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The Gothic in Nineteenth-Century Italy

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> Perhaps he lives, even then, when to his ear
> Is silent the sweet harmony of day:
> May not the cares, the vigils of his friends
> once more awaken it? Celestial
> is this communion with the cherished dead—
> a lovely and a holy gift to men.

The Italians; or, The Penitents of the Gothic: Paralipomena of an Occulted Genre

Is there an Italian Gothic of the nineteenth century? At first glance, the question may appear redundant, particularly for Anglophone readers accustomed to associating Italy not just with the Grand Tourists and nostalgic antiquarianism of the eighteenth century, but also with the imaginative geography of the Gothic canon, the cultural and topological setting of masterpieces such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and the novels of Ann Radcliffe, from *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) to *The Italian; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1796–7), to mention just two authors linked by a pervasive interdiscursive and intertextual Italophile network.[1] Given its deeper implications, my opening question should therefore be broadened and qualified: was there an indigenous or autochthonous Gothic in nineteenth-century Italy, a local reworking of English (and perhaps also Continental) forms and models – a Gothic 'under the sun', so to speak,

* My thanks to Dr Maria Giovanna Pontesilli, Director of the Polo Bibliotecario Umanistico-Sociale of the University of Tuscia and to Dr Clotilde Valeri, for her efficient and tireless help with interlibrary loans. Without this expertise and support I would not have been able to consult so many otherwise unobtainable texts.

1 Epigraph: Ugo Foscolo, *The Sepulchres. Addressed to Ippolito Pindemonte*, trans. attrib. to Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe (London, 1820?), p. 1.

capable of exercising its aesthetic and thematic influence at a supranational level? Addressing this question is not only worthwhile in itself, but also sheds light on certain aesthetic and cultural-historical complications raised by this period. Such complications become most apparent if we consider the question from the privileged, albeit somewhat deceptive, point of view of two giants of Italian letters, here chosen as symbolic bookends of a century so crucial to Italy's political, linguistic and cultural development: the writer Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) and the philosopher and critic Benedetto Croce (1866–1952).

Italo Calvino, the undisputed master of twentieth-century fantastic literature, seemingly laid a tombstone over any vestige of Italian Gothic literature when he stated in 1983 that, with the exception perhaps of Arrigo Boito and a few other authors belonging to the so-called 'Scapigliatura' movement, there had been no nineteenth-century fantastic literature to speak of: were he to mention it alongside its European or American counterparts, it would be 'merely out of obligation' – to satisfy a purely parochial aspiration.[2] As if to disprove Calvino, but only in part, the following year the literary scholar Enrico Ghidetti published the collection *Notturno italiano* (1984), the first attempt to organise the corpus of Italian fantastic literature and further stimulate its study.[3] The story that opens Ghidetti's anthology, 'Narcisa' by the Milanese Luigi Gualdo, however, dates back only to 1868, as though to confirm that there was no Italian Gothic (or fantastic) literature worthy of note before the Scapigliati.

Notwithstanding Calvino's epitaph for Italian fantastic (and by extension Gothic) literature, other scholars over the past 40 years besides Ghidetti have laboured to unearth Italy's Gothic literary production from beneath the thick layers of canonical and ideologically informed generic categorisations that for decades had hidden it from sight – a fate all too common to genre literature. The result has been, on the one hand, a rediscovery of established authors, now recognised as capable of creating a distinct autochthonous Gothic typology (as we will see with *I promessi sposi* [The Betrothed] by Alessandro Manzoni and *Pinocchio* by Carlo Lorenzini, better known by his pseudonym, Collodi), and, on the other hand, an exploration of the Gothic's intersections

2 Italo Calvino (ed.), *Fantastic Tales: Visionary and Everyday* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1997), p. xvii.

3 Enrico Ghidetti (ed.), *Notturno italiano. Racconti fantastici dell'Ottocento* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984). In addition to the excellent Preface to *Notturno italiano* (pp. vii–xii), Ghidetti also wrote *Dal racconto fantastico al romanzo popolare* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987), a study that further explored the nineteenth-century genre novel.

with overlapping or adjacent genres, including the many varieties flourishing in the Anglophone world, such as sensational, detective and fantastic literature. Well before 1909–10 when the Sicilian Luigi Natoli (who wrote as 'William Galt') published *I Beati Paoli*, a dark, gripping historical-detection *feuilleton*, in the *Giornale di Sicilia*, the Italian Gothic of the nineteenth century had already provided sufficient evidence not only of its existence but also its originality.[4] We need only think of such nineteenth-century writers as Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, Luigi Capuana, Giovanni Verga and Matilde Serao, not to mention recognised masters such as Giacomo Leopardi[5] and now-forgotten authors such as Diodata Saluzzo Roero and Vincenzo Linares; it was in fact Linares who, long before Natoli, first used the Beati Paoli sect (and title) in an 1840 story that curiously blended realism and esotericism. As with the statue of the Veiled Christ of the Cappella di Sansevero in Naples, the impartial eye can perceive the disquieting, unmistakable Gothic veining beneath the neoclassical 'moral beauty' and highly polished realism prized by the nineteenth century, as though the semes of realism, rationalism and didacticism could afford some protection from what lay beneath.

For the convenience of researchers who might be unfamiliar with nineteenth-century Italian literature, this chapter employs a two-pronged approach: on the one hand I will discuss the Gothic of the so-called classics, which developed alongside the historical novel of the first half of the nineteenth century, and for which translations are readily available. On the other hand, I will turn to 'popular' Gothic fiction, increasingly

4 Published as a volume in 1921, Natoli's novel has a Manichean structure pitting a heartless antagonist, don Raimondo Albamonte, against a powerful secret sect that operates underground beneath the city of Palermo. Occultism and revenge, conspiracies and persecuted maidens, physiognomic determinism and sinister landscapes: these are the familiar staples of Natoli's controversial Gothic – openly referencing Eugène Sue and the so-called 'Illuminati novels', but also the more disturbing actual abuses of a Sicilian criminal gang – discussed by Umberto Eco in the introduction to Luigi Natoli, *I Beati Paoli. Grande romanzo storico siciliano* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1971).

5 Leopardi owned the 1804 Italian translation of Edmund Burke's 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and of the Beautiful*, which he drew upon in the posthumously published *Zibaldone di pensieri*, now available in several English translations, including *Zibaldone: The Notebooks of Leopardi*, edited by Michael Caesar and Franco D'intino, trans. by Kathleen Baldwin, Richard Dixon, David Gibbons, Ann Goldstein, Gerard Slowey, Martin Thom and Pamela Williams (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2013). Typical of Leopardi's ambivalent oscillations between Enlightenment and unreason, light and dark is the ironic 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie' [Dialogue between Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies] (*c.* 1824; publ. in *Operette Morali,* 1827; trans. as *Essays, Dialogues and Thoughts,* by Patrick Maxwell, London: Walter Scott Ltd., 1880), in which science (the Dutch anatomist Ruysch) engages in a dialogue on and *with* death (the mummies in the scientist's study come back to life owing to a lunar alignment).

anthologised since the 1980s. Besides the shorter texts in these anthologies, I consider full-length Gothic novels first published as serials, as well as works readable within the famous 'limit of a single sitting' stipulated by Edgar Allan Poe in *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846) as indispensable to achieving the true poetic effect: short narratives, whether wholly Gothic or Gothic-inflected, that appeared in major newspapers and magazines of the time.[6] Providing a full bibliography of the latter is not possible here, though I include essential references to enable further research. In both cases, I have paid particular attention to the first half of the century; neglected by Ghidetti, these decades have long been considered the terra incognita of the Italian Gothic and therefore deserve fuller investigation. Finally, I touch on nineteenth-century Italian translations of English and European Gothic works, a field worthy of an essay in its own right, as it was precisely through these works that many of the Italian authors mentioned here approached the Gothic – whether to reject, adapt or wholly adopt it.

