In the years 1880-1894, D'Annunzio actively took part in the debate on the future of the novel and in the transition between realism and decadence. This article argues that D'Annunzio's "battle of realism" is fought between two texts, *Giovanni Episcopo* and *L'Innocente*, closely composed in 1891, and that it can be best brought to light by comparing the two novels against a psychoanalytical ghost text common to both in which two different events take place: castration in *Giovanni Episcopo* and fetishism (as argued by Barbara Spackman) in *L'Innocente*.

The beginning of D'Annunzio's career as a prose writer—a phase stretching roughly from 1880, when the first sketches of *Terra Vergine* appeared, to 1894, when *Il Trionfo della Morte* was published—appears as a complex workshop in which the young author explored, as well as exploited, the most important trends of Italian and European literature. Through an impressively voracious process of absorption and regurgitation, D'Annunzio blurs the limits between plagiarism and creation. Italian *Verismo*, French naturalism, French and English decadence, Russian suggestions and Nietzschean inspirations all collide within the space of a decade, producing a set of tightly knotted prose works, in turn intermingled with the author's poetic production and turbulent private and publishing life. Poetic, narrative and journalistic experiences, diggings and discoveries, plagiarism and inventions overlap in such an intricate fashion that each text of this period appears as the product of multiple and often contradictory forms of inspiration and alignment with contemporary literary production.
movements and authors. The metamorphic quality of D'Annunzio's imitation always prevents his work from being easily labelled by “-isms” (naturalism, decadentism).1

By quickly isolating and collecting his three main novels (Il Piacere, L'Innocente, Il Trionfo della Morte) under the joint title “Romanzi della Rosa,” D'Annunzio characterized them as the best and most consistent fruit of this decade—a sentimental/sexual triad that follows the development of a fundamentally self-resembling male hero from local dandy to local over-man.2 When organizing his work for the National Edition in the late 1920s-30s, D'Annunzio positioned the three novels as volumes 12-14, third to fifth of the “Prose di romanzi,” preceded by two volumes gathering his youthful, shorter, and allegedly more realistic works: the collection

1Particularly elusive, and very much debated, is D'Annunzio's relation with “realism,” that is the relation with Italian verismo in the stories of Terra Vergine and with international naturalism in Giovanni Episcopo and the Novelle della Pescara (not to mention the even more problematic “terzo tempo” of “mythical” realism with La Figlia di Iorio, 1904). Critics agree that these labels never fully fit D'Annunzio's early work and often prefer talking about “primitivism” or “aesthetic naturalism.” At the same time, the impact of Italian and international realism on D'Annunzio's work is undeniable, and while some critics perceive Il Piacere as breaking away from this movement, some extend the survival of naturalistic structures until Il Trionfo della Morte. For D'Annunzio's prose and his strategies of appropriation of Italian and international models see Paratore, “Problemi di stile dannunziano,” “D'Annunzio e Verga” and “Naturalismo e decadentismo in Gabriele D'Annunzio” in Studi dannunziani, 71-306; De Michelis, Tutto D'Annunzio; Goudet, D'Annunzio romanziere; Raimondi, “D'Annunzio e il simbolismo;” Tosi, “D'Annunzio et le symbolisme français” and “Incontri di D'Annunzio colla cultura francese (1879-1894);” Ciani, Storia di un libro dannunziano; Gibellini, “Terra Vergine e il verismo dannunziano;” Andreoli, “D'Annunzio e il romanzo europeo di fine secolo;” Giannantonio, L'universo dei sensi. Letteratura e artificio di D'Annunzio.

2The idea of the “cycle of the rose” is already evident at the time when Il Trionfo della Morte was completed. See the letter to the editor Treves of June 15, 1894: “Questi tre romanzi hanno – come studi di psicopatia – qualche cosa di comune. E io vorrei – in una ristampa – comprendervi sotto un titolo generale che dovrebbe essere sovrapposto al singolar titolo di ciascun volume. Diverrebbe più palese –così– il mio intendimento e resterebbe completo e chiuso il ciclo” (Lettere ai Treves, 134). (Just like studies in psychopathy, these three novels have something in common. In a reprint I would like to gather them under a general title, which would be superimposed to the particular title of each volume. My intention would be, therefore, clearer and the cycle would be completed and closed [translation mine]).
“Le primavere della mala pianta” (vol. 10, *Terra vergine* and *Giovanni Episcopo*) and *Le Novelle della Pescara* (vol. 11). The actual composition of these texts, in contrast to their well-planned sequencing, was rather chaotic and complex. The rebellious breaking away from the standards of naturalism and steering toward decadent inspiration in *Il Piacere* (1888) and the first draft of *Il Trionfo della Morte* (published in a journal series as *L'Invincibile* in 1890) is followed by what appears as a resuscitation of realism with *Giovanni Episcopo*, quickly re-buried with *L'Innocente*. Moreover, the reworking of the short stories was carried on through the long and complex process of revision and rewriting that unfolds through four collections (“Il libro delle Vergini,” 1884; “S. Pantaleone,” 1886; “Gli idolatri,” 1892; “I violenti,” 1892), the presentation of his early work to the French public with *Episcopo et C.ie* (1895, comprised of *Giovanni Episcopo* and ten short stories) and the final arrangement of the *Novelle della Pescara* (1902).

D’Annunzio’s restless experimentation with models implies an awareness of, and participation in the vital crisis affecting the European novel at that time, a crisis that revolved around the extenuation of the social impact of naturalism, the complication of psychologism and the surge of the decadent novel. As early as 1888 D’Annunzio recorded in his journalistic writings the “agony” of naturalism, envisioned as the inability of the writers to reconcile the exactitude of external description with the interest for psychological investigations. When returning to the problems of the novel in

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3For the complex evolution of the *Novelle* and the key-role of the French *Episcopo*, see Ciani, *Storia di un libro dannunziano*.

4“L’ultimo romanzo” in *La Tribuna*, May 26, 1888: “I loro romanzi sono, in una parola, incoerenti. La descrizione naturalistica e l’analisi psicologica non vi si uniscono mai così pienamente e perfettamente da proporre vero e vivente organismo d’opera d’arte. La descrizione di luoghi e di avvenimenti, in somma, non è quasi mai messa d’accordo con le speciali condizioni intellettuali del ‘personaggio.’ Questo fondamentale errore letterario de’ romanziere naturalisti trasformati proviene da un errore scientifico. Essi credono che le cose anteriori esistano fuori di noi, indipendentemente, e che quindi debbano avere per tutti gli spiriti umani una medesima apparenza” ([Scritti giornalistici](https://genius.com/Scritti-giornalistici), 1193-97). (Their novels are, in one word, incoherent. The naturalistic description and the psychological analysis never join so fully and perfectly as to proffer a true and living artistic organism. In other words, the description of places and events never agrees with the particular intellectual conditions of the character. This fundamental literary mistake of the transformed naturalist novelists comes from a scientific mistake. They believe that anterior things exist outside of us, independently, and that, therefore, they must appear the same to every human being [translation mine]).
1892-93 (with “Il romanzo futuro. Frammento di uno studio sull'arte nuova,” “L'Arte letteraria nel 1892. La prosa” and “La morale di Zola”), D'Annunzio targeted the shortcomings of both the pessimism associated with French naturalism and the excessive compassion characteristic of the Slavic school, thus distancing himself from his most conspicuous sources of recent inspiration, and envisioned the greatness of the future novel in the authors' capacity to posit “their spirit” at the centre of the novel and to

5 “Il romanzo futuro” appeared on La Domenica di Don Marzio in January 1892 and can be read in Tosi, “Incontri di D'Annunzio. colla cultura francese,” 59-63; “L'Arte letteraria nel 1992” appeared on Il Mattino in December 1892, and is reprinted in Pagine disperse, 544-50; “La morale di Zola” appeared on La Tribuna in July 1993 and can be read in Le Cronache de La Tribuna, 658-77. For a detailed discussion of these articles and their debt to the French debate on the novel, especially to G. Huret's Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire (1891), see Tosi, “Incontri.”

6 See “Il romanzo futuro:” “Nella storia della letteratura di questo ultimissimo periodo due sono i gruppi di fenomeni importanti più degni di studio: — il pessimismo occidentale e la morale evangelica predicata dagli slavi. Tanto il pessimismo sistematico degli scrittori di Francia quanto la più recente predicazione tolstoiana, tendono ambedue ad un effetto distruttivo. L'uno dimostra l'innitilità degli sforzi e la spaventosa vacuità della vita; l'altra rinnega ogni civiltà e ogni progresso a beneficio delle idee di rinuncia. Ambedue le dottrine sono ingiuste nel loro eccesso, false e ristrette; e vecchie specialmente, pur sempre respinte dalla scienza e dalla conoscenza dei tempi nuovi. Ora appunto gli artisti precursori del Rinascimento hanno per compito la reazione contro le due dottrine e l'esposizione di un concetto della vita più giusto e profondo. Se gli ultimi libri occidentali sono troppo duri contro l'Uomo, i libri dei narratori slavi sono troppo penetrati di condoglianze. Una semplice e virile giustizia venga dopo tanta severità, dopo tanta pietà.” (In the history of the literature of this latest period, there are two groups of important phenomena that are worth studying: the Western pessimism and the evangelic morale preached by the Slavs. The systematic pessimism of French writers and the more recent Tolstoian preaching both tend to be destructive. One demonstrates the uselessness of any effort and the emptiness of life; the other denies any civilization and progress in favour of ideas of renunciation. Both doctrines are unjust in their excess, fake and restrictive; and, especially, old. The science and knowledge of the new times reject them. Now, the artists that are the precursors of the Renaissance must react against these two doctrines and promote a fairer and deeper concept of life. If the latest Western books are too harsh with the human being, the books of the Slavic narrators are too steeped in condolence. A simple and virile justice must come after such severity and such piety [my translation].)
dispense with the “fictions” elaborated by others. Thus, between 1888 and 1892, D’Annunzio framed the “problem of realism” while at the same time detaching himself from it.

