job Junior,” *A Hurried Man*, 48.

<sup>143</sup> See Glen Hooper and Tim Youngs, eds. *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2004); Peter Ferry, *Travel Writing* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008)

<sup>144</sup> Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 68.

<sup>145</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 16.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem*.

images of crampedness in the towers that seek the sun, in the canyons to the bottom of which the sun hardly ever reaches.”<sup>147</sup> While the opposition is generically one between country and city, the mention of towers and canyons reveals the poet to be drawing on his recent experience in Chicago and New York, urban settings like none that could be found in Italy at the time. Section III of “Shorties,” published in *Poetry* in August of 1931, implies a similar view of growing urban centers, relentlessly expanding according to an inhuman divinely ordained fate:

Cities become always bigger –  
nothing can stop them.  
It is written in the books of the awful gods  
who sit above city and country  
but cannot see,  
who act with blind hands,  
who do not even imagine  
the needs of the soul of man.<sup>148</sup>

The journal entry goes on to make a statement about the arts and entertainment in both Italian and American cities: “Amusements, yes, to go and hear an actor that screams and jumps on the strange in a frenzy, or to see the last cinematographic idiocy from the United States (for one must know that the latter is idiotic and that the former is the way of all Italian actors, one or two excluded).” Finally, and most importantly, his critique of urban life ends with a reflection on literature and the indication of Thoreau, once again key American author, as his ideal:

The octopus of the city stifles and kills. Too much literature is a thing of darkness and crowding, a speculation on human passions, a rotten flower on the dunghill of men’s

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<sup>147</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 36.

<sup>148</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Shorties,” *Poetry* 38, no. 5 (Aug. 1931): 243-244.



souls. Literature therefore is a thing for the city. Thoreau believed in the place where he was living and by his belief he made books where the essence of the place in which he lived shines and glitters. A great courage was his and with courage he won. I also believe in the place where I am living. I will have courage too.<sup>149</sup>

What fascinates him about Thoreau, according to this passage, is his ability to convey the essence of place, something that was apparent as a goal of Carnevali's own poetry, since his very first descriptions of life in the tenement houses and back alleys of New York City.

The statement about the essentially urban nature of literature helps us understand why Carnevali wrote less upon returning to Italy. He had offered another clue to the reason behind the scarcity of his late production – aside from his obvious health conditions – earlier in the diary, when he stated: “my dear books are all around me; but I do not read; I do not want any literature to interfere. I look at them and I am glad, glad that they are there at all. . . I would go out and take a long walk.”<sup>150</sup> The 1931 poem “Dead Books and Their Authors” shows the author to paradoxically feel an increasing distance from works of literature, which he now perceives as full of death, as he himself grows progressively closer to death:

All these authors are dead:  
Death arises out of their books  
Like a weary old woman  
that goes to work in the morning.

The books are defined an “awful testimony” “left behind” by their authors, and this testimony compared to “a witch wearing a dress with a very long train.” Another image of decay is contained in the following two lines:

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<sup>149</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 36.

<sup>150</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Diario bazzanese*, 12.

Oh that words should become microbes –  
Words that were flowers before.

The vitality of words symbolized by the flowers is now substituted by the peculiar image of “microbes,” sources of infection and disease. The poem turns the common conception of gaining immortality through literature on its head:

All these books,  
with their dead authors watching them,  
standing behind them –  
old ghosts begging for a love  
they may no longer claim.  
There is no way to touch them  
to tell them a gentle and indulgent lie,  
to comfort them,  
to call them by their dead name,  
to wake them up for a while.

These statements may sound like a profession of disillusionment by someone who is confronting his own failing health and literary ambitions. However, a short interjection in explicit contrast with earlier obsessions about feeling cramped in small rooms seems to offer a more hopeful counterpoint: “there is more room in death/than in a hundred worlds.” The statement aligns with the overall tone of the journal from Bazzano, which seldom falls into desperation. Not incidentally, in the color coding that organizes the material of *The Autobiography*, the “black” period is the one spent in New York and not the final years of hospitalization. In the slow and quiet setting of the sanatorium, Carnevali is no longer invaded by a sense of urgency for words.

Insofar as his health permits it, he now prefers the physical enjoyment of the “delicious air” and the warm sun, and the once “hurried man” concludes: “better stay here and sip this happiness, slowly and with care.”<sup>151</sup>

The description of his hospital room contained in the *Diario Bazzanese* provides an image of seclusion, intensified by the drugs – “half an apothecary shop” – that mark the poet’s illness and distance from the world of the other, healthy, people. And the effect of isolation is heightened by the numerous pages devoted to the description of the goings on of the small town of Bazzano, including gossip about the chaplain’s romantic interests and the servant girl having a baby out of wedlock.<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, the many objects related to literature – his writing tools, the American magazine and foreign dictionary – all point toward a constant reaching out past the boundaries of Bazzano and of Italy, toward the intellectual milieu to which Carnevali still belongs.

My room. A table covered entirely by a heap of magazines and books . . .  
my phonograph records. . .  
Another table where there are letters and papers and on which the typewriter sits quietly. .  
. Among the letters a red blotch, like a rock protruding out of the sea of my English  
dictionary. An ink bottle as empty as poverty.  
. . . My typing machine always my hands. It and the phonograph give a mechanistic touch  
to the face of the room. . .  
. . . On my table, conspicuous, “The American Mercury,” that scandal monger.  
(February 29 1928)

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<sup>151</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 12.

<sup>152</sup> Similar character sketches can be found in “Sorrow’s Headquarters,” which includes portraits of “The Doctor” and “The Catholic Sisters,” in “The Girls in Italy” as well as in the short story “Train of Characters Through the Villa Rubazziana,” Part 1, *This Quarter* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1927): 141-151 and Part 2, *This Quarter* 1, no. 4 (Spring 1929): 127-148.

Linguistically, the English is quite standard, although Carnevali lets slip a “typing machine,” equivalent to “macchina da scrivere,” despite having previously used the correct word, “typewriter.” The ironic tone of the commentary on his personal living quarters recalls “Furnished Rooms” and the other poems written in the US about his lodgings in the various tenement houses of New York and Chicago where he was forced to live: “Two electric lights. Didn’t I say I was rich?” The poet has crossed the Atlantic and returned to his native country, but his living arrangements haven’t changed greatly: he is still a paying guest in a small room – except now the ones paying are often his friends.

Despite having settled in Italy and being relegated to the seclusion of a hospital room, he could very well have repeated the words written when he was living as a young ‘wop’ trying to make his way in New York City, applicable to so many twentieth century human beings: “I am a roomer. In a furnished-room house. One of the homes of the homeless, of the orphans, of the whores, the pimps, the poor spinsters, the poor bachelors.”<sup>153</sup> As the work of both a migrant and a chronically ill individual, Carnevali’s poetry, whether written in Italy or the United States, documents the alienating force of nationalist and ableist ideologies and their rhetoric, as well as their inextricable intersections.

### **The Disabling Force of *Vox Americana***

Rather than attempting to measure the degree to which Carnevali’s work is Italian or American, I aim to shift critical perspective and examine instead the ways in which his translingual poetry

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<sup>153</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 160.

illustrates the intersecting pressures of normative ideological prescriptions onto the embodied identity of the migrant. As an immigrant – thus linguistically and culturally hybrid – chronically ill and in today’s terms queer, the case of Emanuel Carnevali turns on its head the immigrant trajectory of assimilation. Carnevali attempted and failed to perform the transition from Italian immigrant to full-fledged American writer, whose traces of ethnic and linguistic difference could be sublimated within the elitist self-construction of the modernist cosmopolitan.

Undeniably, there is an element of performance in Carnevali’s poetic posture. An admirer of Rimbaud, the figure of the marginalized non-conforming poet was something of a literary trope that certainly fascinated Carnevali and appealed to his Modernist colleagues. However, this performance merely underscored and attempted to employ aesthetically a very real condition of marginalization due to the intersecting pressures of language, socioeconomics, gender, class and disability. As noted previously, the nickname “black poet,” used by Williams and others to describe their friend, while alluding to the dark themes and tormented persona expressed in Carnevali’s poetry, also very literally recalls the racialization enacted by anti-immigration rhetoric and the very real historical classification of Italians as “non-white” during the period of the great migration.<sup>154</sup>

The non-standard linguistic expressions that Carnevali’s multilingualism afforded him contributed to his success among avant-garde experimentalists and represented a powerful antagonistic force to the language legislation of the 1910s and 1920s, expression of ‘English-only’ Americanism. However, ‘writing with an accent’ also prevented Carnevali from becoming the perfectly English-speaking citizen that language politics demanded at this time, according to the definitions of “American language” being put forth by Roosevelt, Mencken, Ford, James and

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<sup>154</sup> See Jennifer Gugliemo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians white? How Race Was Made in America*.

other nativist nationalists during the exact years in which Carnevali was composing his poetry.<sup>155</sup> The importance of commanding the English language in order to assimilate into American culture is also apparent when looking at the increasingly restrictive immigration bills of the 1910s. The racially charged 1917 literacy bill effectively limited access to Anglo-Saxons and sanctioned language as a barometer of national affiliation, loyalty and qualification for citizenship.<sup>156</sup> Ten years later, John Dos Passos would write in *Facing the Chair*, about the execution of Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, that their inability to speak English correctly contributed to their dehumanization by a politically nervous national public that had been trained to doubt the loyalty of residents who spoke English as a second language. Mencken himself would comment “If Sacco and Vanzetti had been able to speak English fluently and correctly at the time of their trial the chances are very good that the jury would have laughed at some of the nonsensical ‘evidence’ brought against them. They might, indeed, have been acquitted.”<sup>157</sup> As Annie Vivanti also showed in her representations of Italian immigrants, because of their speech patterns Americans’ reactions range from suspicion to interest in them as picturesque or exotic characters.

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<sup>155</sup> See Joshua Miller, *Accented America: The Cultural Politics of Multilingual America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80. Mencken’s *The American Language: An Inquiry Into the Development of English in the United States* (New York: Knopf, 1921), by excluding and marginalizing non-English and non-Anglo speech forms, coded its construction of a modernist “American language” as a singular, uniform, and racially white vernacular even in the face of massive immigration and imperial annexation of new territories.

<sup>156</sup> In 1916, Frances A. Kellor, head of the National Americanization Committee, had addressed concerns regarding immigrant labor through policy proposals. One of these was a language-based citizenship restriction: “Every immigrant should be required to become literate in the English language (the minimum standard to be definitively set) within five years after arrival, provided facilities are offered for him. Deportation should be the penalty for failure to do so.” Frances A. Kellor, *Straight America. A Call to National Service* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 14.

<sup>157</sup> Joshua Miller, *Accented America*, 165.

Carnevali's translingualism is markedly different from the defamiliarizing multilingual experiments of other US modernisms that play provocatively with the structures produced by imposed languages, such as Henry Roth's 'Englitch' or Paredes Tejano's Spanglish. With few exceptions, Carnevali avoided deliberately multilingual techniques such as code-switching. I would contend that the textual traces of his translingualism, or "accent," constitute a visible disabling marker similar to walking with a limp. His poetry stages the disabling force of assimilationism, which scrutinizes and singles out newly arrived immigrants, preventing them from 'passing for' natives and deeming them 'unfit' to become full-fledged American citizens. The anxiety surrounding immigrants and their newly nationalized selves is evident in Henry James's concerns, in *The American Scene*, about what might become of immigrants' anterior languages and cultures:

It has taken long ages of history, in the other world, to produce them, and you ask yourself, ... if they may really be thus extinguished in an hour. And if they are not extinguished into what pathless tracts of the native atmosphere do they virtually, do they provisionally, and so all undiscoverably, melt? Do they burrow underground, to await their day again? – or in what strange secret places are they held in deposit and trust?<sup>158</sup>

In 1918, Emanuel Carnevali wrote a poem called "Modern Poetry": which he framed as a letter to Harriet Monroe and presented as a meta-literary reflection and parody of early twentieth-century US Modernism, its formalistic indulgence in technical experimentations and debates around free verse.

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<sup>158</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Harper, 1907), 126.

Dear Editor: Did I say I rejected Italian standards of good literature? Here is what I feel sometimes about our own stuff.

*Emanuel Carnevali*

## MODERN POETRY

### I

A wondrous voice is urging me within  
And thrills me with a pain, alas! . . .

### II

A wondrous voice urges me within  
And with a pain thrills me – alas! . . .

### III

A wondrous voice  
Urges me within  
And thrills me  
With pain . . .

### IV

A wondrous  
Voice urges  
Me within and  
Thrills  
Me with a  
Pain . . .

### V

A voice sings in my throat  
And rings like a fever  
Through my body  
That vibrates with pain.

### VI

My throat sings



Like a stiff red silk ribbon.  
And my veins shrink  
Like teeth  
At the sight of a lemon.

VII

The throat shivers  
Pain.  
Only . . . .  
Well . . . . .

VIII

Throat, this I know,  
And pain.  
Well, I'm sure  
About the pain –  
The throat and the pain,  
Which all rhymes with rain;  
But if it's a free verse  
It doesn't count.

IX

Throat,  
You don't know anything about it.  
Pain,  
Because I have looked at my throat,  
Perhaps my eyes stopped  
At the chest –  
Chest  
Upon  
The belly  
Belly  
Upon  
The legs . . .

Sing a minuet, a minuet, in be sharp –  
Be sharp, how can I ?  
The feet are under the legs and  
The corns . . .  
Throat?  
It's an old platitude, an old commonplace.  
You can't force an artist, what do you think?  
Modern  
Modernity,  
Modernism . . .  
I am above my throat,  
I have a right to forget . . .  
X  
Nobody home  
The poet has left for the asylum.

The recurrence of the word “pain,” associated with the poetic “voice” as it demands expression, is remarkable. The pain is located specifically in the throat, the site in which the poet’s voice is meant to sing. Rather than an inspired ethereal voice, the poem calls attention to the embodied nature of voice, breath and language. Born in the body of the immigrant, the voice sounds like a “stiff red silk ribbon,” it “rings like fever” and causes the body to “vibrate with pain.” As contemporary transnational sound poet Caroline Bergvall claims about artists working across languages, they speak with a “cat in the throat,” where the cat is “the tone, the accentedness, the autography” and includes “hesitations, silencings, stutterings.”

These hesitations and stutterings are the very subject and material of a great many poems by Carnevali – who not only wrote in a second language, but whose health conditions caused him to stammer and shake profusely, and often performed his poetry orally, sometimes with

musical accompaniment. This same poem alludes to the relationship between poetry and song with the pun on “Be sharp” and the question “how can I?” The poet’s mental and physical health conditions exacerbate the difficulty of being or at least sounding sharp for anyone expressing themselves in a second language. The confession comes after a description of the poet’s gaze turning inward, literally curving downward toward his own body, and precedes an eerily prophetic mention of the asylum, where Carnevali would in fact end up a mere four years later. The immigrant and the disabled are thus conflated as victims of analogous processes of dehumanization.

In 1929, seven years after returning to Italy, Carnevali was still composing poetry in English. The poem “Queer things” is something of a self-portrait,” in which again his cultural hybridity – in this case identified with classical Greek and Latin roots – and physical disability seem to go hand in hand.

One nostril means latin,  
The other means greek.

My legs will be  
little steel rods,  
which will continue  
trotting after  
I am dead.

My arms are  
two useless limbs  
when I stand on my head,  
(Which I never do).

My mouth, too often open,  
will be my despair -  
clogged and sputtering  
and drivelling, -  
when I'll be very old  
(which will never be)

I hate my head  
My rotting head  
which will never fall of itself  
like any decent pear.  
It has the intention  
of flying up to the sky,  
but it will always trail in the dust:  
eating grime and dirt,  
screaming erotic songs,  
begging all the world  
to enter in it

The title alludes to the oddity of a body made up of seemingly incompatible elements, reduced to useless mechanical movements and site of despair. The author's biography also allows us to read the adjective "queer" literally, and add yet another layer to the fluid identity claimed by Carnevali. Here we have not the throat, but an open mouth, "clogged and sputtering and driveling," still painfully engaged in the attempt to find words in what remained a second language. Again, it would be easy to read the poem as a performance of bohemian despair, had it not been shakily written in the hospital room that had become Carnevali's home since 1922.

The uselessness of his limbs, perceived as made of "steel," brings out another of Carnevali's recurring themes: that of labor and its dramatic lack. In his *Autobiography*, he

describes his initiation into New York as achieved by walking the streets with Louis Grudin, thus transferring the model of the *flâneur* to America and performing a reversal of what the American group of expats in Paris would experience only a few years later. His insistence on the goal of finding a job, shows how Rimbaud's idea of poetry as the gateway to Eden is conflated with the myth of America as the Promised Land, in the very concretely economical terms in which immigration reconfigured this myth.

*Looking for a job*, I learned to know New York, every nook and cranny, every side and corner, from the Battery up to 110<sup>th</sup> Street. I walked the streets often in a frenzy of hatred and sang an Italian song sometimes and stopped to cry. I walked so much that I know still every street from Third Street to Columbus Circle, and in every street I have planted a remembrance.<sup>159</sup>

In the framework of early twentieth-century American capitalism, assimilation and socio-economic ascent rested almost exclusively on the ability to perform labor. In contrast, the Italian song that harkens back to the poetic voice mentioned in other poems, is ineffectual in achieving that trajectory. Carnevali mentions singing Italian songs several times in his *Autobiography*, for example when he recalls “that in America when I happened to sing an Italian song in the streets, I started to weep like a fool. One song does sometimes mean a whole nation.”<sup>160</sup> He mentions the attempt to silence the song of Italy as proof of the cruelty and idiocy of his employers, when he was a waiter in New York: “They had even forbidden the Italian girl-workers to sing while at work. They had tried to stupefy that fine fire that was in the songs of the Italian girls.”<sup>161</sup> In 1921

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<sup>159</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 74-75.

<sup>160</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 62.

<sup>161</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 77.

Carnevali published an “Italian Song”<sup>162</sup> in *Poetry* magazine, entrusting to the popular form a rare concession to “jettatura” a distinctly Italian word referencing a system of belief and superstitions that resists translation:

Until your lips be red,  
Until the winter-time,  
Until the money be gone,  
Until God see us:  
Until God see us.

Until old age come, girl,  
Until the other man come,  
Until the *jettatura* get me,  
Until God see us:  
Until God see us.

The presence of the infinitives “be,” “come” and “get” in place of the conjugated verbs also contributes to marking the speech both socio-economically and ethnically.

The illness that reduced Carnevali’s body to a shivering, stammering,<sup>163</sup> unproductive vessel kept him from becoming the docile laborer that Americanization required. In Carnevali’s 1919 poem “Synge’s Playboy of the Western World,”<sup>164</sup> the contrast between what New York

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<sup>162</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Italian Song,” *Poetry* 19, no. 3 (December 1921), 143.

<sup>163</sup> In the “Preface” to the *Autobiography* (15), Kay Boyle mentions that as an alternate title for the book Carnevali had thought of *Religious Stammering* and *The First God* – chosen by Maria Pia Carnevali as title for the Italian translation, *Il Primo Dio*. The idea of stammering is certainly connected to the poet’s illness – lethargic encephalitis – which forced him to shake tremendously and impeded his speech as well as his typing, and which he characteristically defined “a modern sickness [that made him] ridiculous, shattered and broken to smithereens.” *Autobiography*, 124.

<sup>164</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Synge’s Playboy of the Western World: Variation,” *The Dial* 66, no. 787 (April 5, 1919), 340.

should provide, according to the American dream narrative, and the harsh reality of Carnevali's situation is explicitly related to his inability to perform "work" and "duties."

It's New York, I tell you . . .  
I'd have a home  
on top of a hill;  
there should be roses  
from the roof down;  
and I'd get up every day  
at sunrise.

I should become so beautiful  
you would be embarrassed  
looking at me.

It's New York I tell you,  
*a city that lives*  
*with work*  
*for men stronger than I;*  
*with duties*  
*for a different conscience*  
*than mine.* (April 1919)

Sleep or sleeplessness recurs throughout Carnevali's corpus in direct opposition to the productiveness of labor. In the first section of "A Splendid Commonplace,"<sup>165</sup> titled "In This Hotel," the poet defines himself "I, who do not sleep, who wait and watch for the dawn." There follows a series of characters, who are also guests in the same hotel – "For every old lady,/And

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<sup>165</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, "The Splendid Commonplace," *Poetry* 11, no. 6 (March 1918): 298-300.

every old gent,/And every old rogue/And every young couple” – from which the poet – a wretched, tired thing – is irremediably distant because of his lack of work.

But I, I – this wretched, tired thing –  
*May I ask for a job*  
As headwaiter  
Of this hotel?

Again, in the second section, titled “His Majesty the Letter-Carrier,” the poet views the other characters with detachment, as from his hotel window he sees “trotting little men/Who rush westward from the east to their jobs.” While his aspiration to find a job in order to support himself financially is ingrained in Carnevali’s experience as an immigrant, as an outsider he is also keenly aware of the dehumanizing force of bourgeois capitalism, and the modern obsession about “the JOB, that damnable affair, THE JOB. Nightmare of the hunted, THE JOB, the misery, this anxiety, this kind of neurasthenia, this ungrateful, this blood-sucking thing.”<sup>166</sup> The description of rush-hour workers in the poem “Morning” strengthens this representation:

This is the hour they go to their work  
Eastward and westward –  
Two processions,  
Silent.  
Shapeless the hats,  
Too large the jackets and shoes –  
Grotesques walking,  
Grotesques for no one to laugh at.  
For, of course . . . but do they  
Really know where they’re going?