Enduring Delights and Fascinations of the Mind: Alessandro Manzoni and the Romantic Gothic[7]

Continuously taught in Italian secondary schools from 1870 to 2010, *I promessi sposi* (1827) [*The Betrothed*] by the Milanese Alessandro Manzoni is universally acknowledged to be the first great Italian novel, and as such it greatly influenced later authors from both a thematic-structural standpoint and a linguistic one: it served as a model for the historical fiction that was quickly rising to prominence in Italy after 1820, in an historical-political context that spurred Italian novelists to create heroic examples of resistance to (foreign)

6 I have consulted the following magazines: *Antologia* (Florence); *Biblioteca Italiana* (Milan); *L'illustrazione italiana* (Milan); *Domenica del Corriere* (Milan); *Fanfulla della domenica* (Rome); and the newspapers *Capitan Fracassa* (Rome); *Fanfulla* (Florence; later Rome). For the first Italian translations of some of the Gothic authors, see, in particular, the contemporary periodicals *Gabinetto di lettura. Miscellanea di scrittori francesi, inglesi e tedeschi recati in Italia* and *Rivista contemporanea*, both published in Turin. The cities of publication outline a geographic-editorial web of the Italian Gothic (autochthonous and in translation) closely intertwined with the democratisation of literature and with the editorial strategies of the 'popular' nineteenth century, as detailed in the last section of this essay. Further information on periodicals is given below when discussing particular authors.

7 The title is adapted from Alessandro Manzoni, 'Letter on romanticism (1823)', intro. and trans. by Joseph Luzzi, *PMLA* 119:2 (2004): 299–316. Alessandro Manzoni, 'Lettera sul Romanticismo', in *Opere varie* (Milan: Fratelli Rechiedei Editori, 1881), pp. 583–97. This edition collects all the Manzoni theoretical writings mentioned in this essay.

oppression;[8] its language, for which Manzoni chose the current Florentine literary vernacular, was widely embraced as an instrument of Italy's nascent linguistic unity, a model of cohesion and a common strategy in the service of an otherwise fragmented kingdom.[9] As such, the novel became compulsory reading in secondary schools, and it remains to this day the keystone of the national literary canon promoted by ministerial education programmes – an institutionalised, centralised canon that, if we look closely, stands on a solid Gothic foundation the reach of which extends throughout the nineteenth century.

Manzoni published the novel in two editions: the so-called Ventisettana, written between 1824 and 1827, and translated into a heavily abridged English version by Charles Swan (Pisa, Niccolò Capurro, 1828); and the so-called Quarantana, further reworked linguistically and published in instalments from 1840 to 1842. The latter was anonymously translated, in full, as *The Betrothed Lovers: A Milanese Story of the Seventeenth Century* (London, James Burns, 1844), the title later simplified to *The Betrothed*. The novel employs well-known invariants of the Gothic genre: like *The Castle of Otranto*, it features a priest with a troubled past (Walpole's father Jerome and Manzoni's father Cristoforo) who opposes the abuses, inevitably of a sexual nature, of an overbearing feudal lord (the tyrant Manfred, a character who in Manzoni is split into two – Don Rodrigo and his henchman, the Innominato, 'the unnamed', who later repents of his evil ways); and the victimiser of a virtuous young woman (Isabella in Walpole and Lucia in Manzoni, both imprisoned by order of the scheming villain). Similarly, the Radcliffe school is represented by the convention of the angelic heroine's kidnapping (Lucia is held prisoner by the Innominato, a fate she shares with Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert and Ellena di Rosalba, together with a host of other Gothic heroines) and the dual focus, with resulting structural bifurcation, which produces an independent, picaresque subplot for the male protagonists (Vivaldi and Renzo).[10] This complex

8 Also worth recalling in this context is *Poesie di Ossian, antico poeta celtico* [The poems of Ossian, ancient Celtic poet] (Padua, 1763), an important translation by Melchiorre Cesarotti of the first *Poems of Ossian*. Other translations of James Macpherson followed, spreading the new canon-breaking aesthetic that rose to the fore in the nineteenth century. See Enrico Mattioda, 'Ossian in Italy: From Cesarotti to the Theater', in Howard Gaskill (ed.), *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 274–302.

9 Also worth noting is that, according to the records in the Catalogo del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale, the Italian translations of Radcliffe reached a peak from the mid-1860s through the 1870s, precisely when the scholastic edition of *I promessi sposi* was most widely used.

10 While there is no clear evidence that Manzoni read the Gothic classics, it remains a distinct possibility: Milan's public libraries held translations of Radcliffe into French, a

interdiscursive grid also allows for the inclusion of various other intertextual elements – specific similarities and reuses that, as several scholars have noted, are by no means accidental.[11]

Bandits, castles, convents, corrupt religious figures, ruthless tyrants – even an introduction (the anonymous seventeenth-century 'dilavato e graffiato autografo' [faded and scratched-out manuscript])[12] reminiscent of the Preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*: Manzoni plainly adopted and transposed onto Italian soil the genre's eighteenth-century topologies and plot typologies, by now somewhat stereotyped, but recently given new life on English soil by Walter Scott, who was widely read in Italy and well known to Manzoni. Equally undeniable, however, is that the novel defuses them in

language in which Manzoni was fluent. Walpole's novel was translated into Italian by Giovanni [Jean] Sivrac (London, 1795), probably a pseudonym employed by the author and typographer Gaetano Polidori, an occasional translator living in exile in London and the father of the well-known John William Polidori. Ann Radcliffe's major novels were also translated into Italian: the Neapolitan printer Gaetano Nobile published *Emilia e Valancourt* and *Elena e Vivaldi* in the 1820s, while in Livorno Assunto Barbani had published *Udolfo* a decade earlier. Matthew Gregory Lewis, who does not seem to have influenced Manzoni directly, was not translated into Italian until mid-century (*Il frate,* 1850, for the Ferrario Brothers in Milan, but almost 30 years elapsed before a second edition). For a detailed bibliography of translations into Italian of Gothic classics in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Francesca Billiani, 'Appendix' to 'Delusional Identities: The Politics of the Italian Gothic and Fantastic', in Igino Ugo Tarchetti's Trilogy "Love in Art" and Luigi Gualdo's Short Stories "Hallucination", "The Song of Weber" and "Narcisa"', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 44:4 (2008): 497–9, and Gianfranco de Turris, 'Gotico popolare italiano. Appunti per una biblio-storia', in Enzo Biffi Gentili, with Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, Valter Boggione and Barbara Zandrino (eds), *Neogotico tricolore. Letteratura e altro* (Milan and Cuneo: Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo Foundation, 2015), pp. 130–6. On the reception of the English Gothic in Italy, see Céline Rodenas, 'La traduction des romans gothiques anglais vers l'italien à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe siècle. Échanges culturels entre l'Angleterre et l'Italie. "Il Castello di Otranto" (1795) et "La foresta" (1813)', *Cercles* 34 (2015): 170–86. Finally, on Italian translations of Radcliffe, see also Rosamaria Loretelli and John Dunkley, 'Translating Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*: André Morellet and Giovanni De Coureil', in Lidia De Michelis, Lia Guerra and Frank O'Gorman (eds), *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Italian Encounters. Entangled Histories* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2019), pp. 2–46. I thank my colleagues Loretelli and Dunkley for sharing their research with me.

11 Among the most convincing is Mariarosa Bricchi, '"Come una magnifica veste gittata sopra un manichino manierato e logoro". I "Promessi Sposi", il gusto gotico e Ann Radcliffe', *Autografo. La letteratura italiana e l'Europa nell'Ottocento* 31 (1995): 29–70. Bricchi references an idea expressed by Mario Praz in *The Romantic Agony* (Italian edition 1930, English trans. 1933): 'Manzoni's masterpiece is a magnificent garment over a mannered and worn-out lay figure'. Praz was the first critic to dwell on the Gothic antecedents of *I promessi sposi* from a comparatist perspective.