The purpose of this article is to show that on the creative ground, the “battle of realism” is fought between two texts, Giovanni Episcopo and L’Innocente, quickly and closely composed in 1891, after D’Annunzio finished his military service. The editorial separation of the two texts—Episcopo was relegated as a minor “document” of the author’s stylistic development while L’Innocente was elevated as the central novel of the “cycle of the Rose”—and the superficial differences that invite the reader to label

7 The renovation of the novel, as described in “Il romanzo futuro,” stands, according to D’Annunzio, in the sincerity of the new author, in the strength of the style, and in a less copious but more concentrated production: “Ora a punto la sincerità, l’assoluta sincerità sarà la prima dote dell’artista futuro. Ma questa dote (difficile per noi esplicarla intera: assai più difficile che non sembri) ad essere efficace ha bisogno di mezzi d’espressione potentiissimi e nel medesimo tempo semplici [...] la virtù dello stile sarà allora una virtù di creazione pura [...] In oltre io credo che da oggi in poi la produzione dei grandi e severi scrittori non sarà copiosa e che fin da principio tutta la loro forza e tutta la loro pazienza saranno intese a favorire il concepimento e la genesi dell’opera unica [...] Tale sarà, io penso, lo sforzo di quelli altri artefici della parola. Rigettando per sempre le inutili e ormai intollerabili finzioni elaborate dai predecessori, essi vorranno soltanto scrivere memorie del loro spirito collocato nel centro della vita.” (Now, indeed, sincerity, pure sincerity will be the first characteristic of the future artist. But, in order to be effective, this characteristic (difficult to explain it in whole, much more difficult than it appears) needs means of expression that are very powerful and at the same time very simple [...] the virtue of style will then be the virtue of pure creation [...] Moreover, I believe that from now on the production of great and serious authors will not be copious and that, from the beginning, all their strength and patience will tend to foster the conception and genesis of one unique work [...] This will be, I believe, the effort of those artifices of language. Finally rejecting forever the useless and now intolerable fictions elaborated by their predecessors, they will only want to write the memories of their spirit as located in the middle of life [translation mine]).

8 After an initial attempt to join Episcopo and L’Innocente in one publication, the two texts followed independent paths and Episcopo was regarded as a quasi-failed artistic work but, at the same time, deeply connected to the evolution of the writer. This attitude is recorded in the 1892 dedication to Matilde Serao (for which see below) and also in the way the novella was presented to its French editor, Georges Hérelle, as documented by Ciani (Storia di un libro dannunziano, 12-16). On the one hand, Episcopo and the short stories are just “un documento letterario che può suscitare la curiosità di coloro i quali vogliono seguire lo
Episcopo as a more “realistic” and L’Innocente as a more “decadent” work, conceal the close and complex relationship between the two texts. Indeed they compose a diptych, not only because of the close time range in which the two were composed (Episcopo is dated January 1891, L’Innocente was completed between April and July of the same year), or because they are both confession narratives that involve a “crime without punishment” type of plot, but also because they confront the same concerns listed in the 1888 article (the uneasy relation between the external exactitude of naturalism

sviluppo del mio ingegno e del mio metodo” (14) (a literary document that might incite the curiosity of those who want to follow the development of my mind and method [my translation]). On the other hand, in the note in which D’Annunzio was suggesting biographical details to the translator, Episcopo is described (like in the dedication) as a crucial step in the activity of the prose-writer: “L’Episcopo et Cie fu scritto a Roma nel Gennajo 1891; e l’autore nella curiosa prefazione messa innanzi all’edizione italiana analizza lo stato della sua coscienza d’artista, dopo quel lungo e forzato désevourement, e descrive la genesi del piccolo libro notando i nuovi elementi entrati nella sua arte. Con l’Episcopo ricomincia l’attività del prosatore e continua senza interruzione. Egli, chiudendo col Triomphe de la Mort la serie dei Romans de la Rose incominciata con l’Enfant de volupté, apre una nuova serie, mostrando di non voler limitare il suo studio a certi stati morbosi della coscienza umana ma di voler esercitare la sua facoltà di rappresentazione in diversi campi” (16) (Episcopo et Cie was written in Rome in January 1891. The author in his curious introduction to the Italian edition analyzes the state of his artistic conscience after that long and forced désevourement, and describes the genesis of that booklet noting the new elements which entered into his artistic work. With Episcopo the activity of prose-writer begins again and continues without interruption. Ending with Triomphe de la Mort the series of the Romans de la Rose, which started with l’Enfant de volupté, he opens a new series, showing that he does not want to limit his studies to certain morbid states of the human conscience, but to exercise his faculty of interpretation in several fields [my translation]). As Martignoni recalls (vi), Episcopo is not included in the 1906 edition of Prose Scele, which includes, instead, excerpts from the Novelle. In writing to Treves in 1911, D’Annunzio describes Episcopo as an old work, detested and despised. See Lettere ai Treves, 409: “In settimana ti manderò l’Episcopo. Siimi indulgente. Tu sai quanto mi sia increscioso rimetter le mani nelle vecchie opere che detesto e dispregio.” (This week I will send you Episcopo. Be indulgent. You know how shameful it is for me to go back to old works which I detest and despise [my translation]).

As for Terra Vergine and Le Novelle della Pescara, for Episcopo too “realism” is only a partial and uneasy label, and critics’ opinions are divergent. Overall, however, critics tend to perceive the novella as substantially “realistic” in nature, and a striking contrast with respect to the preceding Piacere and the following Innocente.
and the internal complexity of psychologism), and, especially, because they share a common source of inspiration: the newest and, for D'Annunzio, quite transient Russian vogue—Dostoevsky for Episcopo and Tolstoy for L'Innocente, as is traditionally understood. In this short phase, further

10 For the Russian influence on D'Annunzio, see De Michelis, “Dostoevskij nella letteratura italiana;” Paratore, “D'Annunzio e il romanzo russo;” Martignoni, “Introduction” to Giovanni Episcopo and Traina, “Giovanni Episcopo, l'Innocente e Dostoevskij.” As critics explain, the Russian vogue is channelled to D'Annunzio through France: Russian prose had been made available in French translation during the 1880s and had attracted the attention of the Italian literary audience, which interpreted Dostoevsky as a naturalistic and positivistic writer (Martignoni, xiii). Traina (“Giovanni Episcopo, l'Innocente e Dostoevskij,” 141), notices that D'Annunzio's reception of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is guided and dominated by French symbolist and naturalist culture.

Critics were quick to accuse D'Annunzio of plagiarism from Dostoevsky, namely, from the short story Kròtkaja, of which Episcopo appeared almost as a translation and from the character of Marmeladov in Crime and Punishment. Martignoni points out that the spectrum of Dostoevsky's texts that converged in Episcopo is much wider (see xvi-xix). Giacon (“Il fondo della perduta 'innocenza': le ‘invenzioni’ di Tullio Hermil”), points also to Maupassant's L'Assassin. Finally, Paratore (Studi dannunziani, 106 and 232) denies tout court the “Russian connection,” interpreting Episcopo as a prime example of a native verismo. The use of Tolstoy in L'Innocente is, at the same time, more declared and more manipulative. Without entering into details, the Tolstoian agenda is pressed onto a part of the background of the novel, the rural one, involving the family estate in the country, the farmer Giovanni di Scordio, the saintly mother of the main character and, especially, his brother Federico, of whom we read: “Aveva allora ventisette anni Federico; aveva vissuto quasi sempre nella campagna, d'una vita sobria e laboriosa; pareva portare in sé raccolta la mite sincerità terrestre. Egli possedeva la Regola. Leone Tolstoi, baciandolo su la bella fronte serena, lo avrebbe chiamato suo figliuolo” (413) (“My brother was seven-and-twenty; he had lived almost his whole life in the country, a life of sobriety and labour, and he seemed to have gathered into himself all the warm sincerity of the earth. He possessed the Rule of Life. Leo Tolstoy would have rejoiced to call him son” [59]. Translations for excerpts from L'Innocente, except when indicated, are taken from the translation by Georgina Harding). Truly opposed to this kind of simplistic Tolstoian idealism are the main characters Tullio and Giuliana, whose deception and criminal plans sharply contrast with and constantly undermine the Tolstoian plot, which stands for the serenity, health, and justice incompatible with the decadent character. Direct quotations from War and Peace are inserted in a lengthy passage (427-31), which sums up the above-mentioned contrast. Giuliana, whose adulterous pregnancy has not yet been revealed, is caught reading and underlining passages from the Russian novel, which both serves to estab-
marked by a forced break for the military service, past and future work converge on the stage of a “final renovation,” which entails the liquidation of the questionable realism of which D’Annunzio had followed and precipitated the crisis since the beginning of his career.