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<sup>166</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *Autobiography*, 76.



Carnevali's response to what he sees as mechanical behavior of unquestioning masses, who do not realize they are just cogs in the wheel, is poetic: "Sit down and take the rest of your life,/O Poets!"<sup>167</sup> His response also embraces the inward turn expressed in "Modern Poetry" as a curving down of the gaze and in the isolated space of the furnished room and hospital room, which constitute the setting of many of his poems.

How crucial work is crucial to Americanization efforts, even when one's relationship to labor is conflictual, is evidenced by the poetry of another Italian American – Arturo Giovannitti – whose open solidarity to the Italian American community as well as the broader worker's movement is in striking contrast to Carnevali's forced isolation and withdrawal into self-reflection. The contrast between Carnevali and Giovannitti's conceptions of the individual and the collective, as expressed in their poetry, is particularly visible when comparing their treatment of the theme of 'sleep.' As previously noted, Carnevali contrasts 'sleep' and 'sleeplessness' to labor, and associates the theme with pain. Two 1921 poems illustrate this point:<sup>168</sup>

### *Sleep*

At the bottom of the abyss of sleep  
A black cradle rocks.  
Pain, slight, with evanescent fingers  
Pushes it.  
Under the cradle is earth,  
To cover and stifle you.

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<sup>167</sup> This stance distances Carnevali from other Italian American poets writing around the same time and who instead chose political activism as a response to the brutality of working conditions. Arturo Giovannitti and Onorio Ruotolo were among the most active and co-edited the magazine *Il Fuoco*, dedicated to art and politics, in 1914.

<sup>168</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, "Sleep," "Aubade," *Poetry* 19, no. 3 (December 1921): 140-141.

*Aubade*

The morning now  
Is a white corpse –  
The nightmares  
killed her.  
Vainly the breeze  
Wafts a terrible sadness  
Over her body.

In both cases, sleep is associated with pain. The reference to the cradle in the former and the one to the corpse in the latter seem to imply that this is true for the entirety of human life, condemned by its very nature to undergo suffering during the night. “Morphine,” written during the poet’s hospitalization in Bazzano, shows the poet’s illness to have exacerbated his solipsism: “I stared into a near world/populated with mutilated images./the gnomes of sleepiness/play a dreary comedy./ . . . I opened me a way through the gnomes of sleepiness/that attacked my head – an undefended fortress. . . ./and then the gnomes sailed away to the infinite.”<sup>169</sup>

The impression of self-referentiality appears even more strongly, when comparing these poems to “The Walker,” perhaps the best known of Arturo Giovannitti’s works. The poem describes the sleepless nights in a prison cell, during which the poet listens anxiously to the footsteps of an unknown “walker” above him, as well as to the sounds produced by a series of cellmates:

I have heard the moans of him who bewails a thing that is dead and the sighs of him who  
tries to smother a thing that will not die;

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<sup>169</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, “Morphine,” in *Il Primo Dio*, 246.

I have heard the stifled sobs of the one who weeps with his head under the coarse blanket,  
and the whispering of the one who prays with his forehead on the hard, cold stone of the  
floor;

I have heard him who laughs the shrill, sinister laugh of folly at the horror rampant on the  
yellow wall and at the red yes of the nightmare glaring through the iron bars;

I have heard in the sudden icy silence him who coughs a dry, ringing cough, and wished  
madly that his throat would not rattle so and that he would not spit on the floor, for no  
sound was more atrocious than that of his sputum upon the floor;

I have heard him who swears fearsome oaths which I listen to in reverence and awe, for  
they are holier than the virgin's prayer;

And I have heard, most terrible of all, the silence of two hundred brains all possessed by  
one single, relentless, unforgiving, desperate thought.<sup>170</sup>

The poet's reactions to the different voices span a range of feelings, including awe, horror and sympathy. Overall the impression is one of solidarity with those who share a similar fate and of compassion for the suffering of others. The repetition of "I have heard" at the beginning of each sentence conveys a sense of relentlessness, functions as an ordering principle within a text made up of long verses that resemble prose and indicates the poet's receptiveness to what is outside of himself. From the specific circumstance of the prison, the poem's reach broadens to include "all the footsteps of men upon the earth," which either "descend or climb." Rather than focusing on his own thoughts and emotions, the poet first and foremost imagines the state of mind of "the walker" and subsequently broadens the scope to include his own perceptions and those of the other inmates: "And that is what two hundred minds drowned in the darkness and the silence of the night think, and that is also what I think." He comments sarcastically: "Wonderful is the supreme wisdom of the jail that makes all think the same thought. Marvelous is the providence

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<sup>170</sup> Arturo Giovannitti, "The Walker," in *Arrows in the Gale*, ed. Helen Keller (Riverside: Hillacre, 1914), 23-24

of the law that equalizes all, even, in mind and sentiment.” The “white haired man dressed in blue” who holds the “small brass key” is responsible for the fate of all of the inmates.

The final entreaties to “my brother,” in Giovannitti’s poem, while motivated by personal suffering, also establish a commonality of experience that implies empathy, solidarity and generally speaking a social consciousness that is seldom, if ever, expressed in Carnevali’s work.

My brother, do not walk any more. It is wrong to walk on a grave. It is a sacrilege to walk four steps from the headstone to the foot and four steps from the foot to the headstone. If you stop walking, my brother, no longer will this be a grave, - for you will give me back my mind that is chained to your feet and the right to think my own thoughts. I implore you, my brother, for I am weary of the long vigil, weary of counting your steps, and heavy with sleep. Stop, rest, sleep, my brother, for the dawn is well nigh and it is not the key alone that can throw open the gate.<sup>171</sup>

The economic difficulties staged in Carnevali’s poetry are connected to his individual health condition, revealing the ability to perform labor as key to assimilating within a modern Capitalist society.

Reading his works through the lens of his disability, however, brings out language as the most visible marker of otherness that hinders his Americanization and acts as a de-humanizing marginalizing and exclusionary force onto the embodied experience of all immigrants. In Carnevali’s case this marker is more often than not expressed in the translingual traces that reveal Italianness within or even despite efforts at self-translation. Other times, however, it is more explicit, and directly connects the poet’s own expressive difficulties to those of the entire community of Italian Americans, by interjecting Italian words or signals of their pronunciation. .

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<sup>171</sup> Arturo Giovannitti, “The Walker,” 27.

“Tale three,”<sup>172</sup> presents a satirical portrait – similar to those depicted in Annie Vivanti’s American novels and short stories – of the way in which the Italian immigrants are viewed by other Americans, who “don’t look” at them, but rather “sneer”:

Ravioli...onion...Yes, people do think that I am interesting! Characteristically an Italian, you know. And it’s just what they want . . . the local color, *that attractive and light way of talking* . . . and those very extraordinary neckties . . . oh, perfectly charming! The harmless, charming little man – oh, the ladies all patronize him! – and *if he writes some tiny verses now and then*, well, what of it...it adds to the charm – and let him be fiery too, on certain occasions<sup>173</sup>

Because of his status as an immigrant, his poems are reduced to “tiny verses” and his person to an exotic and charming oddity. “A girl-D,” is an invective, which seems to intentionally imitate the style of Dante’s *rime petrose*, against a former lover who once sent him “staggering” from her house to knock his head “against the tree trunks/of Lakeshore Drive, magnificently lovedrunk.” Carnevali inserts three lines that mimetically reproduce the mistakes and accent of an Italian American, according to the stereotypical representation of the *wop*:

I no count in your life-a,  
me, da wop-a  
with lethargic encephalitis-a.<sup>174</sup>

The ironic self-deprecating speech conflates the lowly image of the wop with that of the sick man through the transcription of the immigrant’s pronunciation.

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<sup>172</sup> First published as “Tales of a Hurried Man. Tale Three (Home Sweet Home!),” *The Little Review*, Parts 1 – 6, 6, no. 10 (March 1920), 237 and parts 7 – 9, 6, no. 11. (April 1920): 51 – 58.

<sup>173</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *A Hurried Man*, 40.

<sup>174</sup> Emanuel Carnevali, *A Hurried Man*, 22-23.

Emanuel Carnevali's forced return to Italy in 1922 made his a failed migration. In the early 1920s a series of Immigration Restrictions, starting with the 1921 Emergency Quota Act, reduced the number of immigrants allowed to enter the US, particularly from countries of southern Europe considered "undesirable," or "the refuse of Europe" to quote William Williams, the Commissioner of the port of New York at Ellis Island in 1903. Thus, Carnevali's individual case gestures towards the broader attitude of the US toward Italian immigrants. "Physical and moral soundness" together with the "willingness and ability to work" were listed as requirements for immigrants by Grover Cleveland in 1897.<sup>175</sup> As eugenicist and restrictionist views became dominant in the early 1920s, selection was based less on individual diagnosis of disease and more on the 'likelihood' or 'possibility' of someone's mental or physical defects affecting their ability to earn a living.<sup>176</sup> The use of abstractly vague medical terms such as LPC – "likely to become a public charge" –, "poor physique" and "feeble-minded" and their pervasive attribution to broad swaths of immigrants of specific origins – Jews, Italian, Irish, Slavs, Greeks, Portuguese – highlights the disabling and racializing rhetoric that affected – and still continues to affect – immigration into the US.

The specific case of Emanuel Carnevali shows that the methodology of disability studies, which relies on oblique readings to value the meanings that come from difference – bodily and otherwise – can provide migration studies with useful tools with which to approach authors whose physical bodies, as well as their body of work, have systematically been excluded from the canon because of the cultural and linguistic hybridity that marks them as abnormal within

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<sup>175</sup> See Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>176</sup> And make them "progenitors whose offspring will reproduce, often in an exaggerated degree, the physical degeneracy of their parents." "Memorandum" by Joseph W. Scherewschewsky, head physician at the Baltimore station, to all immigration stations, in Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land*, 32.

nation-based literary traditions. Immigrants become indelibly marked, their bodies interrogated, written across and read into. Disability studies, coupled with the better known lessons of queer and gender theory and translation studies, give us tools to uncover the constructedness of canons, traditions, genres and models based on national borders and binary distinctions of here versus there, normal versus abnormal, national versus foreign. These critical frameworks give us a vocabulary to talk about the embodied experience of migration and consider the intersections of migration, translanguaging, disability, and other atypical expressions of identity as they bear on the aesthetic practices of transnational writers.

The case of a disabled, migrant, queer Italian American Emanuel Carnevali complicates the discourse surrounding Italian nation building at the turn of the twentieth century. It provides a counter narrative to the celebratory rhetoric of colonialist writers who were constructing racial formations on the basis of the very same eugenicist and homogenizing discourses that were violently acting on Italians across the Atlantic. It points to the imbrications of socio-economic power and language, as they relate to nation-building projects within and outside of Italy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Performativity and Patriotism in Annie Vivanti and Amelia Pincherle Rosselli.

At the turn of the twentieth century, *italianità* was touted as a supremely ‘virile’ quality, as writings by Gabriele D’Annunzio and F. T. Marinetti discussed earlier have shown. In D’Annunzio’s case, the threat of racial mixing and even of cultural cosmopolitanism is generally associated with his female characters, such as Foscarina in the novel *Il Fuoco*, and Basiliola in *La Nave*. Marinetti depicts women as distractions that keep men from fulfilling the ideal of violence and regeneration, as noted in regard to *Mafarka le futuriste*. He devoted numerous manifestoes to announcing the “grande avvenire virile fecondo e geniale dell’Italia,”<sup>1</sup> and even the founding Manifesto included an article that notoriously glorified war, militarism, patriotism, and “il disprezzo della donna.”<sup>2</sup> In the text *Democrazia Futurista*, Marinetti associates the Society of Nations “vecchia idea Mazziniana” with a feminine idea of universal peace and declares that: “la pace non può essere l’ideale assoluto di un’anima virile.”<sup>3</sup> Fascism’s associations between *italianità* and virility were so strong that in outlining the expectations for Italian women, its ideologues conjured the figure of the “donna virile” – partly anticipated

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<sup>1</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Contro il lusso femminile” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 548.

<sup>2</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Manifesto del futurismo,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 12 “Pacifismo e Società delle Nazioni” of “Democrazia futurista,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 391.



rhetorically in D'Annunzio's orations at Fiume.<sup>4</sup> Carlo Emilio Gadda poked fun at the fascist era in his novel *Eros e Priapo*, when he described it as the time in which "tutto era, allora, maschio e Mavorte: e insino . . . la virile vulva della donna italiana."<sup>5</sup> The virility Fascism attributed to women was not a masculine attitude or an injunction to invade the male sphere of action,<sup>6</sup> but rather the steadfast stoicism of a mother – assimilated to the image of Mother Italy – who endures tremendous sacrifices for the nation.

The Italian case confirms George Mosse's observations about nationalism more generally, and its association with the ideal of manliness.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, at an international level, cosmopolitanism was often depicted as a feminine attitude, as attested to by the prospected readership of American journals that fueled wanderlust and the desire for exotica such as *Cosmopolitan* or *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* – magazines in which writer Annie Vivanti published several short stories that relied on the very "armchair cosmopolitanism" that Marinetti had mocked in the 1913 essay/manifesto "Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà."

Moving away from the gendered representations of D'Annunzio and Marinetti, in this final chapter, I intend to let female voices speak for themselves, by focusing on the works of two women who were writing in the early twentieth century: Annie Vivanti and Amelia Pincherle

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the Fascist ideal of virility, see Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Eros e Priapo* (Milano: Garzanti, 1967), 73.

<sup>6</sup> See the 1921 statute of the Gruppo Femminile Fascista Romano, which advises particularly against this, claiming, as Mussolini would repeat, that work masculinizes women and robs their husbands of their virility. See also Benito Mussolini, "Macchina e donna," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel (Firenze: La Fenice, 1961): 310-311, originally in *Il popolo d'Italia*, 266 (August 31, 1934), 21.

<sup>7</sup> See George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).

Rosselli. Their writing provides a counter-discourse to the celebratory nationalist rhetoric of D'Annunzio and Marinetti. More importantly, it shows the commitments of female writers at this time to be complex, varied and situated at different points of the trajectory between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Annie Vivanti, I argue, expressed a uniquely modern notion of linguistic and cultural identity as “performative,” fluid and socially constructed, rather than ontological, which she elaborated thanks to her extraordinarily nomadic upbringing and existence between four countries. Conversely, Amelia Pincherle Rosselli upheld a brand of patriotism derived from Giuseppe Mazzini's political philosophy, which rejected the bombastic nationalism of those proclaiming the primacy of Italy over other nations. I argue that her reflections on solidarity among nations and on the dangers of nationalism in many ways anticipate current debates on cosmopolitanism.

Both Vivanti and Rosselli were born at the time of Italy's unification – Vivanti in 1866 and Rosselli in 1870 – from patriotic families with strong international connections. Annie Vivanti was born in London, to Anselmo Vivanti, an Italian exile of Jewish descent, and Anna Lindau, a German writer whose family was also of Jewish origin but had converted to Protestantism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, sister of writers Paul and Rudolf Lindau. Vivanti's father was a follower of Giuseppe Mazzini, and had fled to London after the 1851 anti-Austrian uprisings in Mantova and the subsequent brutal repression on the part of authorities. From London, Anselmo continued his activity against the Hapsburg Monarchy, hosting other Italian refugees, and was part of the welcoming committee for Garibaldi during his visit to London in 1864. Vivanti's mother, Anna Lindau, was equally connected to international political and literary personalities – such as Karl Marx, Klaus Groth, and Karl Schonhardt – who frequented her salon in London where she welcomed a wide array of political exiles. A major

silk trader, president of the “Società delle Patrie Battaglie” and of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of New York, Anselmo Vivanti led his family from England to Switzerland, Italy and the United States.

Growing up speaking Italian, French, English and German, in a somewhat itinerant household imbued with politics and culture from across Europe and the US, afforded Vivanti a truly multilingual and multicultural upbringing. She was one of the few Italian writers who could directly address an international audience, which she did by publishing articles in Italian- and English-language newspapers. Her fame as a writer began in Italy, where she published a poetry collection, *Lirica*, in 1890 with the leading Milanese publisher Treves, thanks to the patronage of Giosué Carducci, who wrote the preface to the collection. The relationship between the older, established poet and the young Vivanti caused great scandal in Italy and she later struggled to extricate herself from under the shadow of her male protector. *Lirica* was extremely successful, reprinted seven times between 1890 and 1921, and inspired many imitators in the following years, generating the phenomenon of “vivantismo.”

The young female poets imitating Vivanti reproduced the most striking features of her poems. Among these are her claims to innovation, which are programmatically stated more than actually formally practiced, as shown by the traditional prosody and rhyme scheme of “Nuova”: “Io voglio un nuovo canto audace e forte/Disdegnoso di regole e di rime,/voglio un amor che rida della morte/ voglio del genio la pazzia sublime!”<sup>8</sup> (151). Also, many of Vivanti’s poems thematize her nomadic existence, for example “Iddio, che vuoi da me?,” in which the title question is repeated by the tormented poetic voice only to restate her difficult fate: “Dobbiamo,

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<sup>8</sup> “I want song courageous and strong/scornful of rule and rhyme/I want a love that laughs at death/I want of genius the madness sublime!” Translation is mine.

al buio, sulla terra immonda/brancolando vagare!”<sup>9</sup> (202). Again in “Io sono stanca...” the poet addresses her husband John and asks to be saved from her restless wandering: “Io sono tanto stanca di vagare:/Legami l’ali, e chiamami al riposo”<sup>10</sup> (203). In 1891, Vivanti published her first novel, *Marion artista di caffè concerto*, with considerable success, and devoted herself primarily to fiction in the following decades.

After her marriage to Irish lawyer and *Sinn Féin* activist John Chartres, in 1892, Vivanti lived almost exclusively between England and America for the next two decades. Her Italian success was echoed by the favorable reception given to her novels and short stories in English, such as “Perfect,” published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1896, the play *The Ruby Ring: Comedy in One Act* (1900), the novels *The Devourers*, published in 1910 and *The Outrage*, published in 1915 by A.A. Knopf.<sup>11</sup> *The Devourers*, based partly on Vivanti’s own experience as mother of a child prodigy – her daughter Vivien who became an international celebrity at a young age as a violinist –, was translated into Italian the following year by Vivanti herself, who went on to achieve continued success in Italy until the 1930s, with novels such as *Circe* (1912), *Naja tripudians* (1920), and *Mea culpa* (1927), short story collections such as *Zingaresca* (1918) and *Gioia* (1921), plays such as *L’invasore* (1915) and *Le bocche inutile* (1918), children’s books including *Sua altezza* (1924) and somewhat fictionalized travelogues such as *Terra di Cleopatra* (1925). Vivanti spent the last decade of her life in Italy, having supported the Italian cause during the First World War by writing articles for journals such as *The Times* and *Westminster Gazette* and the Italian nationalist publications *L’idea nazionale* and *Il popolo d’Italia*. In 1941, she

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<sup>9</sup> “We must, in darkness, on the foul earth/groping, wander.” Translation is mine.

<sup>10</sup> “I am tired of wandering/tie up my wings, and call me to rest.” Translation is mine.

<sup>11</sup> Annie Vivanti, *The Ruby Ring: Comedy in One Act* (San Antonio, Maverick-Clarke litho. Co, 1900); Annie Vivanti, *The Devourers* (London: Heinemann, 1910 and New York: Putnam’s Sons 1910); Annie Vivanti, *The Outrage* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1918).

nevertheless was targeted by Fascism's Anglophobe turn and was sentenced to house arrest in Arezzo. Thanks to the intercession of Mussolini himself, Vivanti was able to return to her house in Turin, where she died in 1942, following her daughter's suicide and her own conversion to Catholicism.

Certainly Vivanti's placement at the crossroads of multiple languages and cultures contributed to her success and she made the most of it, as her first self-presentation to Carducci, in letter form, shows: "Non sono italiana, ma profonda ammiratrice del Vostro linguaggio e di Voi, il più forte dei suoi poeti."<sup>12</sup> Her cultural and linguistic hybridity also led critics to view her as an unscrupulous opportunist, who profited from her capacity to transform into the kind of author that her readers wanted. Several of these scholarly readings are heavily gendered, conflating cultural hybridity with allegedly feminine seductiveness. Gabriele Gabrieli commented: "V'è Annie Vivanti scrittrice originale ed illustre e la madre soavissima di una bambina prodigiosa, e v'è pure una Annie Vivanti italiana e una Annie Vivanti inglese . . . Mrs. Chartres."<sup>13</sup> Even recently, Carlo Caporossi, the Italian critic who edited several works by Vivanti for republication in the mid-2000s, described her in these terms:

Con la volontà più determinata all'autoaffermazione e con una scala di valori personali spregiudicati, Annie riesce ad entrare in ogni mentalità, ad incontrare i gusti di ogni pubblico, a prevenirne ed assecondarne le aspettative, a proporsi con sapiente adeguatezza in tutti i contesti. Laddove sarà possibile – in Inghilterra, in Italia o in

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<sup>12</sup> Autograph letter, Bologna, Casa Carducci; Archivio Corrispondenti, Cart. SXVI, 65 (33027-22074), now in Annie Vivanti. *Tutte le poesie. Edizione critica con antologia di testi tradotti*, ed. Caporossi (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2006), 10. "I am not Italian, but I deeply admire Your language and You, the strongest of its poets." Translation is mine.

<sup>13</sup> Gabriele Gabrieli, "La vita di Annie Vivanti," *Il secolo*, undated. "There is an Annie Vivanti who is an original and celebrated author and the most pleasing mother of a prodigiously talented girl, and there are also an Italian Annie Vivanti and an English Annie Vivanti . . . Mrs. Chartres." Translation is mine.