12 Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi, 1. Fermo e Lucia. Appendice storica sulla colonna infame; 2. I promessi sposi nelle due edizioni del 1840 e del 1825–27 raffrontate tra loro. Storia della colonna infame*, edited by Lanfranco Caretti, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), vol. 2, p. 5.

order to normalise and stabilise the more subversive and 'explosive' aspects of the genre, recoding them in line with a more emphatically Christian and providential literary typology.[13]

This is why the draft of *I promessi sposi* (traditionally referred to as *Fermo e Lucia* [Fermo and Lucia]) is of particular interest to scholars of the Gothic. Written between April 1821 and September 1823, just as the historical novel was gaining traction in Italy, this first version of the novel is filled with melodramatic contrasts, lurid overtones and long digressions that veer into sensationalism. These elements give *Fermo e Lucia* a blatantly *noir* flavour,[14] which Manzoni subsequently toned down or wholly suppressed in order to emphasise its more religiously inflected rational and moralising aspects. The revisions likewise involved subordinating history to imagination and it is no coincidence that at this time Manzoni was writing 'Del romanzo storico e, in genere, de' componimenti misti di storia e d'invenzione' [On the historical novel and, in general, on compositions created by mixing history and invention], an important essay published in 1845, but written at least a decade earlier. In the Quarantana, for example, the trials of the *untori* (those suspected of spreading the plague in Milan) form a separate appendix, *Storia della colonna infame* [History of the column of infamy], in which the strange and the wonderful (in the Hoffmannian sense) give way to the Christian tragic mode that became Manzoni's hallmark.[15] Likewise, special emphasis is placed on the evil Innominato's conversion – a revised section much praised for its psychological verisimilitude and an obvious choice for the 'moral considerations' imposed on nineteenth-century students – as well as on the chapters set in the lazaretto, where the victims of the plague end their miserable days. Originally the most horrifying sections of the novel, these chapters now become its true *kairòs*, awarding greater centrality to the mystery of God's judgement. But as Manzoni acknowledged, what had interested him most, at first, was the educational value of the representation of Evil, a concern that responded directly to the

13 Juri Lotman, *Culture and Explosion*, edited by Marina Grishakova (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

14 A note on terminology is necessary here. I will employ the French *noir* (black) to refer to the Gothic *roman noir,* also known as *littérature noire*. See Terry Hale, 'Roman Noir', in Marie Mulvey-Roberts (ed.), *The Handbook of the Gothic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 307–9. For the contaminations between *roman noir* and *I promessi sposi,* see Maria Antonietta Frangipani, *Motivi del romanzo nero nella letteratura lombarda* (Rome: Editrice Elia, 1981).

15 Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, vol. 2, pp. 901–1009.

moral reservations expressed against the novel (primarily of a 'Nordic', Anglo-German kind) by Piedmontese and Lombard intellectuals:

> Siamo stati più volte in dubbio se non convenisse stralciare dalla nostra storia queste turpi ed atroci avventure; ma esaminando l'impressione che ce n'era rimasta, leggendola dal manoscritto, abbiamo trovato che era un'impressione d'orrore; e ci è sembrato che la cognizione del male quando ne produce l'orrore sia non solo innocua ma utile.[16]
>
> [We have often been in doubt if it were not better to remove these nefarious and appalling adventures from our history; but in examining the impression they left when reading the manuscript, we found that it was an impression of horror; and it seemed to us that the knowledge of evil, when it produces a horror of it, is not only harmless but useful.]

The rhetorical question that Manzoni raises here prefigures – and justifies – the dark tenor of many horrific episodes in *Fermo e Lucia*, which were later removed. Among these is the story of Geltrude, better known as the Nun of Monza, a lengthy digression on the well-established Gothic theme of forced monastic vows (and their criminal consequences) first introduced by Denis Diderot in *La religeuse* [The nun] (1780–2), and given a sinister twist by the Gothic's anti-Catholicism (as in the story of Beatrice de las Cisternas, the Bleeding Nun of Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk*, 1796).[17] In the first draft of Manzoni's novel, the fall of Geltrude, who is called simply 'la Signora' [the Lady] (possibly a reference to Sister Agnes/Signora Laurentini in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), is effectively foreshadowed through two sensationalist similes: 'aveva la passione nell'animo e il serpente al fianco; e lo colse' [she had passion in her soul and a serpent by her side;

16 Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia,* in *I promessi sposi,* vol. 1, p. 204.

17 See Diane Long Hoeveler, 'Anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Imaginary: The Historical and Literary Contexts', in Brett C. McInelly (ed.), *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment*, 5 vols (New York: AMS Press, 2012), vol. 3, pp. 1–31 and bibliography. The imaginative contamination with the monastic dramas of the revolutionary period (for example the French playwrights Jacques Marie Boutet, known as Monvel, and Marie-Joseph-Blaise de Chénier) is also evident in the iconography of Geltrude, '*non molto dissimile* da un'attrice ardimentosa, di quelle che nei paesi separati dalla comunione cattolica facevano le parti di monaca in quelle commedie dove i riti cattolici erano soggetti di beffa e di parodia caricata' [*not very unlike* a bold actress, like those who in countries separated from the Catholic communion played the nun in comedies where the Catholic rites were the object of mockery and heavy-handed parody] (*Fermo e Lucia,* vol. 1, p. 138; italics mine). Manzoni was also a playwright and theorist of the theatre, having already written a historical drama (*Il conte di Carmagnola* [The Count of Carmagnola], 1816–19) and a tragedy (*Adelchi*, 1820–2). The analogy in the quotation should therefore be read in light of this theatrical context, of which I believe he was fully cognisant.

and she grasped it].[18] The dark episode is made even more shocking by the nun's brutal murder of an unfortunate novice who had witnessed and exposed Geltrude's dalliance with the 'serpent-seducer' Egidio, and whose body he then buries in a dark cellar under his quarters. Then there is the bloody episode of the Conte del Sagrato (the Innominato of the Quarantana), a ruthless murderer drawn with stylised Manicheanism: 'Il Conte prese di mira [quel misero] in questo spazio, lo colse, e lo stese a terra, . . . e senza scomporsi, ritornò per la sua via . . .' [The count took aim [at the wretch] in this place, struck him, and felled him to the ground, . . . and unperturbed, returned whence he came].[19] This heinous crime, committed on the *sagrato* (outside steps) of a church, allows Manzoni to reflect on the torments of remorse, as the count falls prey to a terrifying hallucination:

> E qui cominciarono a schierarsi dinanzi alla sua memoria tutti quelli ch'egli aveva cacciati o fatti cacciare dal mondo . . .; tutti con i loro volti nell'atto di morire, e quelli che egli non aveva veduti, ma uccisi soltanto col comando, la sua fantasia dava loro i volti e gli atti.[20]
>
> [And now his memory began to parade before him all those he had sent out of this world, or whose death he had ordered . . .; their faces in the throes of death, and those he had not seen, but killed only by command, to them his imagination gave faces and gestures.]