Crucial to connecting the two texts as the two halves of the same renovation is the dedication of *Episcopo* to Matilde Serao, written for the 1892 edition.\(^{11}\) The novella is not regarded as an artistic result (“non ha per me importanza di arte,” 1025), but rather as “un semplice documento letterario pubblicato a indicare il primo sforzo istintivo di un artific e inquieto verso una finale rinnovazione” (1025; “simply a literary document published to signal the first instinctive effort of a restless artist toward a final renovation” [translation mine]). D’Annunzio recounts the literary depression during his time in the service (“Mi pareva che tutte le mie facoltà di scrivere si fossero oscurate, indebolite, disperse.” 1026) (it seemed to me that all my writing faculties were obscured, weakened, dispersed [translation mine])\(^{12}\) and the resulting disgust, anger and shame he felt for his past work, eventually concluding: “Mai artific e ripudiò la sua opera passata con maggior sincerità di disdegno, pur non avendo ancora in sé l’agitazione dell’opera futura né la coscienza del nuovo potere” (1026) (Never an artist rejected his past work with such a sincere disdain, even without yet having inside him the tension of his future work nor any conscience of his new power [translation mine]).\(^{13}\)

lish and undermine the idyllic nature of the scene.

Finally, it is worth recalling that, as Martignoni notices (xx-xxxi), the short phase of Russian-inspired compassion also pervades the poetry of the years 1890-91 (*Elegie Romane, Poema Paradisiaco*) and even the author’s private correspondence with his lover Barbara Leoni.

\(^{11}\) The novella first appeared in a journal series (*Nuova Antologia*, Feb-Mar 1891) and was reprinted in 1892 for the Neapolitan editor Pierro.

\(^{12}\) The gap of the military service is remarked upon in the dedication in order to underline the temporal, human and artistic distance between these two texts and his former works: “Fu scritto a Roma, nel gennaio 1891, dopo quindici mesi di completo riposo intellettuale trascors i in gran parte fra ozii torpidi ed esercizi violenti dentro una caserma di cavalleria” (1025) (It was written in Rome, in January 1891, after fifteen months of complete intellectual rest, spent for the major part among sleepy laziness and violent exercises in a cavalry casern [translation mine]).

\(^{13}\) With respect to his past work, critics agree that the following passage seems to be referring to *Il Piacere*. “Cert i brani di stile, in qualche mio libro di prosa, mi facevano ira e vergogna. Mi parevano vacue e false le più lucide forme verbali in cui m’ero compiaciuto” (1026) (Certain stylish passages in my prose work made
Suddenly, the creative power resurfaces on a winter night, and the story of Giovanni Episcopo leaps in front of the author's eyes as in a vision, its characters surprisingly alive. It is recorded in the novella, which turns out to be less powerful than the vision itself, and certainly inferior to *L'Innocente*.

Ecco, mia cara amica, la genesi di questo piccolo libro che io vi dedico. Penso che troverete qui i primi elementi di una rinnovazione proseguita poi nell'*Innocente* con più rigore di metodo, esattezza d'analisi, semplicità di stile (1028).

me angry and full of shame. The most lucid word forms, in which I basked, seemed to me empty and fake [translation mine]).

"Incominciavo a vedere, in sensazione visiva reale, le apparenze immaginate. E l'inquietudine si faceva, di minuto in minuto, più forte. Quando lessi sul frontespizio di un fascicolo il nome di Giovanni Episcopo, in un attimo, come nel bagliore d' un lampo, vidi la figura dell'uomo: non la figura corporea soltanto ma quella morale, prima di aver sotto gli occhi le note, per non so qual comprensiva intuizione che non mi parve promossa soltanto dal risveglio repentino d'uno strato della memoria ma dal segreto concorso di elementi psichici non riconoscibili ad alcun lume d'analisi immediata. Allora quell'uomo dolce e miserabile, quel *Christus patientis*, si mise a vivere (innanzi a me? dentro di me?) d'una vita così profonda che la mia vita stessa ne restò quasi assorbita [...] E con lui Giulio Wanzer, Ginevra, Ciro, il vecchio, respiravano, palpavano: avevano i loro sguardi, i loro gesti, le loro voci, un odore umano, qualche cosa di miseravelmente umano che doveva rendere indimenticabili i loro aspetti" (1027-28)

(I started seeing, in real visual sensation, the imagined appearances. And the anxiety became stronger and stronger by the minute. When I read on the frontispiece of a folder the name of Giovanni Episcopo, in a second, like the flash of a lightening, I saw the figure of that man: not only the bodily figure, but also the moral one, even before I started reading the notes. This was due to some kind of comprehensive intuition which wasn't triggered only by the sudden awakening of a stratum of my memory, but also by the secret coming together of psychic elements that were not recognizable in the light of an immediate analysis. So that sweet and miserable man, that *Christus patientis* started living (in front of me? inside of me?) of such a deep life that my own life was almost absorbed by his. And with him Giulio Wanzer, Ginevra, Ciro, the old man, were breathing, thumping: they had their own gazes, movements, voices, a human smell, something so miserably human that it made their aspect unforgettable [translation mine]).

"Ah, mia cara amica, perché ebbi una si fiera visione e feci una si debole opera? Perché su la pagina quel gran flutto di forza si attenuò e si spense?" (1029) (Oh, my dear friend, why did I have such a strong vision and made such a weak work? Why was the great wave weakened on the page and died off? [translation mine]).
(Here, my dear friend, is the genesis of this little booklet that I dedicate to you. I think you will find here the first elements of a renovation that was continued in L'Innocente with a more rigorous method, a more exact analysis and a simpler style [translation mine]).

The “renovation” which inspires both texts is guided by what looks like a straightforward principle of realism: “Tutto il metodo sta in questa formula schietta: — Bisogna studiare gli uomini e le cose DIRETTAMENTE, senza transposizione alcuna” (1028) (The whole method rests in this simple rule: — One must study human beings and things DIRECTLY, without any transposition [translation mine]), a principle directly translated from the handbook of the contemporary debate on the novel, Huret’s Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire (1891).16

Upon first reading, Giovanni Episcopo and L’Innocente share a considerable number of similarities and the latter seems in fact to be the refinement of the former on all levels: structurally, thematically, and stylistically. However, how are these two texts connected in view of the “opera presente” and to the “opera futura”? The answer is necessarily inconsistent. What is “the old”? The primitivism of the short stories or the extenuated decadentism of Il Piacere? What is the new? Episcopo’s Russian inspired realism (certainly not), L’Innocente’s fall back into decadence with an early touch of over-man,17 or even “l’ideal libro” longed for in the introduction of Il Trionfo della Morte?18 There are no straight answers to these questions, nor should one trust D’Annunzio’s profession of renovation: it is suspicious enough that two confession narratives should mark a moment of literary conversion.

In August 1891, when submitting L’Innocente to the editor Treves, D’Annunzio envisioned a joint edition with Episcopo, claiming that the novella “ha qualche affinità col romanzo, affinità di forma e di moralità nascosta” (“has a certain affinity with the novel, affinity in the form and in the hidden morality” [translation mine]).19 It is my hypothesis that the

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16 As Tosi notices (“Incontri,” 28) this principle is directly translated from the intervention of the “néoréaliste” Caraguel: “nous sommes, je crois, à la veille d’étudier les êtres et les choses directement, sans transposition aucune.”
17 For traces of the over-man in L’Innocente, see Oddo De Stefánis, “L’Innocente. Il mito del superuomo e il mondo della ‘trascendenza deviata’.”
18 For the connections between “Il romanzo futuro” and “l’ideal romanzo,” see Tosi, “D’Annunzio e il romanzo futuro. La prefazione del Trionfo e le sue fonti francesi.”
19 See Lettere ai Treves, 94: “Il manoscritto si compone di 914 cartelle, delle quali 734 appartengono al romanzo e 180 al Giovanni Episcopo. Vorrei che questo stu-
hidden bond between the two texts consists of a quite aggressive liaison, one which fosters their future separation. Within the 1891 diptych, a narrative struggle takes place, one that I will describe shortly as the clash between a “scar” type of narrative and a “sore” type of narrative, arguing that the latter carries within itself the liquidation of realism.

Let us first examine the similarities between the two texts. In both instances we face two “confessions,” presumably taking place after two “crimes” which involve two “innocent” children and are related to the “betrayal” of a woman. In both cases, an ambiguity between a religious and judicial kind of confession is staged and the events that are going to be narrated exhibit the unquiet appearance of something that escapes both human understanding and the divine dimension. Rather than the crime itself, the surfacing of something obscure and hidden in the folds of memory seems to urge the two confessions forward, since both the main characters implicitly plead not guilty to the charge of murder. In each case, the confessor appears unreliable. In Episcopo, the confession takes place in the form of a dialogue, with a strong emphasis on the oral quality of the situation. Hidden behind the respectful appellative of “signore,” a mysterious interlocutor rules the narration, asking questions, scanning the main character’s narrative delirium with verbal and practical interventions, but never openly interacting with Giovanni. The interlocutor serves to underline

dio singolare fosse contenuto nel volume perché è prediletto fra tutta quanta la mia opera in prosa dalla persona a cui sarà dedicato il libro. Inoltre ha qualche affinità col romanzo, affinità di forma e di moralità nascosta. Ma prima di decidermi desidero avere la vostra opinione in proposito. Credete voi che ne scapiterebbe l’unità del libro?” (The manuscript is comprised of 914 pages, of which 734 belong to the novel and 180 to Giovanni Episcopo. I would like this unique study to be put in the volume because it is the favourite among my prose work of the person to whom the book will be dedicated. Moreover, it has a certain affinity with the novel, affinity in form and in hidden morality. But before I decide I would like to hear your opinion on this matter. Do you think that the unity of the book would be undermined? [translation mine]) For the affinities between the two texts in terms of their relationship to common sources see Giacon, “Il fondo della perduta ‘innocenza’,” 108-10.