Germania – sfrutterà le ascendenze familiari per sentirsi parte di quel popolo tra cui vive e per cui scrive, cogliendone se non gli aspetti più profondi certamente quelli più evidenti e perciò riuscendo a conquistarne i favori. Altrove saprà indossare i panni e calarsi nei ruoli che volta per volta le si presenteranno e che lei riuscirà a rendersi congeniali.<sup>14</sup>

Vivanti's own letters and essays confirm the critical view that "Vivanti was quick to exploit the charm of her hybrid cultural identity to gain public visibility and boost her literary career."<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, however, I aim to break away from indictments of Vivanti's opportunism and from the prejudiced readings that view her linguistic and cultural instability as a symptom of feminine vanity. Instead, through close readings of her literary works, I aim to explore the notion of linguistic and cultural identity that Vivanti's uniquely transnational biography afforded her. In this perspective, her understanding of what I will call "the performative nature of nationality" emerges as a distinctly modern view of identity as shifting and socially constructed. Her writing introduces a transnational dimension to the provincialism of Italian literature in the early decades of the twentieth century. This explains the recent interest in her work, shown by the publication of the volume *Annie Chartres Vivanti. Transnational Politics, Identity and Culture*, edited by Sharon Wood and Erica Moretti in 2016, which represents the most comprehensive attempt to date at exploring "the impact of Vivanti's diverse

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<sup>14</sup> "With the most determined desire to assert herself and an unscrupulous value system, Annie is able to enter into any mentality, appeal to the taste of every audience, anticipate and humor their expectations, enter with the appropriate manner into every context. Where possible – in England, Italy or Germany – she will exploit her family ties in order to feel a sense of belonging to the population in which she lives and for which she is writing, grasping if not their most profound at least their most apparent traits, and therefore succeeding in winning them over. Elsewhere, she will manage to play the roles that gradually present themselves to her and that she will be able to make congenial to herself." Carlo Caporossi, "Introduzione," *Annie Vivanti. Tutte le poesie: edizione critica con antologia di testi tradotti*, ed. Carlo Caporossi (Firenze: Olshki, 2006), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Mariarosa Mettifogo, "Annie Vivanti's Transatlantic Crossings," in *Annie Chartres Vivanti. Transnational politics, Identity, and Culture*, ed. Sharon Wood and Erica Moretti (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), 68.

cultural and linguistic influences on her writing.”<sup>16</sup> Despite their international success, after Vivanti’s death her works were largely neglected by scholars as a result of the secondary status assigned to supposedly less significant genres, such as the *feuilleton*, in which many of them were classified.<sup>17</sup> The recent emphasis on transnational and multilingual identities, particularly in post-colonial contexts, makes a re-evaluation of Vivanti’s *oeuvre* timely, particularly as it seeks to trouble the characterization of Vivanti as the capricious young muse of Carducci,<sup>18</sup> in favor of a critical consideration of her existential and cultural nomadism.

Playwright, emancipationist and journalist Amelia Pincherle Rosselli has also not received the scholarly recognition her many literary and political achievements demand. While Vivanti’s name has been overshadowed by that of Carducci, Rosselli is most often remembered as being the mother of antifascist martyrs Carlo and Nello Rosselli – who were assassinated by the Fascist regime in 1927 – and grandmother of the better-known post-Second World War poet Amelia Rosselli. Daughter of Giacomo Pincherle Moravia and Emilia Capon, Pincherle Rosselli was raised in a patriotic family of non-practicing Jews, whose grandparents had participated in

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<sup>16</sup> Sharon Wood and Erica Moretti, eds, *Annie Chartres Vivanti: Transnational Politics, Identity and Culture* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), XVI.

<sup>17</sup> The works of many Italian women writers active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suffered the same treatment and belong to what Antonia Arslan defines a “galassia sommersa” of overlooked female writers. See Antonia Arslan and Saveria Chemotti, *La galassia sommersa: suggestione sulla scrittura femminile italiana* (Padova: Il poligrafo, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> As late as 1991, Vivanti’s name circulated primarily in works on Carducci, where she is recalled in terms such as these: “Carducci viaggiava con una valigia dove era un paio di mutande di Annie Vivanti, con giri di merletti e volti a insalata. Ogni tanto apriva la valigia, tirava fuori le mutande, le annusava e se ne inebriava. Questo è feticcio.” Carlo Emilio Gadda to Giulio Cattaneo, quoted in Giulio Cattaneo, *Il grande Lombardo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1991), 40. “Carducci traveled with a suitcase containing a pair of underwear belonging to Annie Vivanti, embellished with lace and embroidered loops. Every now and then he would open the suitcase, smell the underwear and become exhilarated. This is a fetish.” Translation is mine.

the “glorious” wars of Venetian independence in 1848<sup>19</sup> and supported Giuseppe Mazzini. The family of Amelia’s husband Giuseppe “Joe” Rosselli, whom she married in 1892, was similarly wealthy, Jewish and patriotic. Joe’s mother, Henrietta Nathan, was English, and sister to Ernesto Nathan, mayor of Rome between 1907 and 1913, supporter and friend of Mazzini. The Rossellis had moved to London from Livorno, where they had invested in mercury mines, to open a money-changing office within the City’s Stock Exchange. In London they had met and befriended the exiled Mazzini and supported him financially until his death. Mazzini even died, in Pisa, where he had gone with the pseudonym of Mr. Brown, at the home of Giannetta Nathan and her husband Pellegrino Rosselli.

Amelia Pincherle Rosselli was heavily influenced by both of the families’ participation in the Risorgimento, and by her Jewish background, although she and her immediate family were non-practicing. Undoubtedly, the strong international family ties and the sense of belonging to a populace that transcended national boundaries impacted her particular brand of patriotism, as did the admiration for Mazzini’s action and political-philosophical reflection. Certainly, a conception of the fatherland such as he elaborated in *I Doveri dell’Uomo*, seems congenial to Rosselli’s own understanding: “la patria non è un territorio; il territorio non ne è che la base. La Patria è l’idea che sorge su quello; è il pensiero d’amore, il senso di comunione che stringe in uno tutti i figli di quel territorio.”<sup>20</sup> Despite being remembered mostly for her familial ties, Amelia Pincherle was a successful playwright, activist and journalist in her own right. She wrote a total of seven plays

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<sup>19</sup> Many members of the Pincherle and Capon families as well as their Levi relations had participated in Manin’s short-lived Republic, against the Austrians, and had fled to France in exile.

<sup>20</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *I Doveri dell’Uomo* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1943), 63. “Country is not a mere zone of territory. The true Country is the Idea to which it gives birth; it is the Thought of Love, the sense of communion which unites in one all the sons of that territory.” Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1862). The translator’s name is not listed.



for the stage between 1898 and 1924,<sup>21</sup> from her initial success with *Anima*, to a wide range of material, including two comedies in Venetian dialect, one-act tragic monologues and the historical and patriotic dramas *San Marco* and *Emma Liona*. Five out of seven of these plays feature female protagonists and may be viewed as the literary manifestation of Rosselli's activism in favor of the emancipationist movement, which from Europe had reached Italy in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>22</sup> As an activist, Rosselli collaborated with the "Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane" and other feminist organizations, published articles for various journals including the prestigious *Marzocco*, presided over the literary section of the Florentine chapter of the international feminist association "Lyceum," and worked as editor for publishing houses Bemporad and Le Monnier.

As a playwright, Rosselli was influenced by contemporary European theater – in particular the realistic drama of ideas practiced by Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw – which she had most likely grown to know particularly well during the initial years of her marriage to Joe, which occurred in 1892, when the couple lived in Vienna in order to support his musical career. In Vienna, Amelia was exposed to the poetic and theatrical production of Hauptmann, Rilke and Wedekind as well as to Freud's psychoanalysis. Here, Rosselli wrote her first novella – *Anima* – which she subsequently rewrote in dramatic form. She submitted the play to a playwriting competition organized by Domenico Lanza's Teatro d'Arte in Turin and won the first prize. The play was staged more than a hundred times and achieved great critical success.

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<sup>21</sup> Several of Rosselli's plays were only published well after their stage production. For details, see the chapter titled "Teatro italiano, coscienza europea" in *Una donna nella storia. vita e letteratura di Amelia Pincherle Rosselli: tragico il tempo, chiaro il dovere*, ed. Giovanna Amato (Ospedaletto: Pacini, 2017). A complete list of Rosselli's written works appears in the "Bibliografia delle opere" in the same volume.

<sup>22</sup> See Monica Leigh Streifer, "Against bourgeois realism: Amelia Pincherle Rosselli's feminist theatre in liberal Italy," *The Italianist* 37, no. 3 (2017): 369-386.

In 1897, Amelia and Joe Rosselli returned to Italy and lived in Rome until their separation. Amelia – who in the meantime had had three children: Aldo, Carlo and Nello – settled in Florence in 1903. Here she participated in a very lively cultural life “spiccatamente internazionale,” as she describes it in her *Memorie*, edited posthumously by Marina Calloni (121).<sup>23</sup> Her final play, *Emma Liona*, was published in 1924, and after that date Rosselli devoted herself primarily to her family and to anti-fascist political activism. Her firstborn son, Aldo, had died in the First World War, while in 1937 Carlo and Nello were both assassinated by the Fascist regime in France. Rosselli had spent the late 1920s and early 1930s traveling between southern Italy and France to care for her children and grandchildren during Carlo and Nello’s exiles and imprisonments, due to their activity within the anti-fascist organization “Giustizia e Libertà.”

Following her sons’ death, Rosselli spent the final years of her own life in exile, moving from Paris to Switzerland in 1937, where she continued to write children’s books but devoted her time mostly to editing her sons’ writings, then to England in 1939 and finally to the United States in 1940, where Rosselli and her family settled in Larchmont, NY. During her time in the United States, Rosselli continued to write articles and essays, especially on the topic of education, and sending contributions to *La settimana dei ragazzi*, founded by her longtime friend Laura Orvieto in 1945. She wrote many letters to fellow political exiles in the US, was nominated president of the “Committee for Relief to Victims of Nazi-Fascism in Italy,” contributed to the “Women’s Division” of the “Mazzini Society,” based in New York, to the “Emergency Relief for Children of Italy” and was president of the “Italian Relief Workshop.” In 1946, Rosselli returned to Italy and continued to be involved in the country’s political and intellectual life until her death in 1954. Aside from publications of the *Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli*, interested primarily in the

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<sup>23</sup> Amelia Rosselli, *Memorie*, ed. Marina Calloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).

political activity of the family, Rosselli's work has been largely forgotten. Only the recent interest in female playwrights has led to her partial rediscovery, spearheaded by Katherine Kelly's inclusion of Rosselli in her 1996 volume *Modern Drama by Women 1880-1930s*.<sup>24</sup>

What makes Vivanti and Rosselli valuable to our discourse – more than other, better-known women writers of this time such as Sibilla Aleramo and Matilde Serao – is their interstitial placement at the crossroads of multiple languages and cultures. Their geographical dislocations and displacements led them to conceive of national identity in ways that anticipate contemporary modes of belonging. Vivanti's poem "Ego" summarizes and anticipates contemporary conception of identity – both national and otherwise – as fragmentary and fluid:<sup>25</sup>

Del mio paese mi chiedi? Io ti rispondo:  
Non ho paese: è mia tutta la terra!  
La mia patria qual è? Mamma è tedesca  
Babbo italiano, io nacqui in Inghilterra.

The difficulty in indicating a singular mode of belonging expressed by the verse "Non ho paese; è mia tutta la terra" anticipates recent conceptions in post-colonial and migrant authors, such as Italian-Somali author Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono*.<sup>26</sup>

As was the case for Emanuel Carnevali, this interstitial position contributed to the neglect of Vivanti and Rosselli on the part of literary criticism, in addition to the marginalization they endured as women, which led many of their works to be classified as *feuilletons* and *romanzi*

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<sup>24</sup> Katherine Kelly, *Modern Drama by Women 1880-1930s* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Annie Vivanti, "Ego," *Tutte le poesie: edizione critica con antologia di testi tradotti*, ed. Carlo Caporossi (Firenze: Olshki, 2006), 149. "You ask me about my country? I answer:/I have none: the entire earth is mine!/What is my homeland? Mother is German/Papa Italian, I was born in England." Translation is mine.

<sup>26</sup> Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono* (Milano, Rizzoli, 2010).

*rosa*. I argue that both Rosselli and Vivanti were wrestling in different ways with ideas of national belonging, at a time when the threat of totalitarian models of national community loomed large, and that they anticipated conceptions of community both beyond and coexistent with nationhood that are emerging powerfully today in the wake of globalization, mass migrations and technological advancements. Vivanti and Rosselli prove Italian literature's engagement with "the dual question of community and cosmopolitanism," which has been defined one of the traits of "international modernism."<sup>27</sup>

Through analyses of several of Rosselli's most famous plays, written both in Venetian dialect and in Italian, and her fictional piece *Fratelli minori*, I argue that her international ties, Jewish-Venetian roots and her experience as a woman led her to develop a particular brand of patriotism which is immune from both the *macho* myth of colonial conquest<sup>28</sup> and the belief in the primacy of the Italian nation over others. In tracking common threads throughout Vivanti's corpus of poetry, short and novel-length fiction, and autobiographical writing, I point toward her understanding of the performative nature of nationality in opposition to essentialist conceptions of race, culture and nationality that were the foundation of aggressively militaristic and colonial enterprises.

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<sup>27</sup> Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>28</sup> See Stefano Jossa, "Matria. L'Italia femmina dei poeti maschi," in *Una. D'arme, di lingua, d'altare, di memorie, di sangue, di cor* (Palermo: :due punti, 2013): 193-218; Matteo Di Gesù, *Una nazione di carta. tradizione letteraria e identità italiana* (Roma: Carocci, 2013).

## **Annie Vivanti and the performativity of language, nationality and race.**

Vivanti's cosmopolitan biography seems to have afforded her an acute attentiveness to the constellations of cultural, aesthetic and political references that accompany each crystallized image of nationhood and a disillusioned awareness of the degree to which these clusters are conventional. Her fiction, in particular, is riddled with characters that embody specific nationalities, bordering on the stereotypical, despite Vivanti's first-hand and thorough knowledge of these nationalities. Rather than imagining a superficial understanding of national character on the part of such a learned and experienced traveler and expat, I argue that her depictions of national 'types' lead us to grapple with the degree to which any representation of nationhood is by necessity a performance. It is not a coincidence, I would contend, that such an understanding emerged in a woman writer, who was by necessity particularly aware of the performance of social behaviors connected to gender. In fact, my use of the concept of "performativity" is informed by feminist theory and in particular by Judith Butler's work on gender and her definition of "performativity" as "the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains."<sup>29</sup> I argue that in Vivanti's fiction, nationality is an "act," not part of one's inherent identity, but something that one *does*. Culture and language are, in this perspective, manners by which one's identity can be constructed and exhibited.

The performativity of nationhood emerges as a thread particularly in the series of short stories that Vivanti published while in the US in the 1890s and that were translated into Italian and arranged in the collection *Racconti Americani* by Carlo Caporossi in 2005.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Annie Vivanti, *Racconti americani*, ed. and trans. Carlo Caporossi (Palermo: Sellerio, 2005).

protagonists of these stories are often Italians, seen by the perspective of Anglo-Saxon characters, such as Vivanti's readers would have been. The geographical distance favored the emergence of traits of *italianità* as it was conceptualized not just within but also outside of the peninsula. Rather than a critique of 'Italianness' per se, the stories reveal the rift between identity and layers of appearance of which language and nationality make up two of the most relevant traits, not any more essential than taste in music or dress.

The story titled "Perfect," published under the name of Anita Vivanti Chartres in *Cosmopolitan*, in 1896,<sup>31</sup> represents *italianità* from the traditionally Anglo-American perspective that associated it with its literary and artistic history. The story's epigraph is a quote from Dante's fifth canto of the *Inferno* – "Amor che al cuor gentil ratto s'apprende" – so famous that perhaps it would have been familiar to the most learned among the magazine's readers. The epigraph immediately establishes the cultural context of the story and promises readers an experience connected to romance, high art and poetry – elements that most would immediately associate with Italy in the late 1800s. The first character to be introduced is a German singer, who has come to Italy to study opera and who we find singing in Italian the aria "ma d'ogni re maggior, maggior il trovatore" (185) from Giuseppe Verdi's *Il trovatore*. While the singer is described as a blonde-haired blue-eyed German man, the female protagonist, Francesca, has the stereotypically Italian dark hair and eyes. The text explicitly frames their encounter as that between a Latin and a Teutonic, following the stark opposition that D'Annunzio and others at the time had been establishing: "with the dark misery of Reni's *Ecce Homo* still in her retina, she turned and saw him. He stood before her in his fair Teutonic strength, young and blonde-haired as the archangel Michael" (186). Not only are the southern and Germanic characters opposed,

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<sup>31</sup> Anita Vivanti Chartres, "Perfect," with illustrations by W. Granville-Smith, *Cosmopolitan* 22 (Dec 22 1896): 185-200.

but they are also presented through the filter of artwork. Through the Milanese setting in which the two characters meet, anchored to specific architectural elements with which readers would have been acquainted, such as the Napoleon in front of Palazzo Brera, or the Madonnina at the top of the Duomo, readers are also offered the chance to vicariously tour artistic landmarks of Italy while sitting comfortably at home. The ekphrasis of Botticelli's *Sacra Famiglia* provides a similar kind of entertainment and instruction.

The text is riddled with words in both Italian and German that are quotations from operatic arias, German poetry and other literary works. The impression is that language – when it is distilled in artistic form – becomes transferable. No longer a genuine marker of identity, it becomes one device among an array of possibilities, chosen by virtue of its expressive potential. When the German singer is playing the part of a romantic lover, he uses Italian words – “Ti adoro” – in his best operatic Italian, as if performing love means performing ‘Italianness’ to some extent: “he strode across the room after his hat in his fourth-act-Fernando manner” (187). Even Francesca often uses German words and quotations, for example “Dess [sic] das Herz voll ist” (“Wes das Herz Voll ist” for the evangelical: “Out of the fullness of the mouth...the heart speaks”). The characters represent the multilingual cosmopolitan educated upper class to which cultural and linguistic differences seem to have become simply accessories from which to pick and choose in accordance with the identity that one seeks to perform.

It is not a coincidence, perhaps, that many of Vivanti's characters are actors and that she herself began her career in theatrical performances, as she recalls in the semi-autobiographical *Marion artista di caffè concerto*.<sup>32</sup> In “Perfect,” literary genres and artistic authors becomes codes for human behavior that seems to preserve nothing original or authentic: “You have no

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<sup>32</sup> Annie Vivanti, *Marion: artista di caffè-concerto* (Milano: Galli di C. Chiesa e F. Guindani, 1891).

more originality than Mascagni,” “You have no more originality than Miss Braddon,”<sup>33</sup> “I do not mean that I am cruel in the fantastic penny-novelette style” (187). Even the romance between the two main characters is presented as their acting out a scene from a well-known literary source: the episode of Paolo and Francesca from Dante’s *Inferno*. Just as in the *Commedia* the two lovers are inspired by reading about the adventures of Lancelot and Guinevere, Francesca and Karl’s affair is spurred by their reading of the fifth canto of *Inferno* “on the shores of Rimini” (187). The very setting of Italy seems to demand a love affair, as does its language, although in quoting the canto Vivanti chooses to translate it into English for the benefit of her American readers, whom she trusts to know the reference well enough to pick up on the subtle “And in its leaves we read no more that day.”

In this framework, language and nationality represent simply two of the most vivid roles that the characters play, costumes of sorts that they can either wear or discard on a whim, even combining traits from one or the other. When Karl declares his love to Francesca, he conflates her with the refined cultural milieu of Europe:

I love you because . . . you paint, strongly and gladly, as Raphael would have painted if he had never met La Fornarina; because you sing like an Italian seraph who had studied under a German archangel; because you ride a horse with the wild grace of a Walkyrie; because you quote Lenau with an adorable Italian accent and accompany “Ich grolle nicht” with the Weltschmerz of genius; because your hair is brown. (187).

In the character of Francesca, Vivanti seems to be illustrating the point that by the late nineteenth century “The world is so small” (191), at least for a specific section of the upper class to whom tourism, the telegraph and an abundance of transferable cultural materials are readily available.

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<sup>33</sup> Popular English novelist of the Victorian era: Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915).



She embodies the cosmopolitan “type” which Marinetti had mocked in “Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà Parole in Libertà” (1913). Her goodbye to Karl Helmuth shows that her departure from Italy is temporary “Shall I ever see you again? – Why not? The world is so small” (191). This passage seems to reference and directly oppose the trope of migration literature in which the emigrants bid goodbye to their family and friends, knowing that they will never see each other again. Francesca’s husband Jack’s response to her mention of the German admirer, while irritated, confirms that trips to Italy will continue in the future: “She was not fit to go running about the globe alone. Next year they would go together” (192). Whereas for Italians at the opposite end of the socio-economic scale, leaving Italy for the United States meant abandoning their homeland and all they knew definitively, Francesca’s voyage is merely a yearly occurrence, one that contributes to her pleasurable “globe-trotting.”