Finally, there is the terrible sketch *à la* Goya of the death of Don Rodrigo, whom we see in the lazaretto, a mere husk of a man, deprived of reason, barefoot and almost naked. His mad flight on a runaway horse – which evokes the motif of the demonic cavalcade – is starkly contrasted with the cynical inhumanity of the eerie, hooded monks who collect the repulsive corpse of the once-arrogant baron and callously throw him 'su la cima d'un tristo mucchio, fra lo strepito e le bestemmie' [on top of a miserable heap, amidst the general tumult and execrations].[21]

A French translation of the Ventisettana led the way for the remarkable success of Manzoni's novel in Europe. Three English translations appeared within 15 years, confirming the growing reputation of the author, the same 'Genius of the Place' to whom Edward Bulwer Lytton dedicated the

18 Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia,* p. 196. The contemporary English translations retained the original Italian 'la Signora' for Geltrude.
19 Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia,* p. 226. 20 Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia,* pp. 281–2.
21 Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia,* pp. 605, 608.

historical novel *Rienzi, The Last of the Roman Tribunes* (1836).[22] Another admirer was Charles Dickens, probably drawn by a poetics that seamlessly blended historical scope and moral vision with exciting plot twists. Father Cristoforo's enigmatic words, 'può esser gastigo, può esser misericordia' [it may be punishment, it may be mercy],[23] uttered by the bedside of the dying villain Don Rodrigo, would not be out of place in *Oliver Twist* (1837–9), one of the works in which Dickens employs Gothic imaginary to great effect, particularly in the episode of Oliver's visit to the imprisoned Fagin. Likewise, the blood spilled by Egidio and his accomplices inevitably leaves its mark on their faces and on their actions, just as Nancy's blood indelibly stains her murderer, Sikes.

The influence of *Fermo e Lucia*'s Gothic style on the principal Italian authors of the nineteenth century was considerable, and might be traced in Giovanni Verga's *Storia di una capinera* [History of a blackcap], a magazine serial, published as a volume in 1870, that includes forced monastic vows. Immured in a convent, where she is eagerly scrutinised through the cell's double grating by the 'viventi che si affacciano alla tomba per vedere cadaveri che parlano e si muovono' [living who peer into the tomb to see corpses that speak and move],[24] Maria has been crushed – or better, buried alive – by her impossible love for the young Nino, leading to her madness and, inevitably, death (hence the epitextual reference to the blackcap, the caged bird symbolising imprisonment), against the background of a mid-sixteenth-century cholera epidemic in the city of Catania. Well before Verga, however, the Romantic Gothic (and later the Risorgimento) had already drawn upon the early Manzoni, particularly in *La battaglia di Benevento. Storia del secolo XIII* [The battle of Benevento. A story of the thirteenth century] (Livorno, 1827–8) and *Beatrice Cenci. Storia del secolo XVI* [Beatrice Cenci. A story of the sixteenth century] (Pisa, 1853) by Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, a keen emulator of the English schools of terror and horror, whose taste for ghastly images was more sensationalistic than cathartic, as censoriously noted by Benedetto Croce, who described him, with an unforgettable metaphor, as 'oppresso dall'incubo dell'orrendo' [oppressed by the nightmare of the horrible].[25] Even

22 Alessandro Vescovi, 'Dickens and Alessandro Manzoni's "I Promessi Sposi"', in Alessandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa and Paul Vita (eds), *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics and Art* (Monza: Polimetrica, 2009), pp. 151–167.
23 Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, trans. by anon. (London: Bentley, 1834), p. 421.
24 Giovanni Verga, *Storia di una capinera* (Milan: Treves, 1893), p. 140.
25 'L'orrendo, che è sparso a piene mani in tutti i suoi libri . . . è un orrendo senza intimo fremito sebbene (anzi appunto perché) roboante di esclamazioni e di declamazioni. E' un orrendo di testa e non di cuore, un'escogitazione di cose terribili non ispirate da

Edgar Allan Poe, the master of the American macabre, probably took inspiration from Manzoni in his brief tale 'King Pest', first published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835 and translated in Italy as 'Re peste. Una storia che contiene un'allegoria'.[26]

By the time of the mid-century, the Gothic contagion had spread throughout the Italian peninsula. Leading the way here were the 'Scapigliati' [the dishevelled ones] (from the French *chevel*, Latin *capillus*), the name a tell-tale semantisation of the messy, unruly corporeality favoured by this northern school of artists, poets and novelists whose influence on late-century fantastic literature was such that they are often assumed to encompass the entirety of nineteenth-century Italian Gothic literature.

In the Non-thetic: Between Body and Mind at Mid-century

If the first phase of nineteenth-century Italian Gothic replicated, adapting them to its own ends, the themes, forms and discourses of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English models, as the nineteenth century advanced the discourses of the body and mind became increasingly central. On the one hand, this was the result of the influence exercised on Italian writers by authors such as Poe, who explored the interior and sensory dimensions of the Gothic alongside its architectural topologies;[27] on the other, this was due to the emergence of characters in Italian literature that

reale terrore dell'anima' [The horrible, which he liberally scatters through all his books . . . is a horrible lacking any inner tremors despite (or rather because) of all the loud exclaiming and declaiming. It is a horrible of the head not of the heart, a concoction of terrible things not inspired by a real terror of the soul]. Both quotations are from Benedetto Croce, 'Gli ultimi romanzi di Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi', in Benedetto Croce, *La letteratura della Nuova Italia. Saggi Critici*, 6 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1914), vol. 1, pp. 27–44 (pp. 28–9). On the influence of Radcliffe, see the first pages of Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, *Note autobiografiche e poema* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1899); on Radcliffe, see also pp. 55–8. Its magniloquence, extreme chromatic contrasts, standard appurtenances (skulls, thunder, ghosts) and paradigmatic spaces (underground vaults, a castle) make *La battaglia di Benevento*, with its Luciferesque villain Manfredi, a late, stale example of Italian hyper-Romanticism, somewhere between Radcliffe's explained supernatural and Lewis's demonic intensity.

26 See in particular the possible comparison with *Fermo e Lucia,* vol. 2, chapters II–IV. On Poe and *I promessi sposi*, specifically the plague episode, also see the anonymous review (probably by Poe himself) of George William Featherstonhaugh's translation of the novel, in *Southern Literary Messenger* 1:1 (1835): 520–2.

27 See, for example, Diodata Saluzzo Roero's *Il castello di Binasco* (1819), with its early Gothic (specifically subalpine) regionalism, and Gian Battista Bazzoni, a popular Walter Scott imitator whose *Il castello di Trezzo* (Milan, 1827) went through twelve editions.

existed at the very limit of the human, central even in one of the cornerstones of Western children's literature, *Le avventure di Pinocchio: storia di un burattino* (1883). I am referring here to what, following Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), we might call the 'non-thetic turn' of the Italian Gothic of the later nineteenth century. Equally pertinent in this respect is Georges Bataille's synthesis of this friction – or fault-line – between thetic and non-thetic in his discussion of sacrifice, where he describes it as a *freeing rupture*, a 'déchirure libératrice' ('a tear, or wound, laid open in the side of the real', as Rosemary Jackson glosses it), thus accounting for the carnality and corporeality that we also find in the Italian Gothic of this period.[28] It is less a regression into the 'arid real' condemned by the classicist Vincenzo Monti in his essay *Sulla mitologia* 1825 [On mythology] than a progressive desacralisation of the world that makes the representation of the body – impenetrable, aberrant, dangerous, resistant, unstable in its exposed, continually challenged materiality that paradoxically elevates it to the stature of *mysterium* – a privileged ethical-aesthetic object. In contrast to the age of Enlightenment, the later Italian nineteenth century is captivated by the disturbing allure of animated objects and seduced by the transgressing body in all its manifestations – possessed, ill, decaying, freed from the equation 'normality = beauty' – as it prepares to encounter the insidious end-century *daimon* quietly lying in wait among the arcane and nocturnal relics of an ancient past.