The entity of the interlocutor is inferred only from Giovanni’s addresses and answers to him. See, as examples a call to order: “Si, è vero, non bisogna pensarsi. Perdonatemi, ora andrò dritto fino alla fine” (1034) (Yes; it’s true. One shouldn’t think of it. Forgive me. Now I will go straight on to the end [94]); a pitiful diagnosis: “Allucinazione, sì, niente altro. Dite bene. Oh, sì, sì, dite bene: basterà un lume perché io stia tranquillo, perché io dorma profondo; si, se un lume, semplicemente un lume. Grazie, grazie caro signore” (1048)
the fact that Giovanni is an unreliable narrator: he constantly forgets what he is talking about and wanders in senseless digressions. However, under this guise of confusion, the narration is organized according to a very strict chronological sequence of the events. In contrast, the confession in L’Innocente takes the form of a monologue, in which the wide pace of the syntax gives the impression of a written statement. Since the narrator presents himself as a very lucid and analytical character, the unreliable quality of his story is relegated to more hidden and subtle devices, such as the overlap of two “first memories,” the succession of negations and the condensation around some specific characters.21

The two texts also show an apparent, even too marked, contrast. The setting for each is perfectly opposite: Episcopo takes place in the Roman lower middle class, a setting which the author had never chosen before, and an obvious homage to his Russian and French sources. To match its “mediocrity,” D’Annunzio partially restrained his style into a more concise and crude discourse, not alien, however, to episodes of symbolization.22 L’Innocente is set in the Roman upper class and aristocracy, often viewed from the rural perspective of two family estates—its language and style fully compliant with that of Il Piacere and Il Trionfo. The characters also seem to be borne of these opposing circumstances: Giovanni, on the one hand, is humble and humiliated, poor, scared and defeated, “il più vile e il più buono degli uomini” (1046) (“the most miserable and the best of men” [106]), truly a “Christus patiens” (1027); Tullio on the other hand is arrogant, rich and self-confident, “non pure uno spirito eletto, ma uno spirito raro” (362) (“not only a choice but an exceptionally rare spirit” [2]). They are matched with the cruel, fake, “impure” Ginevra, and the chaste, intellectual, “pure” Giuliana.23 Ginevra,

Vedete, non tremo più” (1033) (Oh, thank you, sir. You see: I am not shaking anymore [93]). Translations for excerpts from Giovanni Episcopo, except when indicated, are taken from the translation by Raymond Rosenthal.

21 The inconsistencies in Tullio’s statement are outlined in Spackman, Decadent Genealogies, 145-50.

22 For traces of symbolism the Episcopo see Goudet, D’Annunzio romanziere, 63-78; Raimondi, “D’Annunzio e il simbolismo,” 40; Giannantonio, L’universo dei sensi, 301-07.

23 The specular opposite of Giuliana, Ginevra shares some qualities with Tullio’s lover, Teresa Raffo. Interestingly, Ginevra is introduced as “l’assente,” a word that labels Teresa in L’Innocente. See 1038-39: “Nella conversazione, il nome della assente passò su tutte le bocche, proferito in mezzo a frasi ambigue che tradivano un desiderio sessuale da cui tutti quegli uomini, vecchi e giovani, erano turbati [...] Mi ricordo che allora mi si formò nell’immaginazione la figura dell’assente, poco diversa da quella che in realtà poi vidi.” (“In the conversation
nevertheless, gives birth to Giovanni's legitimate son, the beloved Ciro, while Giuliana, so incapacitated as to presumably be barren, conceives the illegitimate Raimondo. Noticeable, then, is a polarity between the two mother figures, “la sensala” and “la santa.”

Thus, of the two brotherly figures, Battista, Ginevra's father, physically and morally representing the lowest point of human abjection, and Federico, Tullio's brother, a Tolstoian figure and the highest point of human ideality; and, finally, that of the two antagonists: on one hand the brutal Giulio Wanzer, “quell'uomo forte sanguigno e violento” (1035) (“that robust, sanguine, violent man” [95]); on the other hand the decadent intellectual Filippo Arborio, “la figura fine e seducente” (400) (“the refined and attractive face” [43]). Perfectly in keeping are the violent, bloody death of Giulio Wanzer, caused by Giovanni's only, and useless, fit of anger, and the refined illness that leads the writer Arborio to aphasia and agraphia, much to the satisfaction of Tullio who does not need to face him in a duel.

The obvious outcomes of these oppositions are two “innocent” children doomed to die: Ciro, the beloved legitimate son who succumbs to Giulio Wanzer's violence; and Raimondo, killed by Tullio's premeditated coldness while still in the cradle.

Building on Michel Riffaterre's notion of “dual sign,” Barbara Spackman has signalled the existence of a ghost text in L’Innocente, a psychoanalytical narrative parallel to the textual narrative in which “a different psychoanalytic tale of haves-who-have-not” takes place: “fetishism.”

In the following analysis I will extend L’Innocente's ghost text to its short precursor, and argue that the narrativization of another familiar psychoanalytic tale is at stake here, and one complementary to fetishism: castration. Thus, the diptych represents the narrativization of a two-fold Freudian theory: threat of castration vs. fetishism. As synthetically outlined in Freud's “Fetishism” (1927) there are two outcomes of the little boy's vision of the female (mother's or sister's) genitalia, a moment that induces a feeling of panic, since, for the first time, he is aware of “her diversity.” The first and most common fear is that of his own castration, which is seen as a dreadful and unique event (“It happened to them, it can happen to me ...”). The absent woman's name was on everybody's lips, spoken amid ambiguous phrases betraying a sensual desire which perturbed all those men, old and young. [...] In my imagination, I remember, there then took form a figure of the absent woman that was not very different from the woman I later actually met”[98-9]).

The first one is introduced in absentia by the screams of her husband whom she is beating; the second one is always accompanied by extremely light and delicate religious images.

Decadent Genealogies, 169-83, quote at 179.
second is fetishism, a complex mechanism that allows him to affirm and deny at the same time the existence of the maternal phallus, and, therefore, to bypass the horror of castration.

When analyzed in light of the ghost text, the two novels interact in a new and surprising way, and indirect refractions take the place of the too obviously marked opposition. What in Giovanni Episcopo is a definite locus, an accomplished event in its disposition within the text, delineated by a closed narrative structure and connoted by unique images, passes in L’Innocente as an echoing movement, with a significantly staggered trajectory, producing events, structures and images which are open, and therefore reproducible, and destined, in turn, to move on toward other D’Annunzian works. The meeting between the psychoanalytical and the literary text takes place around the figure of a wound, which harks back, with an inverted perspective, from Giovanni to Giuliana: a closed wound, from both a physical and narrative point of view, i.e. a scar, in Giovanni Episcopo; a wound always open, i.e. a sore, in L’Innocente. Both wounds refer, in the psychoanalytic text, to an event of castration.

Giovanni Episcopo’s narration begins with a memory of the dead son Ciro, but, at the request of the interlocutor to tell the story in order, “from the beginning” [94], Giovanni recalls his fear of his antagonist, Giulio Wanzer.26 Immediately after he meets him, Giovanni is accidentally wounded by Giulio Wanzer on the forehead. The result is a visible scar, obsessively mentioned throughout the text, the locus of an “obscure and deep feeling” and a mark of humiliation and emasculation.27 Giulio

26“Provavo una sensazione strana, che io non vi so esprimere: un misto di repulsione e di attrazione, indefinibile. Era qualche cosa come un fascino cattivo, assai cattivo, che quell’uomo forte sanguigno e violento mandava verso di me tanto debole, anche allora, e malaticcio, e irresoluto; e, veramente, un poco vile” (1035) (“I had a strange feeling, which I can’t quite express: a mixture of repulsion and attraction, indefinable. It was like an evil fascination, very evil, which that robust, sanguine, violent man exerted over me, so weak then, sickly and irresolute; and, to tell the truth, something of a coward” [95]).

27See, for example, at 1036: “Colui mi levò ogni senso di dignità umana, così, d’un tratto, con la stessa facilità con cui mi avrebbe strappato un capello [...] Io non vi so definire, per esempio, il sentimento profondo e oscuro che mi veniva dalla cicatrice. E non vi so spiegare il gran turbamento che m’invasè, quando, un giorno, il mio carnefice mi prese la testa fra le mani per guardare questa cicatrice che era ancora terna a tutta accessa; e sopra ci passò le dita più volte, e poi disse ‘È chiusa perfettamente. Fra un mese non si vedrà più nulla. Puoi ringraziare Iddio’. Mi parve in vece, da quel minuto, di avere in fronte non una cicatrice ma un bollo servile, un segno vergognoso e visibilissimo, per tutta l’esistenza.” (“He
Wanzer's sudden departure opens a gleam of hope for Giovanni, a hope of regaining his lost dignity, and, with it, his masculinity:

Entrai a testa alta. Mi pareva di avere un'aria fiera [...] L'atto del levarmi il cappello mi rammantò la cicatrice, mi risvegliò nella memoria la frase crudele: - Sei marcato in fronte da un ladro.- Come mi pareva che tutti mi guardassero in fronte e notassero il segno, pensai: - Che credereanno? Crederranno forse che sia una ferita ricevuta in duello. – E io, che non mi sarei battuto, mi compiacqui in questo pensiero. Se qualcuno fosse venuto a sedersi accanto a me e avesse attaccato discorso, io certo avrei trovato il modo di raccontargli il duello. Ma non venne nessuno (1045).