Vivanti’s story points to one of the consequences of this constant travel in the sense of displacement the protagonist experiences. To Francesca, home and homeland are two separate things that cannot be reconciled:

This is my country!...God knows how deeply Italian I am! – how I have a little piece of my soul in every corner of the land and to every lazzarone on the wayside. God knows how Italy’s sky with blue fingers opens my heart; how her beauty gladdens me; how her heart enraptures me; how her poverty hurts me. I feel like a wild gypsy girl here. I should like to go about with a red handkerchief tied around my head and live on polenta and serenades! But this is not my home. Home is a well-appointed orderly house in a brisk, business-like city, hopelessly comfortable, relentlessly correct. Home is a commonplace, well-conducted household, full of good furniture and superior servants. Home is a very dreadful place. But my kind-voiced husband and my little daughter live there and are waiting for me; and Ribs will bark for joy in his sickly manner when I come back. That is home (189).

Francesca's country is Italy, where she feels like a "wild gypsy girl" and enjoys the beauty of its skies. Her home, however, is the United States, where she lives her everyday life: commonplace, business-like and practical. But once again, rather than dealing with the theme in dramatic terms, such as would have been for Italians displaced by forced migration or political exile, Vivanti's light treatment conveys the message that Italy and the US have become superficial signifiers of specific cultural and linguistic traits – which can be easily recreated and transferred. Since Francesca is called to live her everyday life in the United States, she becomes the domestic, pragmatic common-sense mother that this environment demands. When she wants to experience the romance of Italy, she goes into her studio and paints.

Yet the environment seems to influence which traits characters are able to perform successfully. The failure of Francesca's affair with Karl seems to prove that a romantic affair requires a setting such as the Italian coast or the "lungarno," whereas in the United States it appears out of place and even ridiculous. Whereas in the first part of the story, when Francesca and Karl are in Italy, he appears to be the one madly in love, while she treats the affair as a temporary distraction, after her return to America, she thinks increasingly about Karl, in an attempt to recreate around herself the romantic environment that Italy no longer provides and that she can only recreate through her painting. But upon his arrival, he no longer recognizes the object of his desire in her "graceful matronliness": "Where was the wild, free, unconventional, Italian "Francesca da Rimini"? Was it for this good wife and excellent housekeeper that he had tossed through the anguish of white nights?" (198). Not only has Francesca moved from an exotic to a domestic setting, but she has ceased to be "Italian" and become "American." Karl himself attributes his infatuation to his German character:

It was the German dreamer's blood flowing too romantically through his veins. "Ach ja!" Only a poet, an Arcadist, a Chevalier Geoffrey, would be capable of mediaeval romanticism such as his! And Karl Helmuth walked up and down his two-and-a-half-dollar room in the Metropole, reciting aloud what he remembered of Heine, Lenau and Petrarca, melting in complacent melancholy as he applied their rending measures to himself. "Mit schwarzen Segein segelt mein Schiff Wohl über das wilde Meer" Yes; he would certainly go back second-class. It would save him thirty dollars. "Mit schwarzen Segein segelt mein Schiff Wohl über das wilde Meer" (199).

As is often the case in Vivanti's characters, the romantic impetus that led Karl to visit Francesca – exemplified by his quotes from Heine and other lyric poets – is contrasted with the petty concern over the price of the voyage, which he now views in utilitarian terms. In an effort to prolong the romance of his act, he recites poetry about love, but the two and a half dollar room in the Metropole hotel brings his thoughts back to a pragmatic consideration of the price of the trip. Americanness, embodied by Jack's "brown, every-day, Wall street eyes" who could not understand "the blue things of the soul, the pale things of the spirit" in which Karl's German soul relishes, seems to rub off on the German lover as soon as he sets foot in the United States. The very atmosphere of the harbor where Karl's ship lands makes the feelings and behaviors of Italy impossible to replicate: "suddenly he felt as if someone had walked with loud feet into the sacred chapel of his heart and blown all the candles out" (195). The American Francesca is no longer the enchanting mysterious woman who read Dante, but is merely "an excellent housekeeper" (197) as her husband describes her.

The text plays with opposing representations of 'Italianness,' by contrasting the refined artistic and cultural milieu for which tourists flocked to Italy with the low class immigrant populace that was filling the streets of American cities. Francesca states: "I love . . . all the ragged fruit-sellers and organ-grinders and boot-blacks of the street-corners in New York – not

because they are my countrymen, but because I like them. I like their black faces and homesick eyes” (186). The Italians who perform menial labor in the US are compared to Ribs, the “hideous” dog that Francesca and her American husband own in New York. While in the case of the upper-class protagonists of the new cosmopolitanism, nationhood can be chosen and executed by selecting and performing specific linguistic and cultural attributes, working-class immigrants are confined to a space of ‘Italianness’ that determines their entire life.

Through the story of a love affair that was not meant to last, Vivanti seems to be questioning multiple themes that recur in her writing: the opposition between appearance and essence, particularly as regards language and culture, the transferability of these elements across space and the degree to which human beings are determined by their environment. Her stories often reveal characters to be acting out clichés associated with their nationality, but also pondering what happens when characters are able to move freely between languages and appropriate foreign customs. Is there a genuine core of identity that represents the truth of a person independent from acquired tastes, languages and customs? And what is the relationship between that core and one’s nationality?

The story “En Passant,” published in *The Idler* in 1897,<sup>34</sup> deals with similar questions, in representing another story of unrequited love that follows a similar format, with one character falling in love and then moving on by the time the other one reciprocates. The story is narrated through the diary entries of the two protagonists Viviane and Earle Bright – respectively an author and illustrator. The device allows readers to witness the diversity of their perspectives and the difficulty of communication between sexes. In keeping with the semi-autobiographical casting of Viviane, the woman is described as culturally and linguistically hybrid and offers the

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<sup>34</sup> Vivanti Chartres, “En Passant,” Illustrated by St. Clair Simmons, *The Idler* 11 (February-July 1897): 234-241.

chance to reflect on the extent to which identity and personality are determined by one's nationality: "My father's Italian nerves and my mother's German dreaminess fight in my soul and make me what I am" (234). Viviane identifies the root of her tumultuous character with her culturally mixed background. She is also self-conscious about her "Jew-mouth and . . . nose like the beak of a vulture" (234). Earle Bright also looks toward Viviane's roots in order to analyze her personality:

She tells me her father was an Italian brigand and her mother a German princess . . . Now, her father being an Italian brigand would explain many peculiarities about her – her insolent, sensuous eyes, her warm, mild mouth, her lack of propriety and reserve; while she might have inherited her curving nose, and patrician hands, and dreamy, thoroughbred intellect, from the German princess. (235)

Along with the themes of unrequited love, volatility of romantic feelings and the difficulty for women to be taken seriously as artists and intellectuals, I would argue that the story is dealing with the question of authentic and 'natural' character *vis-à-vis* the acquired traits that are determined by upbringing and, therefore, by one's language and culture. All the characters seem to view each other in light of their nationalities and the inevitable clichés that accompany them. The main opposition seems to be the one between Europeans and Americans, with the former representing refinement, art and sentiment and the latter pragmatism and economic considerations. Viviane's American husband, Jack, recalls Francesca's husband in "Perfect": "Poor Jack, who works so hard all day with his stock and his bonds" (237). Viviane, on the other hand, is an artist and one who is constantly falling in love with different men – all of various European origins – by virtue of her German and Italian roots. As she contemplates declaring her

love to Earle Bright, she imagines turning to the Italian language – the language of romantic love – and saying “Salve, Signore!” in [her] best paternal Italian” (237).

She also frames her declaration as an invitation to leave everything and follow her to Italy, thus conflating romance with the geographical reality of Italy. Earle Bright, on the other hand, fills his diary with quotes from the German lieder tradition, such as “Ich kann’s nicht fassen nicht glauben, / Es hat ein Traum mich berückt” (I cannot believe it. A dream moved me) by Adelbert von Chamisso, as he becomes infatuated as much with the young writer as with the prospect of Italy itself. He conflates her identity with her Italian nationality so much that her physical body and the physical space of Italy become one and the same in his mental representation of her: “Italy and Viviane! Rome – and her mouth! Naples – and her laughter! Venice – and her arms . . . O, my sunshine, my wild bird of passion! To what dazzling lands of joy will you lead me?” (238). In the meantime, Viviane has shifted her interests to a Hungarian musician named Markowsky, while her brief infatuation with Earle Bright has inspired a short story that will be published in the *International*.

The text seems to equate the changeability of Viviane’s feelings with her cultural hybridity. Unable to embrace just one identity, she is constantly performing different nationalities and seeking a romantic partner whose own nationality is suited to hers. One of the final pages of Viviane’s diary suggests that her cultural hybridity makes her an “anima multiforme” such as D’Annunzio’s Foscarina in *Il Fuoco* was defined: an actress whose soul contained many identities and was thus condemned to restless errancy:

My *grande passions* are like those Spanish inns where you find nothing but what you bring with you. My soul, like a huge Gladstone bag, has enough passion...to decorate a palace and live on for a year. I carry it all with me, and unpack it in some dingy hovel –

Bright's studio, for instance – and say: “What a beautiful place! How I should like to live here for ever!” Then, one day, while I am out, a little devil comes and packs the passion, and the tenderness, and the glory, and the joy, all up again. And when I come in and see the desolate, shabby place, I wonder how I ever came. Poor, dingy Spanish inns! (240-241)

In describing the multiplicity of her passions, Viviane uses French, alludes to Spanish inns and mentions a typically British travel item, alluding both to the tendency to conflate specific people and places with elements of her own nature and to the superficially multicultural nature of society in an increasingly economically globalized context. While the text apparently confirms the gendered perception of capriciousness as a feminine trait – exemplified by Verdi's 1851 aria “La donna è mobile” from the opera *Rigoletto* – it indicates the real cause of Viviane's changeability to be her cultural hybridity. Furthermore, her satisfaction in concluding the affair successfully, as opposed to Earle Bright's bewilderment at realizing the emptiness of his existence, shows the restlessness associated with multiculturalism to actually be a resource.

The story in which the performativity of national belonging is explored to the fullest is “Houp-là!” published in *Munsey's Magazine* between October 1897 and March 1898.<sup>35</sup> The protagonist is once again a young woman – Elsie Berman – whose father is the manager of a theater, who insists that the entire household recreate the “atmosphere” of the show that was being staged at the time, a French comedy. The theatrical setting allows performativity to be taken literally, as Elsie, like every member of the family, has to transform from Parisian Coquette to Andalusian *señorita* according to the company's schedule. The text also points toward the superficiality of such transformations, which involve little more than a change in clothes, meals, and the imperfect study of a foreign language.

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<sup>35</sup> Vivanti Chartres, “Houp-là!” *Munsey's Magazine* 18, (Oct-Mar 1897-1898): 25-32.

When the story opens, the family is living as French, as the text pokes fun at the father's grasp of the language: "Good...ibien, bon, bien. My farm – that's wife, you know, in French – my onfong – that's you, child – come and embrace your pair." 'Pair' is French for me, you know. Supper ready?" (26). The man's attempt to breathe in the authentic atmosphere of France results in him calling himself a "pair" and his wife a "farm." The superficiality of cultural appropriations is underscored by the fact that the author of "The Parisian Coquette" is actually a German, who is ready to sue the Bermans for appropriating his work. Of course, the German playwright himself is appropriating French culture, which – reduced to a few superficial linguistic and aesthetic traits – has become easily transferable and reproducible. Once again, the core of the story is the romance, this time between Elsie and a German engineer who visits the Bermans and falls in love with what appears to him as a "Spanish señorita."

Their encounter causes Elsie to realize "the absurdity of her Andalusia costume and of her mother's mantilla" (27), whereas it is precisely the colorful Spanish atmosphere that seduces Herr Müller, who has "a methodical German soul, beautiful German ayes, and a dreadful German accent," is "used to 'refined' receptions [with girls] quietly accomplished, tastefully dressed . . . mostly German" (27). The individuality of the two characters is secondary to the cultural "atmospheres" they represent. The lack of communication between the two lovers – a constant trope in Vivanti's fiction – leads Elsie to grow more and more ashamed of her extravagant household and to decide to perform an identity that she believes Herr Müller with his "fair Teutonic face" (29) must find attractive: a demure and sensible German Fräulein, who whispers to him "Auf Wiedersehen" (29). Herr Müller, instead, is tired of German girls, like his sisters, and is attracted precisely to the exotic atmosphere of the Berman household and the "little Houp-là" – as Elsie's father affectionately calls her. In preparation for the German man's return,



Elsie prepares to show herself to him “as she really was, as she always had been at heart” (29), although her pledge for authenticity results in nothing more than the umpteenth transformation into a foreign self, this time a German “gentle, domestic, well-bred girl, in quiet surroundings, in a tidy house” (30).

Like in “Perfect,” the long awaited reunion is disappointing: “Was this the ‘little Houp-là’ he had travelled three thousand miles to marry – this dirty, ugly edition of his home busy bees?” (32). In this case, the ending is apparently less tragic, since Herr Müller marries Elsie anyway “because he was a prudent German, who thought it might be cheaper in the end” (32) again justifying his behavior with his origin. The text reveals the truth beyond appearances by informing readers that – as Elsie’s own father suggests – Herr Müller has his business and his “butterfly elements outside” of his household. The cynicism of the ending lies in Elsie’s exclamation: “Keeping up the Houp-là would have been an awful strain” (32). While the girl is alluding to the effort of keeping up an inauthentic appearance, readers know that the truth about her family life is just as much a façade, which will require its own effort to maintain.

It is not coincidental that the short stories in which Vivanti most explicitly addresses the practice of cultural stereotyping and reflects on the performativity of national belonging were written and set in the United States. As other writings show – such as those collected in *Zingaresca* – Vivanti seemed to consider the superficiality of cultural understanding to be a distinctly Anglo-American trait. As Mariarosa Mettifogo<sup>36</sup> has noted, a great part of Vivanti’s literary production in the late 1890s, when she resided mostly in the United States, can be read as belonging to the genre of transatlantic literature, “her original contribution to the so-called international theme” (65) and the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century tradition of American

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<sup>36</sup> Mariarosa Mettifogo, “Annie Vivanti’s Transatlantic Crossings,” in *Annie Chartres Vivanti. Transnational politics, Identity, and Culture*, 65.

authors traveling to or residing in Italy, and writing about the country and the Italian people. Vivanti's uniquely hybrid biography positioned her to regard with a critical eye the stereotyping of Italy and its inhabitants that transatlantic literature helped to promote. Among the cosmopolitan array of characters that populate her works, Italians feature prominently and, as her short stories illustrate, are not immune from mockery based on national stereotypes. However, Vivanti's first-hand knowledge of Italy and the relentless pride she maintained in her Italian roots led her to develop characters that push back against the most striking cultural prejudices that reduced Italians to a position of backwardness. Furthermore, I argue that by showing the mistreatment of Italians – particularly in American immigrant communities – Vivanti is pointing toward the dehumanizing extremes of cultural stereotyping and performance.

The short story "A Fad," published in *Leslie's Weekly Illustrated* in 1899,<sup>37</sup> serves to illustrate this point. The story follows two American tourists in Naples, a mother and daughter named Mrs. and Lucy Van Cleef, who embody the trope of the American dilettantes, hungry for what they perceive to be the typical Italian experience: romance, high art and colorful peasants. Vivanti plays with the role that Italy and Italians had come to play in the imagination of many Americans and English travellers thanks to their depictions in Grand Tour literature. The story follows the Van Cleefs' journey back to the United States, where they have brought young Cicillo, their guide, as something between a pet and a souvenir. The contrast between Cicillo and his family on the one hand and the refined art the women admire in museums and palaces on the other mirrors the struggle of many Anglo-American travelers in Italy to reconcile the reality they observed, particularly in the South, with the imagined homeland of Leonardo da Vinci. As Henry

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<sup>37</sup> Vivanti Chartres, "A Fad," *Leslie's Weekly Illustrated* 88 Jan-Jun (Feb 9, 1899): 105-106; (Feb 16, 1899): 125-126; (Feb 23, 1899): 145-146.

James would state in *Italian Hours* in 1909, he observed a “perfect separateness . . . between the fecundity of the great artistic period and the vulgarity . . . of the genius of today.”<sup>38</sup>

Vivanti’s own cultural nomadism allows her to shift perspectives, adapting many of the tropes of transatlantic literature in order to reveal their shortcomings. In “A Fad,” for example, the very title points to the superficiality and frivolous intentions of many of the Anglo-American intellectuals who were embarking on Italian tours, despite their claims to intellectual curiosity and professed desire to “gain access . . . to a buried life” thanks to Italy, “a psychic topography of extremes, an ‘other’ that strangely mirrored aspects of themselves [and that] brought to the surface deep-seated fears and desires.”<sup>39</sup> In her story, in fact, Vivanti deliberately leaves her female characters unchanged during the course of their visit, and saves the sensual awakening and tragic outcome that will trigger a revelation for the second part of the story, which takes place in New York. In section three, Mrs. Van Cleef openly gestures to the desire to return to the US unchanged, their trip a mere parenthesis in which social mores are more relaxed: “your face is all freckles and your nose is peeling. Please remember that we are not going to pass our lives among antiquities and Italians” (106). The story’s two-part structure reproduces Vivanti’s own double allegiance to Italy and the US in the form of two popular literary genres of the time, as the first half reproduces the narrative of the American tourist traveling to Italy and the second half that of the Italian emigrating to the United States.

The story opens with the American women accompanied up Mount Vesuvius by two horses and their Neapolitan tour guides – Cicillo and his father Cristo. The horses, which are being abused in order to carry up the terrified women, are significantly named Garibaldi and

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<sup>38</sup> Henry James, *Italian Hours* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin company, 1909), 106.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Casillo and John Paul Russo, *The Italian in Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 185.

Cavour, two heroes of the Italian Unification, perhaps in a nod to the glorious promises of the wars for independence, the fruits of which the South had yet to experience. Cicillo and Cristo are presented as shifty characters: “My father play mandolin and he is guide in summer and Gesù Cristo in winter . . . When he take off the hat the hair fall down, and he is Gesù Cristo for big pictures of English, American, French, German paints. Three francs the hour” (106-107). The father’s entire identity is a performance that changes with the seasons, thanks to which he can earn a living by making the most of foreign aims at exploiting ‘Italianness’ in all of its forms. Mrs Van Cleef, who “was sorry this strange exhibition had been a mere business transaction” as “she had liked to think [it] spontaneous . . . But it was merely an advertisement” (107) is clearly portrayed as the naïve American who wants to consume her idea of ‘Italianness’ without realizing that in doing so she must become a consumer in the economic sense.

Other details contradict assumptions about *italianità* being related to one’s blood, and also shed light on the enmeshment and hybridity out of which strictly drawn national divisions appear in all of their artificiality. We are told that Mrs. Van Cleef is herself of Neapolitan origin, although she doesn’t speak the language, nor seem to know much more about the region than the average American with a Baedeker. Conversely, we learn that Cristo’s mother had been “an English girl, who had come to Sorrento for a month and had stayed all her life, because ‘Beppe Il Bello’ had asked her to” (125). Ironically, Mrs. Van Cleef’s ignorance doesn’t prevent her from declaring “in her weird Italian – which was a mixture of Dante and dialect and ‘how to travel abroad in four languages’” that “when she went back to America she was going to write a book on her travels in Italy,” and specifying “it will circulate exclusively in our own social set, you know” (106). Her language, artificially constructed on the basis of multiple matrixes, is mirrored by the inauthenticity of Cristo’s self-presentation: “‘Eighty-two’ . . . he was not a day over sixty,

but he thought it would add pathos and half a frank to the situation” (106). What makes Cicillo the favored guide is that he is able to speak some English: “It was broken English that he spoke, but very gentlemanly broken English, as he had learned it from the rich and cultivated British and American tourists who patronized him and the Vesuvius, and from the painters who had hired his beauty for two francs an hour . . . not pedantically truthful, not commonplacely accurate.” Language, then, is part of the economic currency with which one acquires cultural and aesthetic experiences. Vivanti’s own English – officially her first language learned in her native England, but then spoken as *lingua franca* throughout Europe, enriched by her time in the United States and influenced by her knowledge of Italian, German and French – bears the traces of a similar non-linear acquisition. “Commonplaceley” appears to be a calque from the Italian “banalmente,” as is, later, “tranquilly” for “tranquillamente.”

The other traits that make Cicillo the women’s chosen guide, even when they leave Naples for Rome, are his apparent expertise in dealing with the locals, his knack for storytelling and ability to provide entertainment and his physical beauty:

He sang Costa’s songs to them; he played his father’s mandolin . . . told them fearful and unlikely tales of Englishmen falling into the crater, of Americans swallowed up by sudden volcanic mouths opening at their feet, of Germans writing poems with burning lava dropping on their heads, of Frenchmen hiring four guides for three days and paying them half a frank a piece at the end of the tour (106).

With Cicillo in tow, the two women hope to gain access to an authentically Italian experience, despite spending most of their time entertaining other American acquaintances. Of course, Cicillo’s tall tales don’t offer much more in the sense of authenticity. The women’s satisfaction with him proves that what they are really after is not the genuine experience of Italy – such as an

immersion in Neapolitan peasant life would afford them – but the performance of ‘Italianness’ that they expect.

The strength of Vivanti’s story lies in her decision to give Cicillo a voice. While the women treat him as little more than an entertaining pet, showing him off to their acquaintances, Cicillo steals the show by posing as different characters, showing off his appearance and refusing to leave the room when an embarrassed Mrs. Ven Cleef would rather her guests not see him: “he had tranquilly taken possession of the situation; the seven grown-up rich Americans sat around the little ragamuffin and laughed and obeyed him” (125). He also reveals himself hard to fool when he interjects his own comments in French, while the Americans had assumed that by speaking French they were effectively excluding him from their conversation. His agency constantly pushes back against the attitude of the Van Cleefs, who embody the type of the American collector, going as far as making Cicillo himself an object of their collection, to be styled and displayed accordingly: “We will dress him in buttons . . . Oh, no, mamma, . . . We must dress him in a Neapolitan costume, with a broad red silk sash, and a long scarlet cap at the back of his head. And he must sit in the drawing room and play the guitar. It will make the place picturesque” (125).