At the centre of these new discourses, and partly shaped by foreign influences that, alongside Poe, included Nikolai Gogol, Charles Baudelaire and Ernst Theodor Hoffmann, was the Scapigliatura movement, active roughly from 1840 to 1860 between Turin and Milan. Inspired by European late Romanticism, the Scapigliati sought to 'de-provincialise' Italian culture as part of a broader social and intellectual effort that extended, in the arts, to poetry and music. As Francesca Billiani explains, 'this literary (and political) movement strongly rejected bourgeois social and ethical values as well as the brand of historical realism advocated by Alessandro Manzoni and his followers'.[29]

The Scapigliati effectively fleshed out the Gothic, locating it in the body and giving it a blatant and disturbing materiality that was quite distinct both

28 Georges Bataille, 'Le Collège de Sociologie', Mardi 4 juillet 1939, in *Le Collège de Sociologie (1937–1939)*, edited by Denies Hollier (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 533; Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 22.

29 Billiani, 'Delusional Identities', p. 495, n.1.

from the immateriality of Gothic historical narratives and from the spectres and phantasmagorias of the turn of the century. Texts in this tradition explore and test the limits of distorted desire, negotiating the most disturbing of proclivities and obsessive psychopathologies. We thus witness a morbid fascination with amputation ('Il pugno chiuso' [The closed fist] by Arrigo Boito and 'Storia di una gamba' [The story of a leg] by Igino Ugo Tarchetti); fetishism verging upon morphophilia (the teeth and especially the hair of Fosca, *femme fatale* 'incadaverita e consunta' [corpse-like, wasted], in the miasmatic short novel by Tarchetti, emblematic of the dismemberment and reification of the *corpus*/corpse, especially female, already inherent in the movement's name);[30] the overwrought erotic aestheticism of necrophilia ('Un corpo' [A body] by Camillo Boito, 1870, which pits science against nature, the anatomist against the artist in a highly contemporary variant on the poetic theme of the corpse of a beautiful woman); and a focus on the diseases and disfigurements of the flesh, inevitable and at the same time liberating, that fascinate and subjugate male characters ('Narcisa', Luigi Gualdo's first work, whose protagonist dies of her beauty, in a foretaste of decadentism that reworks the Scapigliatura invariant 'beauty = incompleteness').

In this interpretative scenario, the aesthetic of the ugly, the abnormal and the heretical is relentlessly and oppressively celebrated, becoming the object of the horrified and subjugated gaze. What Edward Burne-Jones's painting of 1887 termed the female 'baleful head' is clearly epitomised by Tarchetti's Fosca:

> L'esiguità del suo collo formava un contrasto vivissimo colla grossezza della sua testa, di cui un ricco volume di capelli neri, folti, lunghissimi, quali non vide mai in altra donna, aumentava ancora la *sproporzione*.[31]
>
> [Her slender neck formed the most striking contrast with the bulk of her head, whose rich mass of hair, black, thick, longer than I had ever seen on a woman, further augmented the disproportion.]

The term 'disproportion' is, indeed, particularly fitting for this figure's Medusa-like dismantling of Burkean notions of beauty and Vitruvian

30 Igino Ugo Tarchetti, *Fosca: racconto di I.U. Tarchetti. Amore nell'arte: tre racconti dello stesso autore* (Milan: Edoardo Sonzogno Editore, 1874), p. 127; the translation that I cite here is from Lawrence Venuti's English translation of the text as Igino Ugo Tarchetti, *Passion*, trans. by Lawrence Venuti (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994), p. 9.

31 Tarchetti, *Fosca,* p. 49; italics mine; the English translation comes from Venuti's translation, p. 42. See Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

conceptualisations of harmony. A note on language here can help us better understand the typology of Tarchetti's Gothic style. The adjective 'horrid', from the Latin *horridus* (Italian *orribile*), has the secondary archaic meaning of *hairy, bristling*, which, according to the *OED*, remains current. The hyperonymy *horrid hair,* a semantic tautology, thus places *Fosca*'s imagery squarely within the fold of post-Romantic European Gothic. Tarchetti's aesthetic was evidently attuned to such linguistic-rhetorical nuances, as evidenced by his translations from English (among others, Mary Shelley's short story 'The Mortal Immortal' in 1865) and, more particularly, by his proto-deconstructionist story 'La lettera U. (Manoscritto di un pazzo)' [The letter U. (Manuscript of a madman)], published posthumously in 1869 in *Racconti Fantastici* [Fantastic tales], which plays on a linguistic phobia, a lipogram that prevents the narrator from using that letter of the alphabet.[32] In Tarchetti, however, such sophisticated discursive practices are always subordinated to the Scapigliatura's anti-realist project; an example is the presence of *orrid-* within one of the novel's most recurring terms: *sorridere* [to smile], in my interpretation deconstructible into *s-orrid-ere*. There are no fewer than twenty-eight occurrences of verbs and nouns related to *sorridere*/*sorriso* in this *fosco* [fuscous, dark] novel. The horror of Fosca ('la luce del giorno me la mostrava in tutta la sua *orridezza*')[33] is therefore semantically/aesthetically contained within beauty and joy itself, in a plastic rendering of the binary beauty/ugliness (or rather, beauty *in* ugliness) that was central to the decadent and Romantic 'agony' (to cite Mario Praz's influential study). Fosca, in other words, is a channel of *contagion* – medical, psychic, even linguistic – and Giorgio, the narrator, ends up being himself corrupted and corroded, 'inerte, muto, *inorridito*';[34] in brief, he becomes 'foschizzato' [fosca-fied], enveloped in the arms of his horrible corpse-bride, in an ultimate transference of the malady that simultaneously enables and empowers the woman and disables and disempowers the man (where the fate of the body natural also involves that of the body politic). Giorgio encounters the horrible skull that lurks under the beautiful female face.

32 On Tarchetti's estranging and anti-domesticising practice as a translator, and on the aesthetic and political significance of his thoughts on language, see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 148–86.

33 'The daylight displayed her in all her *horror*'. The English translation comes from Venuti's translation, p. 87; italics mine.

34 'Inert, mute, aghast', Venuti's translation, p. 123; italics mine.

Gothic Pinocchio/Pinocchio and the Gothic

To obviate any potential transmedia and transcultural suggestions, it should be clarified immediately that the tender, colourful character created by Walt Disney in 1940 shares very little besides the name with the puppet-turned-real-boy invented by Collodi half a century earlier. The novel was published in instalments in the weekly *Giornale per i bambini* [The children's review] from 1881, later collected in a book entitled *Le avventure di Pinocchio: storia di un burattino* (1883) [The Adventures of Pinocchio: The Story of a Puppet], with illustrations by Enrico Mazzanti. To give a sense of the Gothic tone of Collodi's book as compared to Disney's film, one need only note that in the last episode of the original Pinocchio is hanged and dies.[35] Indeed, Collodi's *Pinocchio* is a grotesque and disturbing reinterpretation of the Pygmalion epyllion that was so popular in nineteenth-century Europe (for example, *La Vénus d'Ille* by Prosper Mérimée, 1837, a model for 'Lorenzo Alviati' by Tarchetti, 1869, and 'Ida' by Federico Verdinois, 1880, the latter a refined multilingual translator who introduced Italians to many European fantastic authors). It is a violent, dark story, a symbolic battlefield in which the Dionysian spirit of boyish disengagement (the *wanting* to be) clashes with, and finally succumbs to, the Apollonian mode (the *having* to be) of adult sociality and of sacrifice.