(I walked in, my head held high. I felt that I had a proud air [...] The act of taking off my hat reminded me of my scar, reawakened in my memory the cruel sentence: “You've been marked on the brow by a thief.”—Since I felt that everyone was looking at my forehead and had noticed the mark, I thought: “What can they think? They most likely think it’s a wound received in a duel.”—And I, who would never have fought, was pleased by this thought. If someone had come to sit next to me and struck up a conversation, I certainly would have found a way to describe that duel. But nobody came [104-05]).

Unable to reclaim his virility, Giovanni transfers his hopes as well as all the virile attributes of excellence, courage, honour onto his son.28 As soon

robbed me of all sense of human dignity, just like that, suddenly, with the same facility with which he would have tweaked out a hair [...] I can’t explain to you, for example, the profound, obscure emotion that that scar inspired in me. And I can’t explain the enormous perturbation that swept over me one day when my executioner took my head between his hands to look at this scar which was still tender and completely red. He passed his finger over it a number of times and then said: “It’s healed perfectly. In a month you’ll no longer see a thing. You can thank the Lord.” Instead it seemed to me from that moment on I bore on my forehead not a scar but a mark of servitude, a shameful, very visible sign that would remain there for my entire life [95-6]).

28See 1077: “In breve seppe leggere, scrivere; superò tutti i suoi compagni; fece progressi straordinarii” (“In short, he learned how to read, to write, he was well ahead of all his classmates; he made extraordinary progress.” [135]) and 1090, where Ciro tells his father how he defended his mother against Wanzer: “- Credi tu che io mi sia nascosto? Credi tu che io sia stato fermo, che io abbia avuto paura? No, no; non ho avuto paura. Mi sono fatto innanzi, io; mi sono messo a gridargli contro; l’ho afferrato per le gambe, gli ho dato un morso a una mano…” (“Do you think I hid? Do you think I just stood there and was afraid? No. no, I wasn’t afraid. I went up to him; I began yelling at him; I grabbed him by the legs, I bit his hand…” [147]).
as Ginevra tells Ciro the truth about his father's scar, the events in the narration rush toward Ciro's uneven fight with Giulio Wanzer and the murder of the boy.

The theme of wound-castration plays a very different role in L'Innocente: not only because it does not heal, nor because it is refracted into many other wounds (on the trees, on the hands, on the landscape), but mainly because it is performed on a woman's body. Since it is inflicted more than once on the same body, on the same member that has Promethean capacities of regeneration, it opens the narrative structure itself to infinite possibilities of reproduction and amputation. As Spackman shows in her chapter "Prometheus and Pandora" (168-83), Giuliana is first introduced as a suffering sister, modeled on the "unique" Costanza, the sister who died at the age of nine "lasciandomi nel cuore un rimpianto senza fine" (363) (leaving a void in my heart that had never been filled [3]), until a moment of panic (Giuliana's sudden sickness that Tullio interprets as an attempted suicide) reveals her "diversity," upon which the surgeon's instruments must intervene. Through them, "beyond" them the "Wound" appears:

E una disperata pietà strinse le mie viscere d'uomo, per quella creatura che i ferri del chirurgo violavano non soltanto nella carne miserabile ma

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29."[Ginevra] mi disse, accennando allo sfregio, sapendo di farmi male: '... Te ne sei dimenticato, di Wanzer? E pure ti ha lasciato in fronte un bel ricordo...' Allora, anche gli occhi di Ciro si fissarono su la mia cicatrice. E io gli lessi in volto le domande ch'egli avrebbe voluto rivolgermi. Avrebbe voluto chiedermi: 'Come? Non mi raccontasti una volta che t'eri ferito cadendo? Perché mentisti? E chi è E chi è quest'uomo che t'ha sfregiato?'” (1080) (“And she said to me, alluding to the scar, knowing she would hurt me: "You haven't forgotten Wanzer, have you? After all he did leave a fine souvenir on your forehead..." Then Ciro also stared at my scar. And I could read on his face all the questions he wanted to ask me. He wanted to ask me: "How is that? Didn't you once tell me that you fell and cut yourself? Why did you lie? And who is this man that gave you the scar?"

30)Interestingly, the sororal aspect of Giuliana is later connected to the Tolstoian plot (for which see footnote 10). While reading War and Peace, “tutto in lei, veramente, nell'attitudine e nello sguardo era dolce ed era buono. E nacque in me qualche cosa di simile al sentimento che avrei forse provato se io avessi veduto in quel medesimo luogo, sotto gli olmi familiari che perdevano i loro fiori morti, Costanza adulta, la povera sorella, al fianco di Federico” (427-28). (“She seemed to diffuse an atmosphere around her of sweetness and kindness, which awoke in me much the same sentiment as I should have felt had I seen Costanza grown to womanhood and sitting there under the old familiar trees at Federico's side [76]).
nell'intimo dell'anima, nel sentimento più delicato che una donna possa custodire: — una pietà per quella e per le altre [...] così deboli, così mal-sane, così imperfette, uguagliate alle femmine brute dalle leggi inabolibili della Natura; che impone a loro il diritto della specie, sforza le loro matri-ci, le travaglia di morbi orrendi, le lascia esposte a tutte le degenerazioni. E in quella e nelle altre rabbividendo per ogni fibra, io vidi allora, con una lucidità spaventevole, vidi la piaga originale, la turpe ferita sempre aperta “che sanguina e che pute” (373).31

(a desperate sense of pity wrung my very vitals for the unhappy creature, not alone whose flesh the surgeon's knife was rudely penetrating, but the inner sanctuary of her being, the very centre of the most hidden and delicate sentiments a woman possesses [15]).32

The sight of the castrated woman is followed by a long period of adjustment, characterized by doubt (ella mi parea un’altra donna,” 397 and 403; she seemed to me another woman altogether [40 and 47]) and desire. Suspicion and desire become more and more precise, until a new moment

31 It is interesting to notice that almost the same kind of construction, and almost the same words are used in Giovanni Episco to express a male-to-male kind of compassion: “E vedere da per tutto intorno a voi questo nemico, vederlo con una lucidità prodigiosa, scoprirne tutte le tracce, indovinarne tutte le corrosioni, le devastazioni nascoste. Vedere, intendete?, vedere in ciascun uomo la sofferenza, e comprendere, comprendere sempre, e avere una misericordia fraterna per ogni traviato, per ogni addolorato, e sentire nell’intimo della propria sostanza la voce di questa grande fraternità umana, e non considerare su la via nessun uomo come sconosciuto ... Intendete? Potete voi intendere questo in me, in me che voi stimate pusillanimism abietto e quasi idiota?” (1058) (“And to see this enemy all around you, to see it with prodigious lucidity, to discern all its traces, divine all its corrosions, its hidden devastations. To see—you know what I mean?—to see the suffering in each man, to comprehend, always to comprehend, and to have fraternal pity for every strayed soul, for every wretched person, and to feel within oneself in the depths of one’s own flesh the voice of this great human fraternity, and not to regard any man on the street as a stranger...You understand? Could you understand this in me, in me whom you regard as pusillanimous, abject, almost idiotic? [117-18]).

32 Harding translates this passage only up to this point. The rest of the passage can be translated as follows: “a piety for her and the other women [...] so weak, ill, imperfect, who are equated to female animals by the unchangeable laws of Nature, which impose on them the right of the species, constrains their wombs, troubles them with horrendous diseases and exposes them to all kinds of degeneration. In her and in the others I saw, trembling in every part of my body, I saw then with frightening lucidity, the original sore, the foul wound always open, which ‘bleeds and stinks’.”
of panic arises: Giuliana is pregnant. Two thoughts of the main character indicate that the reader is encountering the same problem that created the first episode of panic: Tullio, not yet informed of the wife’s new condition, but already aware of a difference, seeing her pallor, thinks: “Ho toccato piaghe che sono ancora aperte” (441) (“I have touched a wound that is still open” [92]). He then reflects on her sickness: “Ma qual era la sua malattia? L’antica, non distrutta dal ferro del chirurgo?” (464) (“But what was her malady? The old original one, not wholly removed by the surgeon’s knife?” [119]) — a dreadful doubt if translated into psychoanalytical terms: “was castration ineffective?” Finally, Tullio’s feelings during the delivery confirm the regaining of a threatening phallus on Giuliana’s part: “Soffrivo anch’io uno strazio fisico, simile forse a quello d’un’ amputazione mal praticata e lentissima” (565) (“I was suffering some such physical torture as I would have done under a slow and badly-managed amputation” [240]). The child’s murder, a second castration, is followed by another bleak moment of dismissal, since the confession is neither prosecutable by law, nor does it belong completely to the divine sphere.

Once these differences between the two texts are set, as far as the castration event is concerned, it is interesting to evaluate the narrative consequences and the literary result of a scar versus a sore type of narrative. Among the numerous occasions provided by D’Annunzio’s dense narrative, there is an example that neatly frames the relationships between the ghost-psychoanalytical text and both novels and illustrates the structural, thematic and stylistic outcome of these two narratives. The example deals with the interplay between a physical type of vision, which involves the act of seeing, and a “beyond” type of vision, which involves the act of revealing and understanding: the former pointing to the specific events described in the story, the latter to the ghost text. No wonder then that in both texts the surfacing of the psychological data, of the level of “beyond” (which offers a tool for the construction of the ghost text) is always connected with the presence of some kind of light in the narrative. It is surprising however that the light narrative should have such different results in the two books.