The final sections of the story take place in New York, where Cicillo has gone after a tearful goodbye to his extended family, a real display of southern Italian emotion – complete with grown men weeping and embracing and gifts of “little ivory horns and coral charms against the evil eye” (126) – that strikes the women as embarrassing and excessive. The detail of the family “waving their dark hands” (126) calls attention to the racialization of southern Italians and their classification as non-white in the United States. Despite the peculiarity of his situation, in America, Cicillo is subjected to the same treatment of Italian American immigrants experienced

by his peanut-selling uncle, already in New York with his family. Just as Emanuel Carnevali recounts in the *Autobiography*, he takes it upon himself to educate Americans who wish to learn about Italian culture. The episode in which he coaches Lucy on the proper way to sing “Ti voglio far morire di passione” once again exemplifies the performativity of ‘Italianness’ and the features supposedly associated with it, in this case unabashed passion. As Cicillo is put on display in the Van Cleef’s stately house on Madison Avenue, he is also called to perform various identities associated with foreign ideas of Italy, for example “a young Faun” and a “mediaeval page,” and while he is “passed around from one guest to the other” is asked to sing “Neapolitan street-songs . . . Sicilian love-lays . . . [and] the Tuscan form of stornello,” regardless of his regional origin. Objectified by his American benefactors, Cicillo is also vilified by his Italian relatives, who say he looks like “Carnevale,” although they happily receive money from him weekly and boast about their relative living on Madison Avenue to their friends on Elizabeth Street.

The story ends with Cicillo’s tragic suicide, after he and Lucy have confessed their love for each other and he realizes he has no future either in Italy or in the United States. His final costume – his cousin’s best black suit and tie – reveals him to a bewildered Lucy to be “a peasant!” While the text is certainly pointing to the “repercussions of the acts of cultural misappropriation perpetrated by the not-so-innocent Americans abroad” (Mettifogo 69), I argue that all characters are also guilty of accentuating their performance of the commonplaces that are associated with their nationality. Cicillo and his father, Cristo, are no more innocent than the American women, in their overt performance of the fiery Mediterranean type, who perfectly represents the characters depicted by Michelangelo – all in the attempt to extort money from tourists. I would contend that here, as in her other works centered on transnational encounters

and exchanges, Vivanti is staging the performativity of nationality, reduced to its more superficial cultural and linguistic markers, against contemporary essentialist discourses that derived from Romantic notions of the ‘genius’ of nations.

Vivanti’s most developed treatment of the transatlantic theme is her novel *The Devourers*, first published in English in 1910 and then self-translated into Italian the following year. The novel’s main topic – the “devouring” nature of gifted, creative children – continues the autobiographical thread of several other works, such as the story “The True Story of a Wunderkind. Told by its mother, Annie Vivanti,” published in 1905.<sup>40</sup> In addition to investigating the parent-child relationship and its connection to artistic practice, the novel explores the quest for belonging of two generations of a family who, much like Vivanti herself, leads a nomadic existence between England, Italy, Switzerland and the United States. Like the characters of Vivanti’s short stories, the characters of *The Devourers* are constantly performing different identities, signaled by the changing names, languages and behaviors that they associate with shifting national allegiances.

One of the characters, the aging actress Nunziata Villari, represents a further iteration of the series of fictional portrayals of Eleonora Duse that included Foscarina in D’Annunzio’s *Il Fuoco*. While in D’Annunzio’s novel, the character served to show the inevitable downfall caused by cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism, in Vivanti’s novel Villari merely represents the most extreme case of mastery of various cultural personas, seen as a positive resource. Her lover Nino has pictures of her “as Theodora, in stiff regal robes . . . as Cleopatra, clad in jewels . . . as Marguerite Gautier, in her nightdress . . . as Norah . . . as Sappho . . . as Francesca” (23). As an actress, her every move is described as a performance – “He was leaving. She gave a little

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<sup>40</sup> “The true Story of a Wunderkind. Told by Its Mother, Annie Vivanti,” *The Pall Mall magazine* 35 (Jan-Jun 1905): 657-665.



Tosca scream, and turned from him with the second act ‘*Dame aux Camilias*’ shiver . . . she also practiced her attitudes and tried her gestures on him without his knowing it” (26). Nunziata Villari’s changeability includes her ability to speak numerous languages, choosing the one most suited to her feelings, rather than following the codified norms of communication. When playing Sappho, she says: “*Toi, tu ne marchais pas encore, que moi deja je roulais dans les bras des homes*” with her deep and steadfast eyes fixed on Nino’s face. She had said the words in French in the midst of the Italian play, for she was whimsical and willful, and did as she pleased” (50). For many characters, language is a commodity that they can use to project a certain identity, better express a feeling, or perform a trait stereotypically associated to a specific nationality. The frivolous Clarissa, for example, “bubbled over into French at the slightest provocation” (81), in an attempt to seem refined.

Most of the novel’s characters demonstrate this capacity for metamorphosis in various degrees, due to their multicultural and multilingual upbringing, and downfall awaits those who are not able to adapt to their environment and perform the necessary cultural and linguist translations. The character who most clearly exemplifies this is Aldo, the attractive Neapolitan whom Nancy marries and follows first to Monte Carlo, where he squanders all of her savings, and then to New York, where they travel in search of a fresh start. Even in New York, Aldo can be nothing other than a Neapolitan: “He looks like the oyster-sellers of Santa Lucia!” (145). What dictates his behavior is “the blood of many generations of Neapolitan *lazzaroni* – beautiful, lazy animals, content to lie stretched in the sun – crossed and altered by the blood of the economical shopkeeping grandfather” (147). Because of his culturally homogenous background and upbringing, he is “weak, and limp and foolish” (149), “he was what he was, and did not know that one could be anything else” (148), in contrast to the resourceful Nancy, who is able to

escape the misery of immigrant life in New York thanks to her performance of a new identity – “The Girl in the Letters” – that seduces a rich European protector. Her multilingualism allows her to befriend Americans, Germans, Italians and others, whereas in Aldo’s case: his “handsome face made them suspicious. His Italian accent frightened them” (161). By recognizing the non-substantial quality of linguistic and cultural traits and learning to perform the right ones at the opportune time, Nancy is able to navigate rapidly changing modern times. Her success is exemplified by the fact that while many members of her family succumb to tuberculosis – the frightening sickness that passes from one generation to another, “the death they carried within them” (10) – the wandering existence that her mother Valeria assures her allows her to escape her fate.

Vivanti does not evade representations of the hardships connected to cultural hybridity. Her characters are frequently nostalgic. The main character, Giovanna Desiderata Felicita known by everyone as Nancy, often misses Italy, a place she identifies as “home” even though when she arrives she discovers that she no longer speaks the language fluently: “I am always homesick for things that I have forgotten, or for things that I never have known” (78). The novel can be read as the story of Nancy’s overcoming of hardships thanks to her ability to transform from young, innocent English girl to sentimental Italian artist, to practical American immigrant and finally to European high society-lady. This changeability, however, comes at a cost, which is abandoning her artistic vocation and never completing “The Book,” which she has been either writing or thinking about writing since shortly after publishing her first successful poetry collection. While Nancy’s artistic failure is due in part to the devouring nature of her daughter Anne-Marie’s musical genius, it is clearly also the price she has to pay for her nomadic and shifting existence.

The constant performance of changing identities on the characters' part often leads to misunderstandings and disappointments, such as when Nancy discovers that her Prince Charming is actually "an Ogre." Furthermore, the text underscores the constant stereotyping characters engage in on the basis of others' national and linguistic expression. While the text alludes to the question of a "true self" – which remains constant beneath the shifting performances in which the characters engage – none of the characters seem to actually reach it. Rather the successful ones are those who come to terms with the fact that in an environment in which people make assumptions based on language, race and culture, the best way to survive is to learn to perform the correct one at the right time.

A great part of the story's action is set in cosmopolitan spaces: Davos – the town in Switzerland where patients from all of Europe convene to heal from tuberculosis, and where Nancy is born – Monte Carlo – which draws all sorts of people with its promise of a new life and easy money – the great hotels in the center of Paris, European concert halls, and the boarding-house on Lexington Avenue in New York. The boarding-house is home to many middle-class immigrants who are struggling to find their place in American society, collectively defined "the kith and kin of all boarding-house guests" (217). Vivanti seems to be singling out these spaces as representative of modernity. On the one hand, the characters here discover a kinship through the linguistic and cultural background that they unexpectedly discover they share. On the other, these cosmopolitan milieus function differently from the nations in which they are located. Like Carnevali's "furnished rooms," these spaces are both within and outside of the largely mono-national and mono-lingual societies that surround them, and their inhabitants make up a multicultural and multilingual society of its own, whose mores Vivanti is interested in exploring. In a sense, these spaces function similarly to the elevator in Amara Lakhous's 2006 novel

*Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore in Piazza Vittorio*,<sup>41</sup> as experiments of multicultural cohabitation and negotiation. However, while Lakhous chooses the elevator in a popular Roman neighborhood as a microcosm representative of a wider phenomenon, Vivanti's cosmopolitan spaces are modern exceptions to societies that are still for the most part culturally and linguistically homogenous.

A symptom of Vivanti's conception of *The Devourers* as a truly international saga is her difficulty in finding the language suited for its composition. The novel's linguistic texture is extremely rich and layered. The text incorporates a multiplicity of foreign sentences and quotations, seemingly "devouring" the words of previous literary texts and foreign characters with the same voracity to which the title alludes. Furthermore, the narrative voice employs a kind of English that reveals the markers of translingual writing. The prose presents many traces of an Italian subtext being translated by the author, in the same way as Carnevali's poetry can be defined as the English translation of an erased Italian source-text that exists in the mind of the author. Despite Vivanti's tri-lingualism, in fact, and her claims to Carducci about having acquired Italian as a second language, after English and German, the language of *The Devourers* resembles Italian closely, both from a syntactical point of view and from a lexical one. Vivanti uses many latinisms, cognates and even calques, such as "insensate" (55), "unverisimilar" (56), "acidly" (112), "Meridional" (115) "poetess" (161). It is not a coincidence that Vivanti chose to self-translate the novel into Italian the following year.<sup>42</sup> In her preface to the Italian edition, she

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<sup>41</sup> Amara Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore in Piazza Vittorio* (Roma: E/o, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> In "Annie Vivanti as Self-Translator: the Case of *The Devourers* and *Circe*," *Italianist* 30 (2010 Supplement): 182-190, Anna Laura Lepschy compares the self-translation of *The Devourers* to the one from Italian into English of *Circe* (1912)/*Marie Tarnowska* (1915) and concludes: "When the original is in English, Vivanti writes very effectively and can produce a successful Italian version, although sometimes, because of the traditionally literary nature of written Italian in her time, the rendering is not always completely spontaneous in the context."

documents the process that leads multilingual writers to choose a language for their texts. While her decision may have been motivated in part by the desire to reach the Italian audience, where she had initially achieved literary success with *Lirica*, here Vivanti attributes the decision to translate the novel to the material itself:

Quando scrissi il mio primo romanzo in inglese, e me lo vidi dinanzi, lungo e corretto sotto al suo titolo ‘The Devourers’ mi dissi “Ma io ho sbagliato. Questo è un libro italiano! mi pareva di vedere sotto al severo abito del linguaggio inglese, spuntare due piedi nudi, memori di tarantella; sotto al britannico cappello del titolo, sfavillare due occhi meridionali, cupi e focosi; e, chiuso sotto la rigida copertina anglo-sassone, udivo battere il turbolento cuore latino, che i miei padri hanno lasciato – eredità preziosa – nel mio petto. Allora a quel monello italiano travestito da Mylord ho detto: - Vieni, ti condurrò in patria. E ho riscritto il libro nella mia lingua paterna. Eccolo ora, adorno di sonanti aggettivi latini, cinto dell’ampio fraseggiare italico come da una sciarpa vermiglia. Lucidi similitudini gli pendono come anelli d’oro dalle orecchie, e il titolo feroce gli è piantato come un cappello da brigante in testa. Eppure... ora che lo vedo così, mi pare che somigli un poco a un inglese travestito da ciociaro. Perché? Forse perché fu pensato e scritto lontano dal vivido sole italico che illuminò la mia infanzia, lontano dalle tempeste che cinsero di fulmini e di fragori la mia adolescenza. Forse, mentre lo scrivevo nella Casa Grigia del lontano Hertfordshire, le tinte calme del paesaggio inglese sono penetrate nelle pagine, smorzandone i colori troppo vivi, le voci troppo alte.<sup>43</sup>

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When she starts from Italian she seems to have more problems in passing to English, which with its long narrative tradition could achieve a relaxed and informal style, whereas sometimes Vivanti’s solutions are awkward, probably through the influence of Italian, including the persistently literary nature of its prose.” (190)

<sup>43</sup> Annie Vivanti, *Zingaresca* (Milano; Quintieri, 1918): 260-263. “When I wrote my first novel in English and saw it before me, lengthy and proper under its title ‘The Devourers’ I said to myself ‘I was wrong! This is an Italian book!’ I could almost see underneath the stern attire of the English language, two naked feet poking out, fresh from a tarantella; and under the title’s British hat, two fiery dark southern eyes sparkling; and, under the hard Anglo-Saxon cover, I could hear an unruly Latin heart beating, the precious bequest that my fathers left in my chest. So I told that Italian rascal disguised as Mylord: ‘Come, I’ll lead you home.’ And I rewrote the book in my father’s tongue. Here it is, decorated with resonant Latin adjectives, the ample Italian

Vivanti colorfully describes looking at her finished novel and sensing that its Italian nature was peeking through, making it a “libro italiano,” despite being in English. However, after her translation, which involved providing the text with “sonanti aggettivi latini” and “ampio fraseggiare italico,” the text still appeared to her like someone masquerading as a foreigner. Her explanation is that she wrote the novel while in England, and so the environment somehow seeped into the text despite her attempts to make it English. Whatever the case, both of the editions are examples of translingual writing that bears the traces of linguistic interferences and crosspollinations. Both Anna Laura Lepschy<sup>44</sup> and Marianna Deganutti note that in her self-translations Vivanti aims at domesticating her text, accommodating it “into a guise . . . which better suits the background (the taste, the mentality, the habits, the belief system) of the new reader.”<sup>45</sup> Despite this objective, her texts – both original and translated – bear the traces of Vivanti’s linguistic hybridity and reflexively document the very processes of interlingual and intercultural communication that the texts explore.

Many of Vivanti’s works from the 1910s and 1920s bespeak a skepticism towards the claimed superiority of one nationality over the other, even to the point of explicitly condemning British colonialism or the supposedly unjust treatment of Italy and its boundaries in the aftermath

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syntax enveloping it like a red scarf. Shiny similitudes hang from its ears like golden rings, and the fierce title is stuck on its head like the hat of a bandit. And yet... now that I see it like this, it seems to me a bit like an Englishman dressed as a farmer from around Rome. Why? Maybe because it was conceived and written far from the bright Italian sun that shone over my childhood, far from the storms that surrounded my adolescence with thunder and lightening. Perhaps, while I was writing it in the Grey House in faraway Herfordshire, the calm hues of the English countryside seeped into its pages, dampening its too bright colors, its too loud voices.” Translation is mine.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Laura Lepschy, “Are there rules of the game? Invernizio, Vivanti, Liala and the Popular Novel,” *The Italianist* 23, no. 2 (2003), 326.

<sup>45</sup> Marianna Deganutti, “A ‘Mistaken’ Choice of Language? A Case of Self-Translation,” in *Annie Chartres Vivanti. Transnational Politics, Identity, and Culture*, 84.

of the First World War. Vivanti's interest in transcultural and translingual relations in the western world led her, by the late 1920s, to explore colonial relations and the political dimension of these relations in such fraught contexts. In 1927, Vivanti published the novel *Mea Culpa*, which – categorized as late as 1991 as a “romanzo rosa,”<sup>46</sup> and gifted to readers of the popular women's magazine *Grazia* in 1984 – questioned the political and social implications of performing another's culture when the relationship between the two cultures is the asymmetrical one of colonial exploitation. In the novel, Astrid, the daughter of a Norwegian woman and an Irish patriot, sails to Egypt with her English aunt, who raised her, and her cousin. She becomes engaged to Norman Grey, an officer on the ship, and also has an affair with Saad Nassir, an aristocratic Egyptian rebel fighting against English colonialism.

As always, Vivanti underscores the performative aspect of nationality and race, showing how easily Saad can mimic western men in his dress and behavior, even using German music to court Astrid. Astrid secretly becomes Saad's lover for one night and later marries Norman while Saad is sent to a concentration camp in Sudan. When she discovers she is pregnant, she is uncertain about the identity of the father, but nevertheless decides to keep the child. When the daughter, named Darling, is born, she is blond and blue-eyed like her parents, but years later, when she herself marries a duke, becomes pregnant and dies in childbirth, her boy is dark skinned. Graziella Parati notes that here and elsewhere Vivanti “disguises her political preoccupations with narrative techniques that imitate the masters of Italian feuilleton,”<sup>47</sup> in this case, Carolina Invernizio's *L'Orfana di Trieste*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bruno Pischedda, “Ritratti critici di contemporanei: Annie Vivanti,” *Belfagor* 1 (1991): 45-64.

<sup>47</sup> Graziella Parati, “Maculate Conceptions. Annie Vivanti's Textual Reproductions,” *Romance Languages Annual* 7 (1995), 328.

<sup>48</sup> Carolina Invernizio, *L'Orfana di Trieste. Romanzo* (Firenze: Salani, 1916).

Vivanti's novel is highly critical of colonialism, to the point that it was censored by the "Ministero della Cultura Popolare" in the 1930s:<sup>49</sup> "[Astrid] s'inginocchiava davanti a tutti gli oppressi della terra, a tutti i paria dell'umanità, cui le razze bianche hanno strappato la libertà, il sacro orgoglio, il diritto di vivere la loro vita e di adorare il loro Dio" (139). With Astrid, Vivanti creates a complex character that both opposes colonialism and submits to it in the form of a traditional marriage and acceptance of Norman Grey's authority. Through her daughter, a white child whose body conceals her biological father's race, and her grandson, whose blackness betrays his racial hybridity and constitutes a subversive element within the family of colonizers, Vivanti is contesting the concept of racial purity. By not giving Astrid and Norman a perfect child of their own, as Norman thinks he already has in Darling, "a different future for the family, in particular, and for colonialism in general . . . is embodied within the familial whiteness of Grey's military family" (Parati 329).

Again in the novel *Vae Victis*<sup>50</sup> and its theatrical version *L'invasore*, Vivanti imagines a genetically hybrid future – in the form of racially mixed children – that resists the myth of racial purity that is one of the pillars of colonialism. Rather than assuming, according to the dominant scholarly narrative, that Vivanti chose her subjects and genres in a mad quest for best-sellers,<sup>51</sup> I argue that her turn to "invasion literature" during and after the First World War is a continuation of her interest in cultural mixing, which appeared in her very first published works. Vivanti wrote the play *L'invasore*<sup>52</sup> in 1915, in response to the request of Luigi Maria Bossi, a

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<sup>49</sup> See Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Unspeakable Women: Selected Short Stories by Italian Women during Fascism* (New York: Feminist Press, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Annie Vivanti, *Vae Victis! Romanzo* (Milano: Quintieri, 1917).

<sup>51</sup> See for example Julie Dashwood, "From Circe to Fosca. Annie Vivanti and the Femme Fatale," in *Annie Chartres Vivanti. Transnational Politics, Identity and Culture*, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Annie Vivanti, *L'invasore. Dramma in tre atti* (Milano: R. Quinteri, 1915). Quotations from the play are drawn from this edition.



gynecologist, politician and fervent interventionist, who was fighting to promote the legalization of abortion for French and Belgian women raped by German soldiers. In Vivanti's play the theme of the performativity of language and culture returns. The Belgian women whose house is occupied by German soldiers initially underestimate the threat, and anticipate befriending the German men: "Mirella – Sono contenta che siate arrivati. M'annoio a morte. E poi . . . io so il tedesco: 'Grüss Gott!'"<sup>53</sup> (65).

In carrying out the theme requested by Dr. Bossi, Vivanti actually chooses to represent the story of two Belgian women, both raped by German soldiers in their home, who make different choices. Luisa seeks an abortion because she feels repulsion toward her unborn child, while Chérie decides to keep her baby. Act three of the play documents their coming to their respective decisions, after having spent time in England as refugees. While Vivanti doesn't explicitly pass judgment on either of the women, the play clearly underscores the desperation of Luisa's choice in favor of abortion, motivated primarily by the thought that others will consider her baby an enemy, because the son of an enemy,<sup>54</sup> and by the eugenicist belief that criminal behavior is hereditary: "questo povero essere ch'entra nella vita credendo che tutti lo ameranno... Non sa lui, non sa che è odiato, disprezzato, maledetto! . . . Un figlio di un nemico . . . Quello sciagurato essere è un predestinato al dolore e alla delinquenza" (179). On the other hand, Chérie's decision to keep her baby is framed as a victory of the "primitivo, portentoso istinto" (181-182) of motherhood. In the final scene, the liberation of Belgium – signaled by the triumphant sounds of the *Marseillaise* – runs parallel to Chérie's decision to keep her child, and

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<sup>53</sup> "Mirella – I am glad that you came. I was bored to death. And also . . . I speak German! 'Grüss Gott'." Translation is mine.