The plot recounts the misadventures of a disobedient wooden puppet whose stubbornness and misplaced sense of independence continually place him in harm's way, causing him to collide, in an adventure-filled process of *Bildung* that replicates the stages of a child's psychosocial development, with paternal (the carpenter Geppetto), maternal (the Good Fairy) and social authority (learning to interact with peers and to internalise mechanisms of repression), before he finally finds his own identity within the community. The novel develops many Gothic motifs, on which it superimposes a strict – indeed harshly repressive – pedagogical intent: alimentary metaphors (anxiety and taboos about appetite and food, with extreme bodily representations of hunger such as starvation and cannibalism); scenes of entrapment and premature burial (Pinocchio is locked in a prison and later is swallowed by the terrible Dog-fish); several near-death experiences (the puppet-master Fire-eater wants to use him as firewood); the tortured and grotesque body (the piece of pine that will become Pinocchio is already animated and talking

35 I quote from the first English translation of the novel: Carlo Collodi [pseud. of Carlo Lorenzini], *The Story of a Puppet or The Adventures of Pinocchio*, trans. by Mary Alice Murray, illustrated by C. Mazzanti [*sic*] (London: Fisher Unwin, 1892).

before Master Cherry offers the wood to Geppetto, and later the puppet is stabbed, hanged and left to die by the Cat and the Fox); and episodes of animalisation and body morphing, literal and metaphorical (Pinocchio's nose notoriously growing longer and longer is certainly the best-known example, but when he follows Candlewick to the land of Cocagne, he turns into a braying donkey, whipped and 'bought by a man who proposed to make a drum of his skin',[36] and in an earlier episode he is put on a chain to serve as a guard dog). These are just some of the Gothic horrors of which the irreverent and rebellious puppet is the subject/object. Besides the explicit didactic intent of correcting a child's misbehaviour, at work here is a constant testing of Pinocchio's ontological and physical boundaries, in a process that encapsulates – as already foreshadowed two decades earlier by the Scapigliati – the late nineteenth-century crisis of binary classifications, the perturbing and unstable porosity of the threshold between human and ab-human – a wooden object in the act of becoming alive – and what Julia Kristeva calls the abject, the limit between law and desire.[37] An example occurs in chapter 34, which tests the monstrous immortality – owing to the uncontainable, irrepressible energy of the Id – of this Creature of uncertainty (I capitalise the word in homage to a possible *Pinocchio* intertext: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* [1818; 1831]):

> Well, then, the good Fairy, as soon as she saw that I was in danger of drowning, sent immediately an immense shoal of fish, who, believing me really to be a little dead donkey, began to eat me. And what mouthfuls they took! I should never have thought that fish were greedier than boys! . . . Some ate my ears, some my muzzle, others my neck and mane, some the skin of my legs, some my coat . . . and amongst them there was a little fish so polite that he even condescended to eat my tail. . . . However, I must tell you that when the fish had finished eating the donkey's hide that covered me from head to foot, they naturally reached the bone . . . or rather the wood, for as you see I am made of the hardest wood.[38]

Through this sequence of transformations – theoretically interminable because oneirically reproducible to infinity, and made possible by

36 Collodi, *Pinocchio*, p. 190.
37 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
38 Collodi, *Pinocchio,* pp. 205–6. Charles Klopp also notes the possible inter-discursive relation between *Frankenstein* and *Pinocchio* in 'Workshops of Creation, Filthy and Not: Collodi's "Pinocchio" and Shelley's "Frankenstein"', in Katia Pizzi (ed.), *Pinocchio, Puppets and Modernity: The Mechanical Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 63–74.

Pinocchio's uncertain ontological status – the puppet stages a protean journey that takes him from vegetable to animal (wood–> donkey–> wood) and from dead to alive (prey of the fish–> fugitive). By contesting and deconstructing already inherently mobile classifications and taxonomies, Pinocchio, an animated block of wood, an un-begotten Other, an object mediating the desire of his male creator, complicates the distinction between object and subject, between I/Other: he embodies the Freudian uncanny par excellence, even if, once again, the novel's extra-textual frame of reference recodes and dislocates the Gothic's mythopoeic and supernatural thrust. Within this narrative scheme, each adventure becomes a device to drive home the novel's moral message and to reiterate the imperatives of social utility, productivity and charity that the individual must learn to recognise and internalise, thus naturalising them. As a result, even horror and monstrosity become abstractions, discourses subjected to a transformation that re-encodes them within a modern morality.[39]

Pinocchio is, unquestionably, a humanistic metaphor *avant la lettre*, a character/trope who, even on a purely semantic level – his name's association with the pine nut – already represents a seme/seed, that of the dialogue between natural / artificial, I/other than me, desire/moral lesson: the seme/seed of modernity itself.

Further Thresholds: The Twilight of Positivism

Alongside the major narrative strands of Verismo and regional literature, the final years of the *siècle stupide* in Italy, as in Great Britain, were marked by explorations of anti-rationalist and anti-scientific discourses and hermeneutical modalities such as spiritualism, mesmerism, psychic phenomena and occultism. Vampirism was also among these, a cultural preoccupation that is worth looking at more closely, since it was the focus of an artistic subgenre that had flourished in the peninsula ever since the *Dissertazione sopra i vampiri* (1739) [Dissertation on Vampires] by the Florentine Giuseppe Davanzati, Archbishop of Trani, a scientific-ethnographic treatise first circulated in manuscript and later published in two editions (1764 and 1789).

In the wake of the success of John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (*New Monthly Magazine,* 1 April 1819), vampires became a recurring theme in

39 For the 'negative aesthetics' of the Gothic, see Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 8. Collodi had also translated Charles Perrault's fairy tales (*I racconti delle fate*, 1876), which, typically for the genre at this time, were expressly written as morality tales.

nineteenth-century Italy, both on the stage and in print.[40] After the appearance of the anonymous *Lord Ruthven o i vampiri di Lord Byron* [Lord Ruthven or Lord Byron's vampires] (Naples, Marotta and Vaspandoch, 1826), a text largely unrelated to Polidori's story, *The Vampyre* was translated as *Il vampiro. Novella di Lord Byron* [The vampire. A novel by Lord Byron] (Udine, 1831). The trope also appeared fairly regularly on the stage, both as free transmediations of Polidori's text (masked ballet extravaganzas staged at the royal theatres of Milan and Turin, of which only a single narrativisation, dating to the 1860s, has survived in print), and as a colourful framing device for comedies (Giovanni Carlo Cosenza, *Il vampire* [The Vampire], 1825; Angelo Brofferio, *Il vampire* [The Vampire], 1827; Cesare Vitaliani, *I vampiri del giorno* [The Vampires of the Day], 1866). In fiction, the first original Italian vampire story appeared in *I racconti del diavolo. Storia della paura* [The devil's stories. A tale of fear] (Bologna, 1861) by Franco Mistrali, the author of the first Italian vampire novel, *Il vampiro. Storia vera* [The vampire; a true story] (Bologna, 1869). Of particular interest, finally, is the story by Francesco Ernesto Morando, 'Vampiro innocente' [Innocent vampire] (published in *Fanfulla della Domenica* in 1885), in which a madman interned in an asylum tells the institution's director how his young daughter had the life sucked out of her by his vampiric son, whom the despairing father then strangled in an attempt to rid the world of the monster. The luridly sensational plot, with its almost explicit incestuous subtext, was probably rendered acceptable only by the deranged narrator's unreliability, a convenient (and common) narrative ploy that casts doubt on his understanding – and therefore the truth – of the events that he recounts, thus justifying the possibility that his son was indeed an 'innocent vampire'.