In Giovanni Episcopo, the same “stripes of sunlight” recur three times in the text. The first and last “strisce di sole” seem to aptly recall a priori (during Giovanni and Ginevra’s first visit to their conjugal house) and a

33“Oh quel sole, quelle strisce di sole, quasi taglienti, su tutta quella roba nuova, lucida, intatta, che mandava un odore di magazzino, un odore insopportabile!” (1068). (“Oh that sun, those beams of almost cutting sunlight on all those new, polished, untouched furnishings, giving off a warehouse smell, an unbearable smell....” [127]).
posteriori (immediately before Ciro’s death)\textsuperscript{34} one central scene (1072-73) in which the same stripes of sunlight simultaneously illuminate the condensation and collapse of a wide variety of issues. In this scene, the guise of narrative confusion reaches its apex, but a close reading traces quite an articulate report of the recollection of the threat of castration implied in the vision of the woman. Initially the focus is on Ginevra. Interestingly, the chronological detail is the festivity of All Saints, which precedes the Day of the Dead, implicitly recalled later by wreath of evergreen, a traditional gift for the dead.

Ginevra stava alla finestra. Mi ricordo: era l’Ognissanti; suonavano le campane; il sole batteva sul davanzale. Il sole, veramente, è la cosa più triste dell’universo. Non vi sembra? Il sole mi ha fatto sempre dolere il cuore. In tutti i miei ricordi più dolorosi c’è un po’ di sole, qualche riga gialla, come intorno alle coltri mortuarie (1072, emphasis mine).

(Ginevra was at the window. I remember: it was All Saints’ Day; the church bells were ringing; the sun was pouring down on the windowsill. Truly, the sun is the saddest thing in the universe. Don’t you agree? The sun has always made my heart suffer. In all my most painful memories there is a little sunlight, a few yellow sunbeams as though around mortuary drapes. [131])

Through the sunlight stripes, \textit{via} the simile with the funeral palls, two points in the past and in the future are summoned: the death of a sister (the little boy’s discovery of woman’s diversity?) and, \textit{via} simile again, Ciro’s death (the definite evidence of the possibility of castration).

Quando ero bambino, una volta, mi lasciarono per alcuni minuti nella stanza dove il cadavere d’una mia sorella giaceva esposto sul letto, tra corone di fiori. Mi pare ancora di vederlo, quel povero viso bianco tutto incavato d’ombre turchinice, \textit{al quale doveva poi tanto somigliare} negli ultimi momenti il viso di Ciro ... Ah, che dicevo? Mia sorella, già, mia sorella giaceva sul letto tra i fiori. Bene; dicevo questo. Ma perché? Lasciatemi pensare un poco ... (1072, emphasis mine).

(When I was a child they once left me for a few minutes in a room where my sister’s corpse was laid out for viewing on a bed, surrounded by wreaths of flowers. I still feel I can see it, that poor white face all carved with purplish shadows, which, during his last moments, Ciro’s face so much resembled ... Ah, what was I saying? My sister, yes, my sister lying

\textsuperscript{34} “Notate, signore, una cosa. Da uno spiraglio (aperto nella parete a cui volgevo le spalle, dunque sopra il mio capo) scendeva \textit{la striscia di sole}” (1088). (“Take note, sir, of one thing. From a tiny window—set in the wall to which my back was turned, and therefore above my head—slanted down \textit{a beam of sunlight}” [146]).
on the bed, amid the flowers. Good; that's what I was saying. But why? Let me think a bit... [131]).

When the passage again focuses on Ginevra, the light—now turned "tragic" in connection with the two corpses—strengthens Giovanni's power of memory. The sunlight beam becomes a mark of a painful memory ("in tutti i miei ricordi più dolorosi," "quante volte nella vita ho riveduto la tragica striscia di sole," 1072). Memory becomes "terrible."

Ah, ecco: io m'accostai alla finestra, sbigottito [...] nell'ombra grigia, una striscia di sole, una riga gialla, diritta, acutissima splendeva sinistramente, con una intensità incredibile. Io non osavo più voltarmi, e guardavo fisso la riga gialla, come preso da una fascinazione; e sentivo dietro di me (comprendete?) [...] il silenzio spaventevole della stanza, quel silenzio freddo che è intorno ai cadaveri... Ah, signore, quante volte nella vita ho riveduto la tragica striscia di sole! Quante volte! Ebbene, a proposito di che? Era Ginevra, dunque, che stava alla finestra [...] C'era anche, sopra una sedia, una corona di sempervivni con un nastro nero, che Ginevra e la madre dovevano portare al Campo Verano, per una tomba di parenti... -Che memoria! - voi pensate. Si; ora ho una memoria terribile (1072-73). (Ah, here it is: I approached the window, dismayed [...] in the gray shadows, a streak of sunlight, a yellow line, straight, very sharp, was gleaming wickedly, with incredible intensity. I no longer dared turn around, and stared fixedly at the yellow line, as if under a spell; but I felt behind me—you understand? [...] the frightening silence of the room, that cold silence which congeals around a corpse... Oh, sir, how many times in my life have I seen that tragic streak of sunlight again! How many times! Very well, what was I saying? So, Ginevra was standing at the window [...] There was also, on a chair, a wreath of evergreen with a black ribbon which Ginevra and her mother were going to take to the Verano cemetery to put on some relative's grave... —What a memory! You must be thinking. Yes, indeed, I now have a terrible memory! [131])

The "terrible power of memory" leads to the surfacing of a "horrendous truth"—one that strongly recalls Tullio Hermil's vision "beyond the surgery" quoted above—an original horror present not only in Ginevra but hidden in every woman. The sequence "guardare - vedere - comprendere" follows the shift from sight to perception to an understanding of female castration ("l'aperta brutalità del sesso," corresponding to "la turpe ferita" in L'Innocente's surgery scene) and sanctions the inevitable fear it evokes.

Non vi accade mai, guardando a lungo una donna, di smarrirsi d'un tratto ogni nozione della sua umanità, del suo stato sociale, dei legami sentimentali che vi avvincono a lei e di vedere, con una evidenza che vi attirisce, la bestia, la femmina, l'aperta brutalità del sesso? Questo io vidi,
guardandola; e compresi ch’ella non era atta che a un’opera carnale, a una funzione ignobile. E un’altra orrenda verità mi si presentò allo spirito: - il fondo dell’esistenza umana, il fondo di tutte le preoccupazioni umane è una laidezza. - Orrenda, orrenda verità! (1073)

(Has it ever happened to you, when looking for a long time at a woman, to suddenly lose all notion of her humanity, her social condition, the emotional ties which bind you to her, and to see, with an obviousness that terrifies you, the bestiality, the sheer femaleness, the blatant brutality of sex? This is what I saw as I looked at her; and I realized that she existed only for the carnal, for an ignoble function. And another terrible truth rose in my mind: human life, all human preoccupations are based on ugliness—a horrible, horrible truth! [132])

The moment of vision and revelation is unique and incontrovertible. The deadly sunlight beam motif is now attached to all painful memories: when replayed in other sections of the text, it needs only to be pointed to ("quelle striscie di sole," 1068) or emphasized ("scendeva la striscia di sole," 1088). The rhetorical motif at work in the passage is simile, which is, interestingly, the same motif that appears in the psychoanalytical text ("As it happened to her, so it can happen to me ...”). Finally, the image carries within a reference to the castration event to which the text also alludes: the sunlight stripe is "tagliente" (cutting) and "acutissima" (sharp) as a knife.35

On the contrary, L’Innocentés light-vision device, the “oscillating” flame of a candle, strongly recalls the undecidability of fetishism. It uncovers and obscures key-moments of the ghost text and operates by means of metonymy, that is, together with synecdoche, the figure of choice of fetishism.36 The dim and mobile light of a candle, often duplicated through mirrors, opens and closes in the text three equivocal moments of vision—by simultaneously illuminating and obscuring a hidden truth—and embodies the quintessential fetishistic strategy: “I know very well, but all the same...”37

35 The piercing quality of the sun-stripes is also recalled in Ginevra’s piercing gaze directed toward Giovanni’s scar: “[Ginevra] mi fissava con quello sguardo acuto, anzi tagliente, che mi dava sempre la stessa apprensione che la vista di un’arme affilata dà al pusillanime. M’accorsi ch’ella mi guardava la fronte, la cicatrice” (1080) (“She stared at me with her sharp, cutting look, which already filled me with the same apprehension an extremely sharp knife inspires in the pusillanimous. I realized that she was staring at my forehead, at the scar” [138]).

36 On metonymy and synecdoche in connection with fetishism see Spackman, Decadent Genealogies, 191-93.

37 For the “I know very well, but all the same” motif see O. Mannoni, “Je sais bien, mais quand même ...”
The first candle is placed in Giuliana’s room, where her sudden sickness induces a panic in Tullio. The candle, “desperately oscillating” and redoubled in a mirror, increases the horror:

E io vedeva in quei larghi occhi passare, come a onde, la sofferenza sconosciuta [...] Era di sera, era il crepuscolo, e la finestra era spalancata, e le tende si gonfiavano sbattendosi, e una candela ardeva su un tavolo, contro uno specchio; e, non so perché, lo sbattito delle tende, l’agitazione disperata di quella fiammella, che lo specchio pallido rifletteva, presero nel mio spirito un significato sinistro, aumentarono il mio terrore (366).