<sup>54</sup> This fear reflects the belief of the time, according to which children's genetic makeup was thought to be entirely derived from the father, while the mother was merely a vessel to conception and birth.

the concluding line – “Sii benedetta tu e il tuo bambino!” – sanctions the choice as a positive one. The play cannot be read as an indictment against abortion – given the sympathetic light in which Luisa and her decision are presented, particularly against the harsh brutality of the German rapists – *invasori* both in a military and a bodily sense. Rather, I argue that Vivanti is making a statement against conceptions of ethnic and cultural purity and the integrity of race inspired by eugenics. She refuses the ethno-nationalistic approach that was being promoted by eugenicists, including Dr. Bossi himself, and instead presents a hybrid birth in a positive light, even suggesting what Cristina Gragnani has defined a “revolutionary and forward-thinking”<sup>55</sup> idea – that cultural hybridity is a positive element that can contribute to future peace and harmony among nations.

The short story “Tenebroso Amore,” included in the collection *Gioia!*,<sup>56</sup> explores the impact of colonialism on gender and racial relations in western society at the turn of the twentieth century. It helps to clarify Vivanti’s position in regards to nationalism. While her support of Italy’s intervention in the First World War led her to embrace the nationalist cause, it is important to note that she was just as committed to supporting the cause of Irish independence against Britain, together with her husband John Chartres who was a Sinn Fein activist, to the point of assisting the Irish delegation to Versailles in 1919, and she also supported Egyptian nationalism against English colonialism. As is the case with Amelia Pincherle Rosselli, Vivanti’s embrace of Italian nationalism is not dictated by a belief in the primacy of Italy above other nations, but rather by a broader support of oppressed nationalist causes that bespeaks a skepticism about the superiority of one nation over another.

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<sup>55</sup> Cristina Gragnani, “War Rape and Hybrid Birth,” in *Annie Chartres Vivanti. Transnational Politics, Identity and Culture*, 57.

<sup>56</sup> Annie Vivanti, *Gioia! Novelle* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1921).

The protagonist of “Tenebroso amore,” Manlio, is a typical white colonial man, who has just returned from the Italian colonial campaign in Libya in 1911 and is now overwhelmed by the desire to possess a black woman. The central event of the story is the performance, in blackface, by two western women, an actress called Alabama Loo – who successfully convinces Manlio’s wife Clotilde that she is an African woman – and Clotilde herself, whose performance in blackface causes the audience to laugh and Manlio to be horrified. The story ends on a tragicomic note, when Clotilde spills the bottle of ointment that can erase the dark makeup from her skin. Her attempts to contact Alabama Loo and ask for more ointment fail due to the elusive character of the performer: “Certo ella aveva cambiato nome e colore” (90). As Sara Ceroni notes, the author represents the female body as “a site that simultaneously affirms and subverts gender and racial hierarchies” (97). I argue that Vivanti views race here in the same way as her earlier works had depicted language and nationality, underscoring its performative nature and resisting the objectivization on which colonialism and white dominance were founded, in many ways anticipating critical race theory. Critics in the late 1920s and 1930s, such as Lorenzo Giusso,<sup>57</sup> stressed Vivanti’s nationalistic outbursts, but did not mention her transgressive ideas of racial and ethnic hybridization, nor her fierce anti-colonialism. Eventually, however, Mussolini – whom she knew personally from her work at the journal *L’Avanti!* – became suspicious of her when she refused to write articles in praise of Fascism and, thus, many of her works were censored – despite appearing to belong to the overly codified genre of romance literature for women.

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<sup>57</sup> Lorenzo Giusso, *Il viandante e le statue* (Milano: Corbaccio, 1929).

## Amelia Pincherle Rosselli's Anti-Nationalist Patriotism

Amelia Pincherle Rosselli, while more staunchly patriotic than Vivanti in her allegiance to Italy, also articulates ideas of national belonging that trouble the triumphalist narrative centered on figures such as D'Annunzio and Marinetti, situated powerfully at the center of the cultural discourse of the time. While a great part of her political reflections are contained in her private letters and in the many essays and articles she published in journals throughout her life first in Italy and then in France, Switzerland, England and the United States, her work as a playwright is also informed by her political and ideological ideals.

In her early patriotic play *San Marco*, the choice of historical material is in service to a political and moral commentary about the present. The subject-matter is “la grande eroica vicenda di avvenimenti dei quali fu protagonista nel 1848-49, il popolo veneziano, sublime di ardore e di amore,” as Rosselli herself presented the play in an article published in the Florentine literary magazine *Marzocco* in April 1913.<sup>58</sup> In her *Memorie*, Rosselli recalls these historical events having been the subject of many conversations with her venetian family, which had participated directly in the events and still possessed a battered flag and a hard piece of “pane nero” that was proudly kept in her parents’ closet and periodically taken out to commemorate the heroic hardship the family had endured, nearly starving in order to support Venice against the Austrian siege. The topic of the play – “il soffio eroico che travolgeva nel suo impeto Venezia, fino a poco prima così molle e neghittosa da far dubitare se mai si sarebbe destata”<sup>59</sup> – allows

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<sup>58</sup> Amelia Rosselli, “L’assedio di Venezia sulla scena dialettale,” *Il Marzocco* 18 no. 16 (April 1913), 43. “The great heroic history of the events of 1849-49 of which the Venetian populace, sibilime in courage and love, was the protagonist.” All translations of Rosselli’s works are mine.

<sup>59</sup> The heroic breath that was overcoming with its enthusiasm the city of Venice, which up to that point had been so weak and.”

Rosselli to gesture toward contemporary malaise regarding the so-called *terre irredente* of the northeastern coast of Italy one year before Italian politics would be completely overtaken by the debate on the country's engagement in the First World War. The environment in which Rosselli presented her play, which debuted at Venice's "Teatro Goldoni" a few days after the *Marzocco* article was published, is the same in which D'Annunzio had written *La Nave* and in which Marinetti had staged the infamous "Battaglia di Venezia" in 1910 – occasion for his "Discorso futurista ai veneziani."

Rosselli's choice to write a comedy in Venetian dialect and within the intimate domestic dimension that was the trademark of venetian playwriting is in striking contrast to both D'Annunzio's and Marinetti's projects. It also differs from Vivanti's generic depiction of Italians according to the flattening stereotypes of foreigners who view Neapolitans and Venetians as one and the same. By choosing to write in dialect, Rosselli roots her patriotism to a precise geo-historical locality. The trope of generational conflict on which the plot of *San Marco* relies had been the structuring device also of the comedy *El Refòlo*, starring the same actor, Ferruccio Benini. In *San Marco*, Rosselli contrasts the "generazione vile" of 1797, which had abandoned Venice to Napoleon in a servile move meant to preserve their lives, and the "generazione eroica" of 1848, to whom Rosselli's own parents belonged, which had faced every sacrifice in order to resist.

While the choice of dialect might seem to immediately limit the scope of the work and circumscribe its audience, Rosselli's own words clarify the extent to which her particular brand of patriotism rests on an intimate connection between the regional and the national. Whereas 'Venetian' works such as D'Annunzio's *La Nave* and *Il Fuoco* were tasked with proving Italy's power as a nation and its equal footing compared to foreign nations such as France and Germany

– primarily thanks to the recent colonial enterprises – Rosselli’s local setting and linguistic regionalism look within and around the contested borders of the nation, seemingly reminding Venetians of their belonging to Italy against the Austrian occupying forces. Furthermore, Rosselli’s play was performed throughout Italy, just as *El Réfalo* (1909), the first of the Venetian trilogy, which had actually premiered at the “Teatro Quirino” in Rome, and *El socio del papà* (1912).<sup>60</sup>

Rosselli’s article for *Marzocco* sheds light on another characteristic of her patriotism, which is her embrace of the working-classes and the acknowledgement of their vital role in securing national unity: “E perché, pensai, il teatro dialettale non dovrebbe anch’esso riflettere i fatti eroici nazionali, quei fatti dei quali fu appunto protagonista il popolo?”<sup>61</sup> The distance from D’Annunzio’s aristocratic ideal is once again striking. Rosselli goes on to define Venetian dialect as intrinsically suited to the narration of historical facts: “Se ce n’è uno adatto alle forme più alte del drama senza perdere niente del suo carattere è proprio esso, che solo fra tutti assurge attraverso la storia a valore e ufficio di lingua. I grandi fatti della Repubblica veneta ci vennero appunto tramandati in dialetto.”<sup>62</sup> Rosselli is thus positioning herself within the tradition of venetian historiography – and in fact she takes the opportunity of the *Marzocco* article to mention her sources – while at the same time employing theatrical devices to incite her fellow Venetians to patriotism by reminding them of their innate qualities of courage, self-sacrifice and humor. By arguing that dialect-theater can treat heroic themes as well as everyday domestic life,

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<sup>60</sup> All three plays were published by the large Milanese publishing house Fratelli Treves, for a national market.

<sup>61</sup> “And why, I asked myself, shouldn’t dialect theater reflect heroic national events too, those events of which common people were the protagonists?”

<sup>62</sup> “If there is a dialect suited to the highest dramatic forms without losing anything of its true characters, it is precisely this one, the only one which rises through its history to the level of language for its value and use.”

she is also implying that some of history's greatest heroes are actually the anonymous citizens that make up "il popolo" who participated in important political and historical events. It is striking that a patriotic play written in 1913 contains no allusion to Italy's colonial undertakings, which had achieved a victorious outcome the previous year, with the conquest of Libya, crowning the 1911 festivities for the fiftieth anniversary of Italy's Unification.

Rosselli's distance from the aggressive rhetoric of might and expansion that was taking over the proto-fascist political discourse can be traced back to the Mazzinian ideological foundation of the Pincherle and Rosselli families' patriotism as well as to her Jewish roots and transnational connections. Her idea of fatherland derived from Mazzini's concept of the nation as a communion of free and equal citizens – united by working harmoniously toward a single aim – that collaborated harmoniously with other free and independent nations for the progress of modern civilization for all of mankind.<sup>63</sup> As for Rosselli's Jewishness, she states in her *Memorie* that she was not a practicing Jew, and actually recalls her uneasiness with her son Carlo's youthful interest in the religion of many of his family members. Rosselli identified with the liberal Judaism of many intellectuals in unified Italy, who distanced themselves from anything – including many religious practices – that might have seemed in contrast with their Italian citizenship – achieved at long last through many hardships: "Ebrei? Sì, ma *prima di tutto* italiani . . . di questa italianità che non ammetteva due patrie."<sup>64</sup> Differently from the Zionist movement from which she explicitly distanced herself, Rosselli considered Judaism a religion, not a race, and stated that she never really considered the "questione ebraica" to be a problem until the late 1930s, when the Fascist regime promoted anti-Semitism at all levels. At the same time, the

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<sup>63</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *Scritti politici*, ed. Terenzio Grandi and Augusto Comba (Torino: UTET, 1972): 883-885.

<sup>64</sup> "Jews? Sure, but first of all Italian . . . of that 'Italianness' that did not allow two homelands." Amelia Rosselli, *Memorie*, 128.

liberal Jewish environment influenced Rosselli both from a moral perspective and in her distance from the myth of Italian supremacy that was arising among Catholic intellectuals such as Vincenzo Gioberti and that saw Italy's history as the heart of Catholicism as proof of its "primato." Rosselli's political stance was also influenced by her participation in a transnational network of artists and political figures – starting with her own relatives in England who spoke mostly English even after moving to Italy, including her husband Joe Rosselli and her uncle Ernesto Nathan, who would become mayor of Rome in 1907.

The work *Fratelli Minori*, published shortly after the First World War in which Rosselli lost her firstborn son Aldo, sheds light on the influence of transnational connections on Rosselli's conception of the fatherland and documents the evolution of her thought after the crisis of the War and the widespread disappointment caused in Italy by what was considered an unfavorable and unjust peace treaty. The text is composed of a series of titled chapters that describe various moments in the life of a cluster of young men and women in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. While each chapter can be read as a standalone tableau representing one aspect of the young generation's life, sequentially they narrate the gradual coming to terms with the reality of post-war Italy and the meaning of patriotism of Mario Savelli, the main protagonist whose older brother has died as a soldier in the war.

I would contend that through the evolution of the character of Mario, Rosselli is grappling with her own post-war disillusionment and what I would call the "temptation of cosmopolitanism," weighed against the ultimate sacrifice of her own son Aldo for the Italian nation. In her *Memorie*, Rosselli recalls the "triste 1919," when military officials returning from the front were not celebrated but "derisi. Si sputava loro addosso. . . Si era vinta la guerra, ma il popolo, fuorviato dagli eccessi di un nazionalismo sbagliato, non aiutato neanche moralmente da



un governo pusillanime, agiva come un popolo sconfitto”<sup>65</sup> (163). Elsewhere in her *Memorie*, Rosselli reflects on this “incorrect nationalism,” which we could define as the D’Annunzian brand of celebratory, aggressively militaristic nationalism based on the idea of Italy’s superiority over other – “barbaric” – nations. In *Fratelli Minori*, Rosselli appears to be developing her own response to this “incorrect nationalism,” by grappling with the “esasperazione del patriottismo . . . le mancate promesse . . . lo stato generale di depressione che segue sempre dopo ogni guerra”<sup>66</sup> (163) and with the fact that the sacrifice of so many was being ridiculed as useless.

In *Fratelli Minori*, Rosselli focuses on the generation that had not participated directly in battle because too young and that had seen older siblings and friends die seemingly for no actual gain. Mario Savelli, the most developed character, has lost his own older brother in the war. He is caught between his family who is clinging to Risorgimento ideals of patriotism in order to give meaning to the son’s death and their own present suffering – “È giusto soffrire, Dio, per l’Italia”<sup>67</sup> – and the younger generation that was reacting to war by rejecting the past completely “abolendo barriere, frontiere, valori di patria.”<sup>68</sup> *Fratelli Minori* begins by staging an environment similar to the post-war one that Walter Benjamin refers to at the beginning of *The Storyteller*, where men have become “silent” and lack “communicable experience.”<sup>69</sup> Rosselli goes as far as stating that the dominant feeling is “rancore. Inespresso. Inesprimibile. Contro tutti

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<sup>65</sup> “Mocked. People spat on them . . . The war had been won, but the populace, misguided by the excess of an incorrect nationalism, and not even morally supported by a cowardly government, acted like a defeated populace.”

<sup>66</sup> “Exasperation of patriotism . . . the broken promises . . . the general state of depression that always follows any war.”

<sup>67</sup> Amelia Rosselli, *Fratelli minori* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1921), 29.

<sup>68</sup> Amelia Pincherle Rosselli, *Memorie*, 163.

<sup>69</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1968).

e contro nessuno”<sup>70</sup> (8). She also returns to her common theme of intergenerational conflict, this time exploring its darker side and presenting it as an abyss separating the new generation from their parents and making mutual understanding impossible.

As in her plays on intergenerational conflict, Rosselli expresses sympathies for the younger generation, to whom her own surviving children Nello and Carlo belong, and seems to admire their openness to a broader dimension: “Non senti il bisogno di un respiro più largo? . . . C’è tanto da fare nel mondo”<sup>71</sup> (20). The injunction to serve beyond the enclosed circle of one’s home and nation resonates with Rosselli’s sense of duty towards others as supreme moral compass. The author also acknowledges the risk that just patriotism develop into the aggressive nationalism based on hate – “odio, che bisognava continuare, eternare” – sustained in the attempt to dispel the possibility of the death of loved ones having been useless: “là dentro qualche cosa s’irrigidiva, impietriva”<sup>72</sup> (34). On the other hand, the death of ideals experienced by Lucio Mainardi and others among Mario’s friends is depicted as even more terrible than the physical death of their slightly older peers. It is not a coincidence that Rosselli specifies that Lucio Mainardi’s father comes from Switzerland, the neutral country *par excellence*, suited to test the resilience of cosmopolitan ideals that rest on the assumption that national barriers are absolutely meaningless:

Suo padre, uno svizzero naturalizzato italiano, ritrae dal suo paese di origine col quale serva frequenti contatti una larghezza di vedute che si riflette nei suoi atteggiamenti quotidiani. Non per nulla è figlio di un paese destinato a subire tutti i contrasti, attenuandoli; ad accogliere tutti i dissidenti, rispettoso della fede di ciascuno; ad essere

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<sup>70</sup> “Resentment. Unspoken. Unspeakable. Against everyone and no one.”

<sup>71</sup> “Don’t you feel the need for a broader outlook? There is so much to be done in the world.”

<sup>72</sup> “Hate, that needed to be continued, made eternal . . . something inside there was becoming hard, like stone.”

rifugio di chi non si trova bene in patria; l'unico punto, nel mondo appassionato, in cui le passioni possono vivere, smorzate, e sbocciare le iniziative di carattere universale.<sup>73</sup> (45)

Despite vocabulary such as “rispettoso,” “accogliere” or “rifugio,” which would seem to depict the character’s universalism in positive terms, the narrator’s description of Mario’s reaction – “Mario sente . . . il vuoto sotto di sé. Ma il vuoto attira”<sup>74</sup> – introduces an ambiguity. Not only does Mario realize that such an approach would negate the values for which his brother has died, but the choice of the term “vuoto” connects to the “death of ideals” previously rejected.

The chapter titled “Correnti,” one of the most essayistic and less narrative in the text, outlines the two alternatives that dominate the ideological horizon of post-war Italy.

C'è la corrente nazionalista . . . chiusa, ardente, aggressiva, piena di amore e di odio, feroce nella difesa dei diritti della patria, gelosa della sua grandezza, preoccupata soltanto della sua grandezza, anche se questa è a danno altrui. Che . . . dichiara nemico chi non la segue. Che isola fuori del mondo la patria, come se fosse un valore assoluto; e spregia e misconosce la legge di relatività fra le varie patrie, l'equilibrio che dovrebbe essere la risultante delle diverse grandezze. Ombrosa come un amante geloso vede dappertutto rivali . . . Pronta al sacrificio, a tutti i sacrifici; ma satura d'individualismo, poiché la patria s'identifica con l'io. Una corrente che fa pensare a certi corsi d'acqua violenti in alta montagna, stretti, che si scavano la strada mordendo le rocce.<sup>75</sup> (47-48)

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<sup>73</sup> “His father, a Swiss turned naturalized Italian, derives from his country of origin, with which he maintains frequent contacts, a broad outlook that shows in his everyday manners. He isn’t for nothing the son of a country destined to endure all contrasts by softening them; to welcome all dissidents, respecting the faith of each one; to be a refuge for those who do not feel welcome in their own country; the only point in the passionate world, in which passions can live, softened, and universal initiatives can blossom.”

<sup>74</sup> “Mario feels a void opening under him . . . but the void is attractive.”

<sup>75</sup> “There’s the nationalist current . . . closed, courageous, aggressive, full of love and hate, fierce in its defense of the rights of the fatherland, jealous of its greatness, worried only about its greatness, even if it comes at the price of another’s detriment. That . . . declares an enemy anyone who doesn’t follow it. That isolates the fatherland outside of the world, as if it were an absolute value; and despises and refuses to acknowledge the law of relativity among the various

Although no individual names are mentioned, it is easy to read the passage as a definition of the sort of nationalism espoused by Gabriele D'Annunzio and Enrico Corradini, which would soon merge with the "Partito Nazionale Fascista" – founded in 1921, the same year as the publication of *Fratelli Minori*. The convergence between fatherland and self – "satura d'individualismo, poiché in essa la patria s'identifica con l'io" – could even be assumed as descriptor of D'Annunzio's overtly nationalistic and megalomaniacal enterprises, such as the Fiume expedition or the construction of "Il Vittoriale." The image of the impetuous river carving out its own path while engulfing everything it encounters in its way also recalls many descriptions of Mafarka in Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste*, in which the founding of a new futurist time and space was presented as the violent overcoming of weak and idle populations.

The description would seem to point toward cosmopolitanism as a morally superior alternative, rooted in openness and the abandonment of longstanding hostilities. And yet, Rosselli's description of the opposing ideology is also negative and expands on that "vuoto" felt by the character of Mario.

E c'è l'altra corrente che somiglia all'estremo corso di un fiume, là dove le acque dilagano pigre ed incerte, e si spandono oltre i confine nel terreno circostante, e tutto si confonde, e nella confusione il paesaggio smarrisce ogni carattere, e non si sa bene dove finisca il fiume e dove incominci il mare.<sup>76</sup> (49)

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fatherlands, the balance that should result from the different powers. As moody as a jealous lover it sees rivals everywhere . . . Ready for sacrifice, any sacrifice; but overflowing with individualism, because the fatherland coincides with the self. A current that recalls certain violent streams up in the mountains, narrow, that dig a path for themselves by biting the rocks."<sup>76</sup> "There's the other current that looks like the very end of a river's flow, where the waters overflow lazily and uncertainly, and spread across the adjacent terrain, and everything is mixed up, and in the confusion the landscape loses all of its character, and you cant' really tell where the river ends and the sea begins."

Strikingly, Rosselli describes the cosmopolitan mentality in terms not unlike those used by D'Annunzio himself to point toward the impurity of ethnic mixing. While Rosselli's Jewish and international background leads her to reject any ideal of ethnic or racial purity – the most striking difference between her Mazzinian brand of patriotism and the nationalism that was increasingly taking hold of Italian public opinion – the image of the slow current of water that creates swampy soil in which “tutto si confonde” – shows her distrust for the overcoming of all barriers between people, which she sees as a loss of home.