If Fosca, the deadly protagonist of Tarchetti's novel, can be associated – as victim and active carrier – with forms of physical and psychic vampirism that were also common in contemporary English literature, after the turn of the century the story 'Un vampiro' by Luigi Capuana (published in a 1907 collection by the same title) represents a new, distinctly bourgeois version of the vampire *mỳthos*. The narrative is set in post-Umbertine Italy and reconfigures the figure of the vampire according to the middle-class ideologies of domesticity and marriage, a shift shared with much Gothic and fantastic fiction of nineteenth-century Italy. In Capuana's story the vampire is thus the deceased husband of the protagonist, Luisa, newly married to her

40 Edoardo Zuccato, 'The Fortunes of Byron in Italy (1810–1870)', in Richard Cardwell (ed.), *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, 2 vols (London: Thoemmes-Continuum, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 80–99.

first love – a union both fulfiling and long desired, and hence *guilty*. The couple has a child, whereas her first marriage to the man whom death has transformed into a *revenant* had been childless. Like the persecution of a phantasm, always present in its absence and able endlessly to reactivate a past that must not be allowed to remain past, the torment inflicted by Capuana's vampire on the couple's son is, ideologically, the punishment that patriarchal authority reserves for the woman, guilty of a desire that is perceived as illegitimate and unnatural, and that must therefore be disciplined and punished. On an epistemological level, however, the acceptance by Dr Mongeri, the story's narrator, of the extraordinary events related by his friend, the poet Lelio Giorgi, makes him the spokesman of a new *doxa,* a modern anti-dogmatic empiricism open to other dimensions parallel to that of reason, and capable of allowing that this 'preteso caso di vampirismo' [alleged case of vampirism] belongs within a vaster and more complex natural order, of which it even represents an evolutionary stage.[41]

Salvatore di Giacomo expressed this new openness in 'La fine di Barth' [The end of Barth] (1893):

> Tutto questo, miei ottimi amici, io vi giuro di averlo *visto* e *udito*. La realtà ha tali argomenti di persuasione e di sensazioni che non ci si può permettere d'offenderla co' soliti argomenti fantastici, con le supposizioni di un sogno, d'una visione del solo spirito, della sola immaginazione esaltata.
>
> Che successe dopo? Posso io narrarvelo con la medesima precisione? No, non posso ... Tutto quello che succedette alla mia visione – devo io chiamarla *visione*? – è impreciso.[42]

> [All this, my good friends, I swear to have *seen* and *heard*. Reality has such arguments of persuasion and such sensations that we cannot allow ourselves

41 Luigi Capuana, 'Il Vampiro', in Costanza Melani (ed.), *Fantastico italiano* (Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 2009), pp. 290–308 (p. 308). In the early editions, the story had a dedication to Cesare Lombroso, whose collaboration with Capuana I discuss elsewhere in this essay. Of the vampire fictions that I refer to, Franco Mistrali's *Il vampiro. Storia vera*, edited by Antonio Daniele (Salerno: Keres Edizioni, 2011) is currently out of print; Luigi Capuana's 'Il Vampiro' is available in several collections of nineteenth-century fantastic tales, for which, as for the other texts mentioned in this essay, see the bibliography. Especially useful is the critical introduction to Luigi Capuana, *Novelle dal mondo occulto*, edited by Andrea Cedola (Bologna: Pendragon, 2007), pp. 7–75. Some of the nineteenth-century vampire tales, including those discussed here, are in Antonio Daniele (ed.), *Vampiriana. Novelle italiane di vampiri* (Salerno: Keres Edizioni, 2011). The only scholarly text on the subgenre, though with a strong twentieth-century focus, is Giuseppe Tardiola, *Il vampiro nella letteratura italiana* (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991).

42 Salvatore di Giacomo, 'La fine di Barth', in Melani (ed.), *Fantastico italiano*, pp. 381–4; italics in original.

to offend it with the usual fantastic arguments, with suppositions of a dream, of a vision of the spirit alone, of exalted imagination alone.

What happened next? Can I describe it with equal accuracy? No, I cannot . . . All that followed my vision – must I call it *vision*? – is imprecise.]

It is with this symbolic final question, as obsessive as it is disarming, that the Italian Gothic of the nineteenth century comes to a close. The question expresses a hermeneutic and narratological incapacity, the gnoseological hesitation of a dissolve, of an evanescent body, of a gaze that *cannot* see. Not surprisingly, with positivism in full decline, the next century ushered in a new attempt scientifically to systematise spiritualism itself: the Società di studi psichici was founded in Milan in 1900. Modelled on the Society for Psychical Research in London (founded in 1882), and with its own journal, *Luce e ombra. Rivista mensile illustrata di scienze spiritualiste* (1901) [Light and darkness. Illustrated monthly review of spiritualist sciences], the Società remained active for many decades and included among its members writers of the calibre of Antonio Fogazzaro (also its honorary president), Arrigo Boito, Capuana and, among men of science, even Cesare Lombroso, the psychiatrist whose new discipline of criminal anthropology sought in the materiality of the most deterministic physical taxonomy a direct route into the *psyche*.[43] The deep crisis of traditional values that marked the end of the century was thus accompanied by a radical questioning of scientific certainties, in a context of social unease made starkly apparent by the worsening living conditions of the masses. The potentially subversive experimentation of the Gothic (and more generally, the fantastic) responds to this post-unification disillusionment and conveys the sense of crisis through anti-realist or para-realist forms and themes that grapple with and challenge not just facts but facticity itself.

No clear distinction can therefore be drawn between literary naturalism and supernaturalism in these end-century decades, nor between the standard-bearers of realism-naturalism on the one hand and the exponents of late-Romantic anti-realism on the other. But such uncertainty about 'the true', and the need constantly to review the hermeneutic paradigm and hence the boundaries of the fantastic, were already evident in Manzoni, who wrote explicitly about the frailty of Enlightenment reason: 'Non voglio dissimulare . . . a me stesso, perché non desidero di ingannarmi, quanto indeterminato,

43 Fascinated by the famous medium Eusapia Paladino (or Palladino), Lombroso also wrote a treatise on spiritualism, much of which concerns precisely what he called 'fenomeni spiritici eusapiani' [Eusapian spiritual phenomena]: *Ricerche sui fenomeni ipnotici e spiritici* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1909).

incerto, e vacillante nell'applicazione sia il senso della parola "vero" riguardo ai lavori dell'immaginazione' [I do not want to conceal . . . from myself, because I do not wish to deceive myself, how indeterminate, uncertain, and dubious in its application is the meaning of the word 'true' as regards the works of imagination].[44] Authors such as Verga, Capuana and Serao, but also the Neapolitan Salvatore di Giacomo, and, early in the next century, the Sardinian Grazia Deledda and the Sicilian Luigi Pirandello, constantly interweave apparently antithetical forms and genres in their works. Such experimental contaminations give rise to plots in which the inexplicable, the mysterious and the unknown imbue the Gothic of this time with an original and distinctly regionalist and folkloristic-popular tinge, shrouding in black the sunny, Mediterranean *genius loci* so beloved by the writers and travellers of earlier centuries. In this geolocalised rereading of the Gothic that is attentive to specific cultural nuances, traditional themes and actors are recoded: history becomes legend (sometimes brutally violent, as in *Le storie del Castello di Trezza* [The stories of the Castle of Trezza] by Giovanni Verga, 1875); supernatural events turn into miracles, if the interpretation is religious or, if secular, into the effects of omnipresent and omnipotent local forces of oppression (the post-feudal crimes of arrogant landowners or secret societies, as in *I Beati Paoli*); psychic phenomena and mesmerism are reinterpreted as beguilements; the figure of the antagonist, enveloped in an aura of superstition, becomes 'Il fatale' ('The fatal being', the title of a story by Tarchetti in *Racconti Fantastici*); the spectral, finally, may be reduced to mere passion. Once again, the work of Luigi Capuana is emblematic in this respect. A dialectologist deeply versed in Sicilian traditions, including their darker and fiercer aspects, Capuana was the acknowledged progenitor of the southern naturalist literary school, but experimented equally with fantastic as with anthropological-documentary forms, adapting characters and situations from the *fin-de-siècle* art/science dialogue to the Sicilian setting. One example is the psychopathology of a criminal explored in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* [The Marquis of Roccaverdina] (Treves, 1901), a novel set against the background of an archaic and feudal Sicily, and which is unanimously recognised as his masterpiece. His works exhibit his decades-long interest in the anti-materialism and anti-dogmatism of 'metapsychics' (or *metapsychique,* a term coined by the French physiologist Charles-Robert Richet, a scholar of the paranormal and winner of the Nobel Prize in 1912) and transcendentalist doctrines that interrogated the boundaries between visible and invisible, life and death,

44 Manzoni, 'Lettera sul romanticismo', p. 594.

between the material and an immateriality that is often dark and threatening (as in the story 'Forze occulte' [Occult powers], first published in 1902).