(And in those great eyes I saw her nameless sufferings pass like a wave [...] It was evening; the room was full of shadows, the window wide open and the curtains swelling and fluttering in the breeze, and a candle burned on a table in front of the looking-glass. I do not know why, but the flapping of the curtains, the agitated flickering of the candle reflected in the pale mirror—all assumed a sinister significance in my mind, and added unspeakably to my terror. [7])

While Giuliana’s “unknown pain” is caused by a “complicated internal trouble” [9] (“malattie complicate della matrice e dell’ovaia,” 368) which lead to the surgery scene discussed above, Tullio intentionally misunderstands it as an attempted suicide caused by his infidelity.38

The second candle enters, literally, on stage to delimit the discussion

38The light of the candle here creates a halo of magic, within which the “I know very well, but all the same...” motif is reinforced. See the end of the scene: “Ambedue oramai eravamo dominati da quel pensiero di morte, da quell’immagine di morte; ambedue eravamo entrati in una specie di esaltazione tragica, dimenticando l’equivoco che l’aveva generata, smarrendo la coscienza della realtà. Ed ella a un tratto si mise a singhiozzare; e il suo pianto chiamò il mio pianto: e mescolammo le nostre lacrime, ahimè! che erano così calde e che non potevano mutare il nostro destino” (367-68) (“We were both, for the moment, dominated by the thought of that death and the images it called up; we both entered into a certain state of tragic exaltation, heedless of the mistaken idea which had given it birth, lost to all sense of reality. All at once, she began to sob, and her tears drew forth mine, till the drops mingled that were so hot, and yet, alas! could not alter our destinies” [9]). It is interesting to notice that the last sentence, the one about tears, has also a reference in Giovanni Episcopo, at the end of the long scene of the vision quoted before: “C’era il sole, sul pavimento; e c’era quella corona mortuaria, su quella sedia, e il mio singhiozzo non mutava nessuna cosa ... Che cosa possiamo mutare noi? Pesano forse le nostre lacrime? - Ciascun uomo è uno qualunque, a cui accade una cosa qualunque” (1075). (“There was the sun on the tiles; and that funeral wreath on the chair; and my sobs did not change a thing...What can we change? Do our tears have any effect?—Each man is just anyone, to whom just anything can happen” [134]).
between Tullio and Giuliana regarding the pregnancy. At the beginning it underlines the fictitious setting of the scene: "Una candela ardeva sul tavolo, aggiungendo evidenza a quell'aspetto di finzione scenica poiché la fiammella mobile pareva agitare intorno a sé quel vago orrore che lasciano nell'aria con un gran gesto disperato o minaccioso gli attori d'un dramma" (510) ("A candle burned upon the table, adding another touch to the scenic effect; for the wavering flame seemed to shed around it that vague horror which lingers in the air after some grand gesture of despair or menace from one of the actors in a drama" [175]). At the end of the crisis the candle appears as an instrument of moral illumination and clarification ("io primo riebbi negli occhi la luce," 521).39 Yet, the light of the candle, now reflected into a mirror, muddles the "truth" again and brings into vision another fictitious image that metonymically leads from the painting, to the "image of hallucination" to the image of the "unfaithful one" (that could be both the image of Giuliana being unfaithful or that of Tullio's unfaithful lover Teresa) to the "Other" (which could be the future illegitimate son, or Giuliana's lover, but it might as well be a variant of the "Oltre" – the level of the beyond which is revealed during the surgery).

Il divano con le nostre figure si rifletteva nello specchio dell'armario. Senza guardarcì noi potevamo vedere i nostri volti ma non bene distinti perché la luce era scarsa e mobile. Io consideravo fissamente nel fondo vago dello specchio la figura di Giuliana che prendeva a poco a poco nella sua immobilità un aspetto misterioso, l'inquietante fascino di certi ritratti femminili oscurati dal tempo, l'intensa vita fittizia degli esseri creati da una allucinazione. E accadde che a poco a poco quell'immagine discosta mi sembrò più viva della persona reale. Accadde che a poco a poco in quell'immagine io vidi la donna delle carezze, la donna di voluttà, l'amante, l'infedele. Chiusi gli occhi. L'Alto comparve.

(The couch and our two figures were reflected in the mirror opposite. Without looking at each other, we could see our faces, though indistinctly, because of the meagre and flickering light. I gazed fixedly into the vague depths of the mirror at Giuliana's figure, which gradually assumed an aspect of mystery, the perturbing fascination of certain feminine portraits obscured by time, the intense fictitious life of figures born of an hallucination. And by degrees this distant image seemed to me more living than the real person, by degrees I saw in that image the woman of my

39"Io primo terminai di piangere; io primo riebbi negli occhi la luce [...] La candela ardeva sul tavolo, e la fiammella si moveva a quando a quando come inchinata da un soffio" (521). ("I was the first to cease weeping [...] The candle burned upon the table, the flame bending now and then as if under a breath" [188]).

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caresses, the woman of passion, the faithless one. I closed my eyes. The Other suddenly appeared before me [190]).

Finally, three sets of candles come into play after the child's death. Without the help of any mirror, but rather mirroring back and forth from one set of candles to the other, an oscillating narrative movement is created around two points before and after the death of the child. Around the funeral bed four candles are burning. Tullio's soul, blinded ("orbata della sua vista primitiva," 628) is suddenly—although disingenuously—illuminated.

La culla era nel mezzo della camera, fra quattro candele accese [...] Feci qualche passo; andai a mettermi a piè della culla, tra le due candele; portai a piè della culla la mia anima pavida umile debole, interamente orbata della sua vista primitiva. [...] Allora, dal silenzio, una gran luce si fece dentro di me [...] io compresi" (628-29).

(The cradle stood in the middle of the nursery all decked with white between four lighted candles [...] I advanced a few paces and sat down at the foot of the cradle, between the two candles; to the foot of that cradle I brought my trembling, downcast, feeble spirit that seemed so entirely to have lost its former assurance. [...] It was then, in that deep silence, that a great light broke in upon me and pierced to the very centre of my soul—I understood. [324-25]).

Without further explanation as to what he understood, Tullio briefly feels the necessity of confessing his crime, but, rather than a statement, he devises a question: "Sapete voi chi ha ucciso quest’innocente?" (629) ("Do you know who killed this innocent babe?" [325]). Federico, Tullio's brother, leads him back in his room, where another candle is burning. Through this candle Tullio (and the reader, who, like the other characters understands the death of the child only from the perspective of Giuliana's sick room) recollects Raimondo's agony, during which another candle had been lit: "Avevano accesa una candela; e la reggeva una delle donne; e la fiammella gialla oscillava a piè della culla" (633) ("One of the women lighted a candle and held it over the cradle, where it shed a flickering yellow light" [329]). Eventually, the pressure of recollection becomes too strong and Tullio shouts to his brother, "Quella candela! Leva quella candela!" (633) ("That candle—take away that candle!" [329]). The last, theatrical move of extinguishing the candle envelops the scene again in darkness and denial: this is consistent with the ending of the book with Raimondo's burial beside (and not by chance) Tullio's sister Costanza.

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40."Vedendo una candela che ardeva su un tavolo, trasalii. Non mi ricordavo d’averla lasciata accesa" (629) ("when I caught sight of a candle burning on a table, I started back. I could not remember having lighted it" [325]).
The comparison between the light/revelation devices in *Giovanni Episco*po and *L’Innocente* shows the different workings of the scar and the sore narrative. In *Episco*po, the fixity and uniqueness of piercing stripes of sunlight illuminates once and for all the central event in the psychoanalyti-
cal ghost text (Giovanni’s fear of castration) and marks it with the horror of
inevitability (Ciro’s death), whereas the mobile and indecisive flame from
the candle in *L’Innocente* flashes upon and at the same time obscures the
root reason of the same fear (female castration). In the transition between
scar and sore, narrative repetition and reproduction substitute originality
and permanence in the ghost text, in the narrative, and even in style.

Witness, for instance, the two techniques at play in the microcosms of
a short passage. In *Giovanni Episco*po, in the passage quoted above with the
third recurrence of the sunlight stripes, Ciro reaches his father in the back
room of a drugstore where he is working:

Io stavo nel retrobottega d’una drogheria, curvo su lo scrittoio a lavorar
di conti, affannato di stanchezza e di caldo, divorato dalle mosche, nau-
seato dell’odore delle droghie. [...] Notate, signore queste altre cose. Un
garzone, un giovane corpulento, dormiva sdraiato su i sacchi, inerte; e le
mosche ronzavano sopra di lui innumerevoli come sopra una carogna
(1088).

(I was in the back room of a grocer’s, sitting at a desk working on the
accounts, worn out from weariness and the heat, eaten up by flies, nau-
seated by the smell of the spices. [...] And notice, my dear sir, these other
things. A delivery boy, young and fat, was sleeping stretched out on the
sacks, inert; and the flies were buzzing above him, countless flies as
though around a carcass [146]).

In *L’Innocente*, the same passage—in which the shop is upgraded to a
bookstore where Tullio is informed of the disease that is killing his antag-
onist Filippo Arborio—is enlarged and expanded through the repeated
recurrence of the same image of the flies, which are reproduced from every
point of view:

Veramente nella libreria stretta e lunga come un corridoio spirava un filo
di frescura, per un riscontro. La luce era mite. Un commesso dormiva in
pace, su una sedia, col mento sul petto, all’ombra di un globo terraqueo
[...] Montando, urtò col capo un nastro ch’era teso pel riposo delle mosche.
Un nuvolo di mosche gli turbinò intorno con un ronzio fierissimo. Egli
disseco portando un volume: l’autorità da addurre in favore della morte. E
le mosche implacabili discendevano con lui. [...] Le mosche non si quieta-
vano. Facevano tutte insieme un ronzio irritante. Assalivano me, l’albino,
il commesso addormentato sotto il globo terraqueo [...] E le mosche impla-
cabili ronzavano, ronzavano senza posa (547-49).
(A thread of fresh air wafted through the long, narrow, passage-like shop. The light was subdued. A clerk slumbered peacefully on a chair, his chin on his breast, in the shadow of a terrestrial globe [...] On the way he knocked his head against a string fastened across a corner of the shop for the flies to rest on. A cloud of them instantly surrounded him with a chorus of buzzing. He descended with a volume in his hand, the authority to be quoted for his fatal verdict. [...] The flies would not settle again. They kept up a continuous irritating buzz" [217-219]).