Rosselli comments in her *Memorie* that her own children, Nello and Carlo, never let go of patriotism because of their upbringing and their experience in war or preparing for it<sup>77</sup> – “troppo avevano, Carlo e Nello, partecipato a quella passione di patria”<sup>78</sup> (164) – and yet even they were open to a broader conception of human belonging that Rosselli admits she was not ready for at the time. While Rosselli does not elaborate on this point, the section of her *Memorie* titled “A Firenze,” in which she narrates the impact of the Great War and refers to the composition of *Fratelli Minori*, was written after the 1937 assassination of Carlo and Nello, while she was in exile first in Switzerland and then in the United States. Therefore, the specification “Io non potevo ancora seguirli su questa via...”<sup>79</sup> and the ellipsis indicate that at Rosselli's view of patriotism and cosmopolitanism would later change. In the following section, “La casa devastata,” written immediately after “A Firenze,” she defines herself “ex-nazionalista” and confesses that her son Carlo had always begrudged her her “nationalism.”

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<sup>77</sup> Carlo served as a lieutenant in the “Alpini,” while Nello had been preparing to join the military when the peace treaty was signed.

<sup>78</sup> “Carlo and Nello had participated too closely in that passion for their homeland.”

<sup>79</sup> “I wasn't yet able to follow them on that path...”

In describing the summer spent in 1925 with her sons in Siusi, in the newly acquired border region of Alto-Adige, she mentions “i metodi assenteisti del precedente Governo Democratico, il quale . . . consentiva un po’ troppo supinamente alla predominanza nel paese dello spirito Tedesco”<sup>80</sup> (189). Rosselli laments that signs are mostly written in German and that shopkeepers and waiters ostentatiously display preferential treatment to German speakers. Her hope for a gradual Italianization of the region clashes also with the violent methods Fascism would soon impose:

Vennero poi i fascisti...e, come si sa, fu un’ira di Dio. Italianizzazione a oltranza. Chiuse tutte le scuole tedesche, obbligo d’insegnamento nella sola lingua italiana, rimozione a Bolzano, del monumento al poeta nazionale tedesco Walter (e gli austriaci avevano pur sopportato, a Trento, con maggiore abilità politica, il monumento, nientemeno, che a Dante!). Reazione delle popolazioni, reciproco odio. In ultimo il Regime fascista aveva creduto di troncare la spinosa questione con l’emigrazione di massa, in Germania, della popolazione altoatesina (quella parte che voleva restare tedesca) e opzione per la nazionalità italiana per quelli che volevano restare nella loro terra natale.<sup>81</sup> (189)

While Rosselli disagrees with coerced Italianization, particularly through the uprooting of beloved cultural icons, nevertheless the anti-Austrian sentiment that her venetian upbringing had fostered leads her to claim that she had considered the annexation of the region necessary –

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<sup>80</sup> “The absenteeism of the previous Democratic Government, which . . . was a bit too servile in allowing the German spirit to prevail in the regions.”

<sup>81</sup> “Then the fascists came... and, as everyone knows, all Hell broke loose. Italianization to the bitter end. All German schools closed, Italian language imposed as mandatory for all schools, the monument of Walter, the German national poet, taken down (and the Austrian had even tolerated, in Trento, the monument of Dante, no less!, displaying much greater political expertise) Reaction from the population, mutual hate. Finally, the fascist regime had thought it could put an end to thorny issue by forcing mass migration, to Germany, of the population of Alto-Adige (that part that wanted to remain German) and giving Italian nationality to those who wanted to remain in their birthland.”

“credevo di vederne la necessità” (190) – again presenting the fact with uncertainty and in the past tense. Her hope seems to have been that the population of Alto Adige gradually become enmeshed with the rest of Italy, possibly through a rediscovery of ancient cultural roots: “Ma forse, a poco a poco, quelle fiere popolazioni si sarebbero addolcite al contatto della gentilezza latina”<sup>82</sup> (189). It is worth noting that her choice of vocabulary, with “fiere popolazioni” opposed to “gentilezza latina” signals that she was not immune to the rhetoric that rigidly opposed Latin and Germanic populations.

*Fratelli Minori* captures the phase in which Rosselli is working through her nationalism and testing what holds true after the slaughter of the First World War. She describes the members of the young generation as overtaken by a sense of injustice, desperate for meaning and prone to rejecting everything of the past, as a result of the war. She sees their behavior as a reaction to the passion that caused four years of brutality, and comments that “essi aspirano a un equilibrio mentale che esclude necessariamente l’amore”<sup>83</sup> (50). The word “amore” is one of the most commonly used by Rosselli in conjunction with “patria” and “Italia,” explaining why throughout her works, while increasingly distancing herself from aggressive forms of nationalism, she conceives of universalist cosmopolitanism in terms of loss. In *Fratelli Minori*, she defines the following speech by Lucio Mainardi, the spokesperson for this viewpoint, “insidiosa”:

“Bisogna ormai allargare il concetto di patria. Procedere storicamente. Un tempo la patria era rinchiusa fra le mura della propria città. Poi questo concetto fu superato, e patria divenne la regione. Ora ci troviamo di fronte a una terza tappa della concezione

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<sup>82</sup> “But perhaps, gradually, those proud populations would mellow out through contact with the Latin kindness.”

<sup>83</sup> “They long for a mental balance that necessarily excludes love.”

patriottica. Patria è, per un certo numero di esseri, lo spazio di terra su cui si parla una stessa lingua. Bisogna sorpassare anche questa concezione. Ostinarsi a mantenere barriere fra popolo e popolo vuol dire fermarsi sul cammino della civiltà. Smentire la storia. Che l'Italia sia piccola o grande, il giorno che patria sarà, come dev'essere, il mondo, non è di alcuna importanza.”<sup>84</sup> (51)

Readers are meant to be wary of such radically anti-nationalist statements, including the final one concerning the lack of consequence of Italy's standing – both in terms of geographical extension and of political and cultural importance – for which Rosselli's own son Aldo had just sacrificed his life.

At the same time, I would contend that Rosselli is taking the provocation of cosmopolitanism very seriously and subjecting her own patriotism to careful scrutiny. In the chapter titled “Serata,” the character of Mario spends an evening at the house of Lucio Mainardi: “società mista. Esotica,” in which men and women from Switzerland, Russia, France and Italy are discussing the possibility of a future without frontiers and the establishment of a League that would abolish the concept of nation. Rosselli attributes to the various characters statements regarding war and patriotism that range from those she obviously deems excessively radical – “Amor di patria . . . una delle più grandi menzogne sociali con cui si è finora addormentata la buona fede dei popoli”<sup>85</sup> (60) – to claims that Rosselli herself made in previous works, such as her venetian trilogy on intergenerational conflict – “La gioventù ha il diritto, o piuttosto il dovere

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<sup>84</sup> “We must broaden the notion of homeland. Proceed historically. Once the fatherland was enclosed within the wall's of one's city. Then this concept was overcome and fatherland became the region. Now we found ourselves facing a third stage in the patriotic conception. Fatherland is, for a certain number of beings, the land in which the same language is spoken. We must overcome this conception too. Insisting on maintaining barriers between populations means not progressing on the path of civilization. Denying history. Whether Italy is small or great, is of no importance, once the fatherland is, as it should be, the whole world.”

<sup>85</sup> “Love of country . . . one of the greatest social lies with which the good will of populations has been put to sleep.”



di rivedere per proprio conto i valori morali trasmessi dalla generazione precedente”<sup>86</sup> (59-60).

Many of the statements to which the character of Mario reacts most viscerally concern the war and particularly the connection between “il valore di nazione” and what is defined “tremendo flagello” and “umano carnaio.” His response, as he thinks about the death of this brother, is “Tanta gente . . . sarebbe morta per niente?”<sup>87</sup> (62), to which a Frenchman responds

“Poveri ragazzi. Certe verità vi stupiscono. Naturale. Vi hanno talmente ingombrata la mente di falsi idoli, ve l’hanno fasciata di tante menzogne convenzionali, che non siete più in grado di comprendere la verità . . . Ma la verità fa la sua strada. . . È tempo che spezziate le barriere entro le quali vi si mantiene prigionieri! . . . Siate voi gli apostoli del nuovo verbo! À bas les patries, absurd tyrannie des peuples!”<sup>88</sup> (63-64).

The fact that the “nuovo verbo” is pronounced in French rather than Italian, signals the distance between the claim and Rosselli’s wishes for the Italian nation. At the same time, the troubled reaction of Mario’s character reveals the force of what I have called the “temptation of cosmopolitanism.”

It is really only when Mario returns to his parents’ home and contemplates a portrait of his grandmother that he begins to distance himself from the other young peoples’ viewpoint. Rosselli introduces here many autobiographical references, mentioning the sword from the National Guard and the “pane nero” from the siege of 1848 that belonged to her own parents. The text concedes something to the point of view that associates nationalism and war with hate,

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<sup>86</sup> “Young people have the right, or rather the duty to reconsider on their own terms the moral values inherited by the previous generation.”

<sup>87</sup> “So all of those people . . . would have died for nothing?”

<sup>88</sup> “Poor kids. Certain truths shock you. Naturally. They have filled your mind to the brim with false idols, they have wrapped it in so many conventional lies, that you are no longer able to understand the truth . . . But the truth makes its own way . . . The time has come to break the barriers within which you are being held prisoners! . . . Go and be the apostles of the new word! À bas les patries, absurd tyrannie des peuples!”

when Mario imagines his grandmother to be speaking to him from the portrait and recalling that the Austrians were “cattivi” (75). Even her exclamation “Maledeti! Maledeti!,” however, is presented as the deeply human and justified indignation of a righteous woman: “la dolcezza dell’accento veneziano mette una strana mitezza nella terribilità di quella maledizione”<sup>89</sup> (75). The grandmother’s venetian accent – graphically made visible by the use of the single ‘t’ – is said to mitigate the harshness of the words, in a way appealing to the trope of Latin civility opposed to Germanic brutality.

The last forty pages of the text are meant to stage the definitive victory of the patriotic stance as a middle ground between aggressive nationalism and universalist cosmopolitanism. In one scene, Mario contemplates the portrait of his older brother – “fanciullo soldato” – with his silver medal, and feels his room gradually expanding to accommodate all of Italy, entering on its knees: “L’Italia, fatta più grande anche per merito suo; più rispettata, più forte”<sup>90</sup> (80). Mario’s mother expresses love for Italy in terms of civil religion:

Italia benedetta e cara! Anche se ti prendi i nostri figliuoli! Non sono tuoi prima che nostri? Prima che nel nostro grembo non sono essi stati nel tuo, Madre nostra di tutti noi, che ce li hai dati esprimendoli dai tuoi frutti, dal tuo grano, dal tuo sole per farne sangue nostro, cuore nostro, vita nostra? Ed ecco tu ce li hai ripresi. Sia fatta la tua volontà.<sup>91</sup> (80).

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<sup>89</sup> “The sweetness of her venetian accent adds a strange softness to the mercilessness of that curse.”

<sup>90</sup> “Italy, made greater thanks also to him, more respected, stronger.”

<sup>91</sup> “Blessed and dear Italy! Even though you take our dear children away! Are they not yours before they are ours? Before they were in our wombs were they not in yours, Mother of all of us, who gave them to us drawing them from your fruits, your grain, your sin, to make out of them our blood, our heard, our life? And, well, now you have taken them back. Your will be done.”

The personification of Italy as a mother and the final phrase taken directly from the “Our Father” prayer connect this passage to the tradition of patriotic poems from the Risorgimento, such as Giacomo Leopardi’s canzone *All’Italia*, in which he referred to Italy as “formosissima donna” (v. 10) and asked “Dove sono i tuoi figli?”<sup>92</sup> (v. 41).

What separates Rosselli’s work from coeval texts that reinterpreted this tradition, such as D’Annunzio’s own *Canti della guerra latina*, is the lack of triumphalism and the absence of references to Italy’s primacy over other nations. Rosselli is deeply aware of the cost of patriotism, in terms of human sacrifice, and peppers her text with mentions of the brutality of war, giving space to questions about the justification of war. She attributes to Lucio Mainardi’s father, for example, the statement “Non ci sono mai state né mai ci saranno guerre giuste. La sola causa della guerra, di tutte le guerre, è la schiavitù di coloro che le fanno”<sup>93</sup> (61), which would find no place in any work by D’Annunzio or Marinetti. Pacifism is presented as an appealing and theoretically viable option, to which Rosselli opposes the necessity for oppressed people to fight for their freedom. In a letter written as early as the mid 1910s to her friend Laura Orvieto and quoted in the final section of *Memorie*, written by Marina Calloni, Rosselli clarifies this point, when she states:

La bella guerra predicata dai nazionalisti non esiste; ossia, esiste in un caso solo, quando sia guerra di indipendenza vera e propria. . . . Io non avevo prima questo orrore. . . E arrossisco, come di un delitto, della leggerezza con cui prima dicevo o pensavo che sì, la

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<sup>92</sup> “Most beautiful woman, where are your children?”

<sup>93</sup> “There have never been nor will there ever be just wars. The only cause for war, any war, is the enslavement of those who fight them.”

guerra è un elemento di forza, è una necessità di vita per i popoli. È un'orrenda menzogna.<sup>94</sup> (247)

Thus, the only acceptable wars are those meant to liberate the oppressed. The only legitimate military actions are defensive ones.

This perspective connects to Rosselli's own upbringing in Venice, a contested space that was felt to be unjustly occupied by a foreign power – the Hapsburg monarchy – against the will of the population. *Fratelli minori* ends with Mario and his family traveling to a destroyed Trento, one of the newly acquired cities on Italy's borderland, where they contemplate the statue of Dante, which symbolically represents all of Italy and appears to be giving a blessing to the tombs of the soldiers buried in the mountain cemetery. Rosselli here subscribes to the conception of nation as based on common language, celebrating the Italian language as the one “per la quale è dolce morire”<sup>95</sup> (102). The text ends with the description of a sense of peace that Mario and his family experience as they contemplate the love and sacrifice for which the eldest son has given his life. Rosselli's choice to end the text on a highly patriotic note clarifies her critique of cosmopolitanism. While she appreciates its non-violent ideals, she considers it too abstract and therefore a betrayal of the specific love and duty to one's country: “L'ideale che gli hanno dato in cambio ha confini troppo vasti per essere abbracciato dal cuore, per farsene scudo e difesa”<sup>96</sup> (88).

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<sup>94</sup> “The beautiful war nationalists preach about does not exist; rather, it exists only in one case, when it is an actual war of independence . . . I did not have this horror of war before . . . And I blush, as if for a crime, when thinking about the carelessness with which I used to think and say that yes, war is an element of force, but it is vitally necessary for populations. That is a horrible lie.”

<sup>95</sup> “For which dying is sweet.”

<sup>96</sup> “The ideal they traded it in for has too vast border to be embraced by the heart, to make it one's shield and protection.”

It is interesting that the question of hierarchy of duties and the sense of loss of belonging are some of the main objections being raised in current debates on cosmopolitanism still today. Benjamin Barber, for example, argues that cosmopolitanism is a “thin” commitment, based purely on intellectual conviction that lacks the appeal to the heart that parochial allegiances possess.<sup>97</sup> In his recent essay “The Importance of Elsewhere. In Defense of Cosmopolitanism,” Kwame Anthony Appiah quotes British Prime Minister Theresa May who in 2016 stated: “If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don’t understand what citizenship means,” to which Appiah objects that “the cosmopolitan task, in fact, is to be able to focus on both far and near. Cosmopolitanism is an expansive act of the moral imagination. It sees human beings as shaping their lives within nesting memberships.”<sup>98</sup>

Rosselli acutely anticipates the core of the debate between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, as residing in an emotional nucleus able to compel humans to ethical behavior, what Martha Nussbaum – who not by coincidence relies on Mazzini for her discussions on patriotism – defines “a type of love, an emotion that is not simply abstract and principle-dependent, but that conceives of the nation as a particular, with a specific history, specific physical features, and specific aspirations that inspire devotion.”<sup>99</sup> Because of her international connections and her Jewish-Venetian-Mazzinian upbringing, Rosselli was grappling with the contradictions of national and supra-national belongings at a time when most intellectuals were either aggressively embracing the Nationalist rhetoric of proto-fascist and colonialist ideologies or cynically

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<sup>97</sup> Benjamin Barber, “Constitutional Faith” in Martha C. Nussbaum with Respondents, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>98</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Importance of Elsewhere. In Defense of Cosmopolitanism,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March-April 2019), 20.

<sup>99</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Teaching Patriotism: Love and Critical Freedom,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 79, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 217.

lamenting the weakness of the liberal state and the broken promises of Unification first and the First World War later. Her Patriotism rejects the exclusionary impulse of nationalism, and appears compatible with today's definitions of cosmopolitanism that are rooted in an ethical ideal that preserves a privileged space for the local, such as those by Nussbaum, Appiah or Michael W. McConnell, who states: "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind."<sup>100</sup>

Rosselli's refusal to overcome the importance of national belonging also speaks to the privilege inherent in the cosmopolitan position at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a woman of Jewish descent, who had heard stories from older relatives about the first generations of Jews living after closure of Venice's ghetto<sup>101</sup> and the relative freedom that Italian Jews enjoyed during the nineteenth century compared to those living in the Austria-Hungarian Empire, Rosselli is aware of the consequences of deprivation of citizenship – which would tellingly be the last stage of the progressive denigration of Jews in the Third Reich, before the implementation of the Final Solution.<sup>102</sup>

One of the few book-length works Rosselli published after the First World War was the historical play *Emma Liona – Lady Hamilton*, which was published in 1924, but never staged.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Michael W. McConnell, "Don't Neglect the Little Platoons," Martha C. Nussbaum with Respondents. *For the Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 79.

<sup>101</sup> Venice's ghetto was officially closed in 1797, with the end of the Venetian Republic and Napoleon's concession of equal citizenship to Jews. However, the actual desegregation of Jews took much longer. As Rosselli recalls in the first section of her *Memorie*: "Come ebrei pesava sulle spalle dei miei l'atavico peso del ghetto, le cui porte erano sate aperte alla libertà soltanto nel '66." See Amelia Rosselli, *Memorie*, 52.

<sup>102</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951).

<sup>103</sup> The first performance of *Emma Liona* was staged in 2007. Rosselli finished writing the play in 1923/1924, but it appears that a first draft existed as early as 1914. See Giovanna Amato,

In the case of *Emma Liona*, the choice of a British protagonist – albeit one who became closely involved in Italian politics – serves as an ulterior distancing device from the historical material. The play has recently received critical attention, mainly from a feminist perspective, as it is in fact a striking example of a rewriting of a historical figure whose legacy had been interpreted exclusively by men – including poets, novelists and playwrights, from Goethe to Dumas<sup>104</sup> – narrated now finally from the protagonist’s point of view. Rather than fashioning Emma after the trope of the *femme fatale* who brings ruin not only to the men in her life, but also to the Republican patriots of Naples, Rosselli depicts the protagonist as a young woman who is exchanged as a commodity by the man to whom she is promised and whom she loves, Charles Gréville, to his uncle Lord Hamilton, British ambassador to the Bourbon-occupied Naples, in the hope of keeping the uncle from remarrying and directing his inheritance away from his nephew. Rosselli’s aim in the play is to show how Lady Hamilton’s famously negative behaviors – including her role in cancelling the armistice between the Republicans and the Bourbons, leading to the death of her lover admiral Nelson and other celebrated Neapolitan patriots – were not due to her intrinsic character, but rather were the result of objectification, exploitation and cruelty she was subjected to by men, specifically the deprivation of her children.

While the play certainly deserves to be read as a successful example of feminist theatrical practice, my aim is to parse the ways in which Rosselli uses the historical figure of Emma Lyons to explore the connections between identity and national culture and the role of transnational

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“Teatro italiano, coscienza europea,” in *Una donna nella storia: Vita e letteratura di Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, ed. Valdo Spini (Firenze: Alinea, 2012): 40-78. Quotations from the book are drawn from this edition: Amelia Rosselli, *Emma Liona: Lady Hamilton: Dramma in quattro episodi* (Firenze: R. Bemporad & figlio, 1924).

<sup>104</sup> For a discussion of the many nineteenth-century adaptations of Lady Hamilton’s story, see Giovanna Amato, “Tragico il tempo, chiaro il dovere,” in *Una donna nella storia: Vita e letteratura di Amelia Pincherle Rosselli*, 23-114.

exchange in the spread of political and philosophical ideals. The events of the play span almost thirty years – from 1786 to 1814 – and take place between England, Italy and France. In many ways, Rosselli's Emma Liona is similar to the female cosmopolitan figures that populate Vivanti's texts. Emma is portrayed from the start as an actress of sorts, able to perform a variety of identities to please those surrounding her, particularly Gréville, her protector, whom she loves and who has forced her to give up the child she had previously out of wedlock. From the beginning, then, the main character is a compromised woman who nevertheless exhibits moral soundness, similar to other female characters in her plays, and particularly following the example of *Anima*, Rosselli's first and most successful play. In addition to aiming to please Gréville, the opening scene also shows Emma to be serving as a model for the painter Romney and essentially performing roles for him to depict: "Che straordinaria creatura siete mai! Cento, mille creature diverse in una sola . . . Per ritrarvi degnamente bisognerebbe avere il genio di Raffaello e di Michelangelo al tempo stesso!"<sup>105</sup> (17).