If the major Italian authors of the end of the century thus had no qualms about making their own incursions into the Gothic and the fantastic, it is also true that the rapidly expanding circulation of magazines and newspapers, with their serialised novels and short stories ranging in genre from horror to the exotic to proto-science fiction, contributed in no small part to the popularity of Italian genre literature. However distant from the 'high' literary canon, such reading matter was nonetheless fully attuned to the tastes of a newly literate working-class and petty-bourgeois audience. Though this wholesale production of literary 'pleasure' was scorned by militant critics, it remained in high demand by the masses.[45] It was this publishing context that gave rise to best-selling authors such as Emilio De Marchi and Carolina Invernizio, whose gripping novels freely combined *noir* with detection and romance, in a winning narrative formula first mastered in Britain by Wilkie Collins. In Invernizio's fiction, in particular, a morbid insistence on death, a theme already dear to the Scapigliati, is coupled with a focus on women's victimisation that reads as a scarcely veiled critique of the repressive institution of the family: unbridled sexual impulses that inevitably result in social transgressions (not least adultery, in plotlines revolving around typical ethical-social constructions of the time such as 'honour' and 'respectability') could thus find free expression outside the ideological and formal straightjacket of bourgeois realism. In this regard the titles of Invernizio's novels are exemplary, enticing the reader into the realm of the macabre, the anguished, the forbidden: *Il bacio d'una morta* [The kiss of the dead woman] (1886) and its sequel, *La vendetta d'una pazza* [The vengeance of a mad woman] (1894), and, among the novels on taphophobia, the 'buried alive' theme that garnered Invernizio an immense following, *La sepolta viva* [The buried alive woman] (1896) and, consequently, *La rediviva* [The revenant woman] (1906). These are works – rapidly adapted for the screen in the silent film era – that cleverly exploit a diverse range of mass-market Gothic themes and forms, blending

45 For a detailed and fascinating introduction to Italian 'weird' magazine literature, see Fabrizio Foni, *Alla fiera dei mostri. Racconti pulp, horror e arcane fantasticherie nelle riviste italiane 1899–1932* (Latina: Tanué, 2007), from which I draw the following information. Among periodicals of interest to Gothic scholars are *Per terra e per mare*; *Il giornale dei viaggi,* with a similar editorial thrust, and, at the cusp of the new century, *La domenica del Corriere*, supplement of the very popular Milan daily *Il Corriere della Sera,* which serialised, among others, *She* (1887) by Henry Rider Haggard, starting from n. 15 of 1901, and in 1902, from n. 44, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) by Arthur Conan Doyle, translated as *La maledizione dei Baskerville*.

the 'gaslight mysteries' *à la* Eugene Sue with the surprise endings of the *roman feuilleton* and the classic features of the sensation novel.[46]

Shadows and Glimmers: Into the Twentieth Century

> L'anima italiana tende, naturalmente, al definito e all'armonico. Bene invase e corse l'Italia, dopo il 1815, una nordica cavalcata di spettri, di vergini morenti, di angeli-demoni, di disperati e cupi bestemmiatori, e si udirono scricchiolii di scheletri, e sospiri e pianti e sghignazzate di folli e deliri di febbricitanti. Ma tutto ciò . . . agitò la superficie e non le profondità.[47]
>
> [The Italian soul leans naturally toward the definite and harmonious. It is true that after 1815, Italy was invaded by a Northern cavalcade of ghosts, dying virgins, angel-demons, desperate and gloomy blasphemers and one could hear the creaking of skeletons, the sighing, weeping and guffaws of fools and delirious cries of feverish people . . . But it only rippled the surface without touching the depths.]

So wrote Benedetto Croce, the leading Italian intellectual of the first half of the twentieth century, in 1904, reflecting on the century just past. With their icy dismissal of the unbalanced, disturbed, neurotic – in short, 'nocturnal' – side of what he defined, perhaps for lack of a better word, 'Romanticism', Croce's critical writings, thoroughly politicised and ideologically inflected, helped to establish the (or, rather, *a*) literary canon that held sway in Italy until almost the end of the last century. His condemnation carried much weight, therefore, and exemplifies a late resurgence of post-Enlightenment censure that proved so influential as to become an automatic critical response among Italian intellectuals, as we saw with Italo Calvino's views on the Italian Gothic discussed at the start of this chapter. In retrospect, however, this towering figure now paradoxically has come to resemble an *éidolon* – an anachronistic phantasm far removed from the *real*.

46 Carolina Invernizio's rich *oeuvre* is available in several languages, including Spanish and Portuguese, but not in English. An exception is the short story 'Punishment', translated, with some critical notes, in Cosetta Gaudenzi, 'Carolina Invernizio's "Punishment"', *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 38:2 (2004): 562–81.

47 Benedetto Croce, 'Arrigo Boito', in *La letteratura della Nuova Italia. Saggi Critici*, 6 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1914), vol. 1, pp. 259–76 (p. 259). Up to the ellipsis the translation is by Remo Ceserani, 'Fantastic and Literature', in Paul Puppa and Luca Somigli (eds), *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, gen. ed. Gaetana Marrone (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 684–8 (p. 685).

Demons and brigands, darkness and light, ecstasy and terror; superstitious horrors generated by the excesses of religion; dazzling visions emerging from dark sea's depths. As this chapter has shown, the Italian Gothic of the nineteenth century is a hybrid, bipolar genre locked into a perennial intergenerational struggle with stolid *res* – the realism, or 'dull catalogue of common things' against which John Keats in *Lamia* (1820) rebelled – at the uncertain and mobile boundary between matter and idea, Romantic and Classic, or between *griechisch* and *gotisch,* to return to the eighteenth-century aesthetic categories from which we started. From Radcliffe's Italy, the land of villains, castles and bandits – a hetero-directed vision, a cultural construction – to the post-Verist Italy of mysteries, of otherworldly psychopomps, of the crisis of epistemologies and radical questioning of the discourses of the body and of humanity, we have before us a vast chiaroscuro Gothic canvas in which the strands of ethnographic enquiry intertwine with those of social denunciation, all set against the background of the difficult construction of the new nation. Its development can be traced through a sequence of cultural interrelations, confluences, contacts, rereadings, until it gradually acquired its own strong and distinct voice, one whose history for the most part still waits be written. Replete with the unresolved paradoxes and unsolvable aporias of a land born under the sign of Saturn, where unquiet pagan gods still seem to inhabit the quivering vegetation overlooking the brilliant blue of the Mediterranean idyll, Gothic Italy lurks even beneath the sunny and fragrant Ravello of E. M. Forster's 'The Story of a Panic' (1904), the (purposely northern) gem of a story with which I conclude this journey into the Italic Gothic:

> It is not possible to describe coherently what happened next: but I, for one, am not ashamed to confess that, though the fair blue sky was above me, and the green spring woods beneath me, and the kindest of friends around me, yet I became terribly frightened, more frightened than I ever wish to become again, frightened in a way I never have known either before or after.[48]

Forster here figures a sinister, transformative encounter – simultaneously disturbing and epiphanic, once again inexorably oxymoronic – that marks a

48 E. M. Forster, 'The Story of a Panic', in *Selected Stories*, edited by David Leavitt and with an introduction and notes, by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), pp. 1–23 (p. 6).

transition: an end that is a beginning, a flight forward, headlong into the next century, the indisputably *noir* century whose fertile soil nourished such figures as Tommaso Landolfi, Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Eraldo Baldini and Tiziano Sclavi, the new purveyors, in different media and with diverse imaginative and rhetorical talents, of chills under the Italian sun.