The first episode shows Emma able and willing to transform herself in order to please the more powerful men to whom she is indebted. In a sense, her character resembles D'Annunzio's "donna multanime," such as *La Nave*'s Basiliola's or *Il Fuoco*'s Foscarina. Like those characters, Emma will ultimately pay the price of her metamorphosis. However, I argue that while in those representations the "donna multanime" is viewed as a powerful and even dangerous form that men must reckon with, Rosselli is actually attributing the cause of Emma's downfall to the men that have mistreated her, forced her to abandon her children and molded her according to their will. In episode one, Emma is implicitly likened to a statue or painting, a work of art molded by

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<sup>105</sup> "What an extraordinary creature you are! A hundred, a thousand different creatures wrapped up in one . . . In order to make a portrait worthy of you I would need to possess the genius of Raphael and at the same time that of Michaelangelo!"



the artists that surround her and exchange her as a commodity. In telling Emma about his uncle Hamilton, Gréville shows her a bust he had found during the excavations in Pompeii that he had directed. He recounts having given the bust to his uncle as a gift, only to change his mind and exchange it for an Etruscan vase that Lord Hamilton eventually placed in his museum. Emma is explicitly compared to a classical statue: “Bocca divina, che nell’arco mirabile rievoca Grecia e Roma! . . . Sarete la nostra Arianna”<sup>106</sup> (44-45). As a woman, she is little more than an object to be traded and collected, and in fact the episode ends with the suggestion that she embark on a “viaggetto a Napoli” (53).

In the second episode, we find Emma no longer in Edgware Row, but in a great palace in Naples, home of Lord Hamilton, English ambassador. The diplomatic environment recalls the cosmopolitan spaces that Vivanti represents in *The Devourers*, in which upper class people from various European countries create an environment that participates in many cultures but is also outside of all of them. The transfer to a foreign country has signified a shift in socio-economic status for Emma and her mother, but also a transformation of character. Abandoned by Gréville, despite his promises, Emma has been shaped by her environment and become the sad heroine of the nostalgic popular songs she hears on the streets of Naples: “una canzoncina popolare, cantata da un suonatore girovago, che si accompagna al mandolino . . . melodia triste, nostalgica”<sup>107</sup> (65).

Particularly through the character of Emma’s mother, Mrs. Cadogan, I would contend that Rosselli is critiquing the kind of cultural understanding that Annie Vivanti expresses in her fictional works, namely the reduction of national culture to superficial aesthetic features and

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<sup>106</sup> “Divine mouth, which in its admirable arch recalls Greece and Rome! . . . You are our Arianna.”

<sup>107</sup> “A popular ditty, sung by an itinerant musician, who accompanies himself with a mandolin . . . a sad, nostalgic melody.”

customs. As she attempts to foster admiration for Lord Hamilton in Emma, purely for self-interested purposes, she indicates how England can be recreated for consumption abroad:

“Questa sala, per esempio: non sembra veramente un piccolo angolo di casa inglese? Bisogna affacciarsi al balcone per ricordarsi di essere a Napoli. Egli ha pensato: Emma sentirà nostalgia del suo paese, facciamo in modo che ne trovi un piccolo limbo qui, nel cuore di Napoli”<sup>108</sup> (71).

Emma herself appears to become more and more Neapolitan, as Romney comments when he visits her in Naples and finds her singing an aria by Paisiello, whereas in the episode set in England she had been singing a song based on Shakespeare’s “It was a lover and his lass”:

“Spring-time, the only pretty ring time,/When birds do sing they ding a ding a ding” (13).

Romney comments: “tutto è mutato: in voi e... intorno a voi!”<sup>109</sup> (71) and “non siete una donna, voi, ma un camaleonte”<sup>110</sup> (97).

To this apparently simple transformation from English country girl to Neapolitan Lady at the individual level, Rosselli opposes the complexity of international relations on a political and military scale. During a society dinner, the character of prince Dietrichstein summarizes the political upheaval that is coming to Naples, as revolutionary ideas are beginning to circulate and a rebellion against the Bourbons is being plotted. Rosselli seems particularly interested in portraying the transnational circulation of political and philosophical ideas. Her representation of the spread of ideals of freedom, justice and equality from France to the rest of Europe in the late eighteenth century mirrors the spread of ideals of independence that caused the uprisings

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<sup>108</sup> “This room, for example: does it not really looks like a little corner of an English home? You have to look out the balcony to realize that you are in Naples. He thought” Emma will be homesick for her country, let us allow her to find a small piece of it here, in Naples.”

<sup>109</sup> “Everything has changed, in you and around you.”

<sup>110</sup> “You are not a woman, but a chameleon.”

throughout Europe in 1848 as well as the connection between thinkers and political leaders in England and Italy that supported and ultimately enabled Italy's Unification in 1870.

Il vento di follia che ha travolto la Francia minaccia d'imperversare su tutto il mondo. Anche qui a Napoli l'audacia del partito giacobino aumenta di giorno in giorno. . . . Credete che si sarebbe stata la Rivoluzione in Francia se avessero a tempo opportuno impedito lo spargersi delle idee di quei maledetti Enciclopedisti? Troppa libertà signori miei! Il pensiero! . . . Bisogna ucciderlo! Meno male che da noi c'è chi intuisce io pericolo e fa Tesoro dell'esperienza altrui...la Regina! Guardate se da noi in Austria le teorie sovversive hanno messo piede!<sup>111</sup> (90-91)

Obviously, while the events are presented from the point of view of a conservative, we are meant to appreciate "libertà" and "pensiero" and to see their transnational circulation as a great resource for the advancement of humanity. Even later, when characters in the play define the rebels "Francesizzanti" the term seems to be a tribute to the circulation of ideas and efforts beyond borders.

As the play follows the political events that led England and Naples to join forces against France and ultimately quash the rebellion against the Bourbons, it also enacts Emma's definitive transformation into the ruthless Lady Hamilton. The text makes clear that the metamorphosis is caused by Gréville's mistreatment of Emma, since it occurs after she is able to glean from Romney that he is engaged to another woman: "Emma Lione è morta; ma Lady Hamilton la

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<sup>111</sup> "The wind of madness that has swept over France threatens to spread to the entire world. Even here in Naples the audacity of the Jacobin party increases day after day . . . Do you think they would have had the Revolution in France if at the right time they had stopped the ideas of those damned Encyclopedists from circulating? Too much freedom, my friends! Thought! . . . It must be killed! Fortunately here we have someone who understands the danger and treasures the experience of others . . . the Queen! Just look, if in Austria subversive theories have caught on or not."

vendicherà!”<sup>112</sup> (105). In the third episode we find a cruel lady Hamilton who has married Gréville’s uncle and refuses to help three townspeople connected to the revolution – including the famous Eleonora Pimentel – who have come to the ambassador’s wife for help. Her transformability allows her to become a skillful diplomatic agent, who nevertheless uses her resources to further her own interests. Nothing seems to be left of the innocent English girl. Emma Lyons appears to have completely transformed into Lady Hamilton, a powerful and ruthless member of the corrupt Bourbon court. The episode ends with the encounter between Emma and Admiral Nelson, whom she seduces. Rather than merely the meeting between two individuals, the encounter is described as that between England and Naples, with Admiral Nelson gradually succumbing to the charms of the latter: “com’è dolce questo mare di Napoli! Com’è diverso da quello laggiù, torbido, scuro, tempestoso . . . Ah, qui è dolce lasciarsi vivere, sognare!”<sup>113</sup> (143-144).

The final episode takes place in Calais, France, at the inn that belongs to Monsieur Brochard, a character of tepid ideals who cares mostly for his own wellbeing and leading a quiet life. He is juxtaposed to the character of Bartuello, a colorful Neapolitan exile who had participated in the short-lived Neapolitan Republic of 1799.

Al proprio paese si può voler bene anche senza rischiare la pelle. Che cosa ci avete guadagnato? . . . Io lascio passare tutti, non domando che di esser lasciato in pace, e tutt’al più m’informo, anche per loro, del nome e cognome: per regolarli nel chiamarli.

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<sup>112</sup> “Emma Lyons is dead; but Lady Hamilton will vindicate her!”

<sup>113</sup> “How sweet this sea of Naples is! How different it is from the one up there, murky, dark, stormy . . . Ah, it is sweet to let yourself live, and dream, here!”

Perciò...Repubblica? Viva la Repubblica! Impero! viva l'Impero! Anzi, non fo per dire, prendo da ciascuno quel po' di bene che può venirmene.<sup>114</sup> (154-155)

The imagined audience for the play is obviously meant to view Brochard's opportunism critically, and instead admire Bartuello "focoso, amante della giustizia"<sup>115</sup> (156). From the perspective of Emma Lione's trajectory, this final episode is meant to show her demise, as she enters the inn without revealing her identity, brought to safety by a friend after escaping England, her debts and the hate of her fellow countrymen. The conversation between Bartuello and other men staying at the inn, including a merchant who has recently been to Naples, is primarily meant to present a narrative of the bloody Bourbon repression of Neapolitan revolutionaries, including Elionora Pimentel, Antonio Caracciolo and other republicans that had sought Emma's support in vain. It is also meant to provide a justification of Emma's behavior, as we learn that once again she has been forced to give up her child – born from her affair with Admiral Nelson – and as she once again encounters Gréville, now her nephew, and attributes her ambition and cruel behavior to his own cruel abandonment and betrayal: "Lady Hamilton, sappilo, è opera tua . . . Perché io, quando m'imbattei in te, io ero un'altra. Ero Emma Lione. Una bambina . . . nelle tue mani docile strumento . . . e tu incominciasti l'opera . . . strappandola violentemente alla sua creatura"<sup>116</sup> (194). Her character is framed as a tragic figure, modeled after the tradition of classical tragic heroines, from Medea to Lady Macbeth. The play ends with

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<sup>114</sup> "One can love one's country without risking one's hide. What have you gained from that? . . . I let anyone through, I don't ask for anything except to be left in peace, and at the most I find out, for their sake too, their first and last name: so I know what to call them. So . . . Republic? Long live the Republic! Empire? Long live the empire! Actually, I really mean it, I take from each one the little bit of good that can come of it to me."

<sup>115</sup> "A fiery temperament, a lover of justice."

<sup>116</sup> "Lady Hamilton, you must know, is of your making . . . Because when I came upon you, I was another person. I was Emma Lyons. A young girl . . . a docile instrument in your hands . . . and you began the transformation . . . by violently ripping her away from her child."

a frail, old, and poor Emma collapsing on the floor, overcome with guilt for the past as the ghost of Caracciolo, whom she and Nelson had thrown into the sea, appears to her with his raised index finger.

The play can also be read as a political statement, meant to incite reflection and concrete political actions. Sentences like “dappertutto dove sono andati i Francesi, hanno portato con loro il germe della libertà. E adesso che quella libertà l’hanno incatenata all’isola d’Elba, vedrete che cosa diventerà l’Europa!”<sup>117</sup> (170) when read in 1924 are meant to encourage resistance against the rise of Fascism in Italy and across Europe. As Rosselli wrote in her *Memorie* about the postwar period in Italy:

Del resto il fascismo incominciava ad affermarsi. Erano di quel tempo le prime spedizioni punitive, tacitamente sopportate dagli ambienti ufficiali, che o non osavano intervenire o piuttosto credevo, s’illudevano che fossero un aiuto prezioso a ristabilire l’ordine in Italia, turbato dalla recente ondata di scontento popolare ben comprensibile dopo le delusioni subite.<sup>118</sup> (166-167)

The historical time in which the play is set allows for a parallel between the political instability in Europe in the early 1920s and the time in which Lady Hamilton lived, with Spanish rule in the South, the French Revolution in the North-West, and the restoration of totalitarian rule with the rise of Napoleon. The play allows Rosselli to express her patriotism, as she attributes statements about Naples – a metonymic stand-in for Italy – to Bartuello and other characters, particularly in

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<sup>117</sup> “Wherever they went the French brought their seed of freedom. And now that that freedom that has been chained to the isle of Elba, you will see what will happen to Europe!”

<sup>118</sup> “And Fascism was starting to take hold. That was the time of the punitive expeditions, tacitly tolerated by officials, who either did not dare intervene or, as I thought more likely, deluded themselves that they were a precious aid in re-establishing order in Italy, after the recent wave of dissatisfaction that had rightly overcome the population after the disappointments it had suffered.”

the final episode. To the stereotype of Italy as land of pleasure and romance – “È terra da cantare, da fare all’amore, non alle cannonate . . . Là si vive d’amore, come qui d’aria”<sup>119</sup> (173) Rosselli opposes Italy’s history of political engagement: “si vive d’amore, ma si muore da eroi, quando è necessario. E io ho visto in quei giorni morire per la libertà uomini tali”<sup>120</sup> (175).

Like Annie Vivanti, Rosselli is aware of the stereotypes surrounding Italy and even exploits them to a certain extent in her representation of Emma Liona and her transformation in Lady of the Neapolitan court. Ultimately, though, her perspective differs from Vivanti’s as she views Emma’s transformability as the effect of cruelty and a trait that ultimately causes her downfall. The characters with whom the audience is meant to sympathize, such as Bartuello, are those who maintain their identity and loyalty to the fatherland and who make the most of their transnational connections to divulge political ideals and support their country from afar. Bartuello in many ways anticipates Rosselli’s own future exile, particularly the years she would spend in the United States, from where she would continue to support anti-Fascist efforts in Italy, where she would choose to return as soon as possible after the conclusion of the Second World War.

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<sup>119</sup> “It is a land made for singing, for making love, not for cannons . . . People there live on love, as we live on air here.”

<sup>120</sup> “We live on love, but we die as heroes, when necessary. And in those days I saw such men die for freedom.”

## CONCLUSION

While not claiming to be an exhaustive analysis of transnational connections within Italian literature at the turn of the twentieth century, this dissertation contributes to the conversation about the role of national and linguistic belonging in literary history. A true reframing of the scholarly approach to authors active in and around Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century would of course be a much more extensive project, aimed at recovering the cross-cultural sources of many of the most relevant literary and artistic movements that evolved in Italy since its unification, from Verismo to Ermetismo and beyond. This project's focus on five case studies points to some of the ways in which this reframing can change our approach to well-known authors, aid in the rediscovery of marginalized voices, and alter some of the coordinates that govern literary history and analysis.

One of the most evident consequences of this approach is the geographical breadth of literary investigations. The project's attention to cross-cultural connections has resulted in a remapping of the locations around which its narrative revolves, which I would argue, in addition to expanding the geographical scope of inquiry, also helps us recognize the constructedness of the spaces that we study.<sup>1</sup> Accounts of modern Italian literature typically focus on the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Compelling models for this kind of critical reflection can be found in Paul Gilroy's conceptualization of "the black Atlantic," Rob Wilson's concept of "critical regionalism" and Édouard Glissant's conception of "cultural zones." See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and the Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989); Rob Wilson, "Imagining Asia Pacific



cultural hubs of Rome, Florence and Naples, as well as on the newly industrialized Milan. Conversely, by tracing intricate histories of displacement and the emergence of nationalist constructs out of experiences of hybridity and exchange, “Belonging to the Threshold” has turned to contested borderlands, such as Venice, which emerges as critical site of political, aesthetic and formal development in the literary production of three out of the five authors on which the dissertation focuses: D’Annunzio, Marinetti and Rosselli. Shifting away from the narrow focus on the Italian peninsula, the project also highlights international trajectories and sites of literary experimentation that span three continents, ranging at least from Egypt and Libya to England, Switzerland, France and the United States.

Reading cross-nationally has allowed unexpected affinities to appear, such as those between Marinetti and D’Annunzio and a cluster of writers whose works George Steiner would describe as culturally and linguistically “un-housed,” erased from the Italian literary canon because of their interstitial placement between nations and tongues, such as Emanuel Carnevali, who like Marinetti reacted to his geographical displacement by obstinately professing belonging to a singular nation – in his case the United States. His status as an immigrant, however, puts him at the opposite end of the spectrum of power compared to imperialist ideologues D’Annunzio and Marinetti. The comparison with Carnevali and his poetic treatment of disability brings to the fore the ableist rhetoric marshaled by nationalist thinkers to exclude categories of people from rightful citizenship in a eugenicist perspective.

The juxtaposition of D’Annunzio and Marinetti is founded on the premise that Italy’s history as a colonial power has had lasting – albeit still neglected – influence on its cultural production. By putting their literary production in mutual conversation, the dissertation has

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Today,” in *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 231-260.

problematized the mono-nationalist readings of authors who paradoxically embraced aggressively nationalist politics while situating themselves on the threshold of East and West, North and South. It has also shed light on the crosspollinations between two major authors, while at the same time pointing to their divergent perspectives on a crucial topic such as racial purity and to the differing modes of formal experimentation engendered by their attraction to non-western cultures. The representation of nationalist literature that emerges from the pairing of the two authors is therefore more varied and composite than the leveling discourse that interprets them as generically proto-fascist.

Reading their works against those of Amelia Rosselli has generated an even more diverse picture, in which racial purity and the primacy of Italy over other nations emerge as the factors distinguishing colonialist nationalism from a brand of patriotism more directly connected to the Risorgimento and open to considerations of solidarity and harmony with other countries. Racial and ethnic concerns are central to the works of all of the authors examined, as they grapple with questions of citizenship based on exclusionary parameters or – in the case of Jewish writers Rosselli and Vivanti and emigrant Italian American Carnevali – with their own ethnically hybrid or racialized identities. This observation confirms at a literary level the claim made by Lucia Re about “the considerable role that various forms of racism have played in the history and even in the *formation* of Italy as a nation and, indeed, in the creation of the ‘Italian identity.’”<sup>2</sup> While this Italian identity from an ideological and political framework was constructed mainly through an exclusionary impetus, as shown by Giulio Bollati’s definition of it as “an ethno-racial imaginary

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<sup>2</sup> Lucia Re, “Italians and the Invention of Race: the Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913,” *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010), 2.

formation based on the denial and rejection of the ‘other,’”<sup>3</sup> “Belonging to the Threshold” shows the Italian literary identity to have been consistently more capacious and porous than narratives surrounding it have made it appear.

While the overarching critical narrative about literature from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries associates it with the spread of nationalism and the evolution of a truly distinct Italian character and history, the dissertation recovers another discourse that runs parallel or, more often, inextricably intertwined to it, which concerns cosmopolitanism and the imagination of different forms of belonging that supersede or accompany nationality in various ways. D’Annunzio appears to be wrestling with cultural cosmopolitanism as an attractive intellectual and artistic stance, which increasingly clashes with his political viewpoint. Marinetti imagines a kind of supranational revolution that begins with Italy only to spread beyond its borders and relies on a brutish coming-together of African, Oriental and European elements. Carnevali desperately lays claim to an American identity insofar as it is predicated on the principle of inclusion, which his status as an immigrant and disabled will constantly thwart. Amelia Pincherle Rosselli most explicitly reflects on the possibility of a post-national cosmopolitanism in which human solidarity reaches beyond national boundaries, only to reach the conclusion that such a construction would be too abstract to engender true cohesion. Annie Vivanti expresses skepticism about the essential and ontological nature of national qualities, explicitly rejecting notions of racial or national purity that eugenicists were spreading as the foundation of colonial enterprises, exploring instead the kinds of communities that exist in cosmopolitan spaces.

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<sup>3</sup> Giulio Bollati, *L’italiano. Il carattere nazionale come teoria e come invenzione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983).

The dissertation, therefore, shows Italian literature to have grappled at the turn of the twentieth century with notions that are now at the center of debates around cosmopolitanism, in which scholars such as Benedict Anderson, David Miller, Michael Walzer and Benjamin Barber<sup>4</sup> point toward human beings' inability to care for those who are distant from them as a fallacy of cosmopolitan ideals, in opposition to Martha C. Nussbaum, Alexa Weik von Mossner, Anthony Qwame Appiah and Bruce Robbins<sup>5</sup> who support the possibility of an ethical world citizenship. Even in the work of some of its more aggressively nationalist writers, this literature often encourages its readers to stretch their imaginations and empathic attachments beyond the national. It confirms authors at the forefront of Italy's colonial propaganda to be foundational to the understanding of contemporary Italy's postcolonial condition and its impact on contemporary life.

The project has also recovered the different ways in which literature at this time was experimenting formally on the basis of cross-lingual and cross-cultural contamination and has revealed how this kind of contamination was often the chosen means by which authors were overtly attempting to free themselves from the weight of Italy's centuries-old tradition and renew its modes of expression. Rosselli's plays interlace the Venetian tradition of dialect-theater with

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000); Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Benjamin Barber, "Constitutional Faith," in Martha C. Nussbaum with Respondents, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996): 30-37.

<sup>5</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum with Respondents, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*; Alexa Weik von Mossner, *Cosmopolitan Minds. Literature, Emotion and the Transnational Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Anthony Qwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006); Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999); Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics. Feeling and Thinking Beyond the Nation* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

the drama of ideas that was evolving in theaters across Europe. Carnevali produced translingual poetry that bridged the Italian lyrical tradition with the experimentation of North-American Modernism. Vivanti made her début in what was at the time a second language – Italian – and a traditional lyrical form and went on to achieve success both in Italian and English-speaking countries with novels and short stories in which she injected elements of Italian migration accounts into the Anglophone genre of transatlantic literature. D’Annunzio negotiated between an aesthetic fascination with the Orient and its formal intricacies and the opposite model of classical Latin purity, while at the same time absorbing stimuli from a variety of European and extra-European influences, including French Symbolism and German philosophy, to fashion an idiosyncratic ideal of *italianità*. Finally, Marinetti pushed the poetic word against the limits of signification, creating sound and concrete poetry that embraced the non-western primacy of sound over meaning.

My hope is that this project will lead to further endeavors in this direction, nudging scholars toward a richer understanding of the interrelatedness between Italian and foreign literary developments, and pointing to Italy and its literature as a vantage point from which to observe and comprehend many of the most striking developments at the center of contemporary literary debates, such as the proliferation of linguistically hybrid texts or the discussions around the role of translation in world literature.

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