Giovanni Episcopo’s dedication to Matilde Serao proffers an explanation for the different outcome of the two structures. For, if the two novels really represent two parts of the same renovation, the first one must definitely be the pars destruens. The castration of the middle class character and the elimination of his offspring induce a scarring of the narrative structure, leading its words and images to a point of no return. In the dedication we find out that Giovanni Episcopo is allegedly a real character, whose story was documented with maximum precision (“con la maggior possibile esattezza,” according to the dictates of realism) by D’Annunzio and his friends:

La persona di Giovanni Episcopo era già stata da me osservata e studiata con intesa curiosità, due anni innanzi. Il filosofo Angelo Conti l’aveva conosciuta per la prima volta nel gabinetto d’un medico, all’ospedale San Giacomo. Io, quel nobile filosofo e il pittore simbolico Marius de Maria avevamo poi frequentato una mortuaria taverna della via Alessandrina per incontrarcì col doloroso bevitore. Alcune circostanze bizzarre avevano favorito il nostro studio (Angelo Conti appunto aveva provveduto la siringa e la morfina pel povero Battista). 41 Ma il raro materiale, rac-

41 D’Annunzio is referring here to the passage where Ciro and Giovanna nurse the dying Battista: “E Ciro mi faceva lume; e in quella pelle tesa, lucente come un marmo giallognolo, io iniettavo la morfina con una siringa arrugginita” (1079) (“and Ciro would hold the light; and then into that taut flesh which shone like yellowish marble I injected some morphine with a rusty hypodermic syringe.” [138]). To further reinforce the pretense of realism of the story, the anonymous interlocutor (Conti, the medical student?) is said at the beginning to have seen Wanzer’s body at the morgue: “Voi ... vedeste ... il cadavere? — Non vi parve che ci fosse qualche cosa di straordinario in quel viso, negli occhi? — Ah, ma gli occhi erano chiusi ...” (1034) (“Did you see...his corpse? Don’t you think there was something extraordinary about that face, those eyes? Ah, but the eyes were closed...” [94]). The interlocutor is also said to have seen Ginevra: “Lavete vista? Lavete conosciuta? Le avete parlato? Ed ella vi ha parlato? Anche voi, certo, avrete provato quel turbamento improvviso ed inespressibile, se ella vi ha toccato una mano” (1040) (“Did you ever see her? Did you know her? Did you ever talk to her? And did she ever talk to you? Well, you too, I’m sure, experienced that sudden, inexplicable perturbation, if she touched you with her hand” [100]).
colto con la maggior possibile esattezza, era rimasto grezzo in alcune pagine di note (1025).

(I had observed and studied with great curiosity the figure of Giovanni Episcopo two years before. The philosopher Angelo Conti had met him for the first time in a doctor's office, at San Giacomo hospital. That noble philosopher, the symbolist painter Marius de Maria and myself used to spend time at a deadly tavern on the via Alessandrina to meet with the sorrowful drinker. Some bizarre circumstances had fostered our study (Angelo Conti indeed provided the syringe and the morphine for the poor Battista!) But the rare material, gathered with the utmost exactitude, had remained but a rough draft in a few pages of notes [translation mine]).

The confession of an alcoholic witnessed by three friends “under bizarre circumstances” becomes, however, the faithful record of a trial. The genre itself of the narration, the “straightforward formula,” which sanctions the direct observation of humans and things (“Tutto il metodo sta in questa formula schietta: - Bisogna studiare gli uomini e le cose DIRETTAMENTE, senza transposizione alcuna,” 1028) comes to be sentenced, once we discover who is on the board. Angelo Conti and Mario De Maria, friends of D'Annunzio in life and art, are in fact the promoters, in philosophical and aesthetic terms of the “new” art. Conti - later depicted as Daniele Glauro in Il Fuoco - a medical student who dedicated himself to philosophical practice, was a collaborator of La Cronica Bizantina and La Tribuna Illustrata in the 1880s, in which, under the pen name “Doctor Mysticus,” he supported the rejection of realism in favour of a kind of art steeped in decadent and symbolist inspiration. In the same years the painter Mario De Maria, known under the pseudonym of “Marius Pictor,” closely dialogue with Conti and D'Annunzio on symbolist figurative art. In 1886 he contributed to the illustrated edition of the Isotta Guttadauro, D'Annunzio’s most markedly pre-Raphaelite poem.

In this new perspective, Giovanni Episcopo's significance becomes clearer: in order for D'Annunzio's quest for the “future novel” to express its novelty completely and to shed light upon his contemporary and future projects, the past work had to be reduced to impotence. Through Giovanni's castration and the suppression of his offspring, under the eyes of three representatives of the new art, realism forever loses its capacity to reproduce, and its forms, nailed down in the rigor mortis of the structure, justify the past production and open a way for the future. In L'Innocente

42 For Conti and his influence on D'Annunzio's work, see Ricorda, Dalla parte di Ariele, and Zanetti, Estetismo e modernità.
43 Interestingly, in L'Innocente we find a pale palinode of the abuse perpetrated on
—soon located at the centre of the main triad—the reiterated castration of the female body starts an absence-presence process of a fetishistic kind, one which allows the structure to live and to regenerate itself in all its parts: the character’s representation, the narrative support, the figures, the images, and the language, not only through symmetrical resonances within the text itself, but also through the refraction into and from other works.

One last point can be made regarding the existence of the threat of failure, inherent, and often in an apotropaic way, perhaps in all literary works. This threat of “castration,” which Freud explained through the figure of Medusa, is here represented by the language and style of his previous works. In L’Innocente, images and style from the earlier production are condensed around the figure of the threatening phallic woman (the pregnant Giuliana). See, for instance, the following passage: “rimane incinta, ignobilmente, con la facilità di quelle femmine calde che i villani sforzano dietro le siepi, su l’erba in tempo di foia” (505) (“she was left pregnant, ignobly, with the facility of those hot women whom villains force behind the hedges, on the grass during the harvest” [my translation]). Such a strong echo to the setting, the language and the situations of Terra Vergine does not recur even in L’Innocentè’s most openly rural scenes. There is, however, one significant exception: Tullio’s criminal plot seems threatened by the presence, near the child’s cradle, of a wet nurse, a woman from the mountain people. Only by deception and circumvention does Tullio manage to dismiss her from the cradle-side and to expose the infant out of the window, causing the illness that will kill him. Witness the description of this “femmina,” whose enamel eyes set a Dantean Medusa reference:

Giovanni Episcopo in the figure of Giovanni di Scordio, an old man living on the family’s estate, part of the Tolstoian plot and almost sanctified in his martyrdom. See, for example, 508: “Quel vecchio è un santo [...] La moglie, una specie di carnesce, è morta. Egli è rimasto solo. I figli l’hanno spogliato e rinnegato. Tutta l’ingratitudine umana s’è accanita contro di lui. Egli non ha sperimentata la perversità degli estranei ma quella delle sue creature [...] Farai bene, Tullio, a non dimenticare quel sorriso.” (“That man is a saint! [...] The wife, a terrible shrew, is dead. He is quite alone. His children have stripped him of everything, and then cast him off. Every form of human ingratitude has been poured upon him. And it is not the unkindness of strangers, but of his own flesh and blood, that he has had to endure [...] You would do well, Tullio, not to forget that smile-” [172]). Ironically, Giovanni di Scordio becomes the godfather of the illegitimate child.

44 For Medusa as a literary threat see Freccero, “Medusa: the Letter and the Spirit.”
Si chiamava Anna, era una femmina di Montegorgo Pausula; escva da una grande razza di viragini alpestri. Aveva talvolta l’aspetto d’una Cibele di rame, a cui mancasse la corona di torri. Portava la foggia del suo paese: una gonna di scarlatto a mille pieghe diritte e simmetriche, un busto nero a ricami d’oro, da cui pendevano due maniche lunghe dove ella di rado introduceva le braccia. Il suo capo si levava su dalla camicia bianchissima, oscura; ma il bianco degli occhi e il bianco dei denti vincevano d’intensità al candore del lino. Gli occhi parevano di smalto, rimanevano quasi sempre immobili, senza sguardo, senza sogno, senza pensiero. La bocca era larga, socchiusa, taciturna, illustrata da una chiostra di denti fitto ed eguali. I capelli così neri che davano riflessi di viola, partiti su la fronte bassa, terminavano in due treccie dietro gli orecchi attorte come le corna d’ariete. Ella stava quasi di continuo assisa, reggendo il poppante, in attitudini statuarie [...] Io vedevo biancheggiare le fasce di Raimondo su le braccia della cupa femmina possente che mi fissava con quegli occhi d’idolo inanimato (597-98, emphasis mine).

(Her name was Anna. She was a woman from Montegorgo Pausula, a member of a splendid race of mountaineers. There were times when she had all the aspect of a Cybele of bronze, to whom only the turreted crown was wanting. She wore the costume of her part of the country; a scarlet petticoat falling in a thousand straight symmetrical folds, and a black bodice covered with gold embroidery, from which hung two long sleeves, into which she rarely put her arms. Her head rose sombre and grand out of her snow-white chemisette, but the whites of her eyes and her dazzling teeth far outshone the brilliancy of the linen. Her eyes, like polished enamel, remained nearly always motionless, staring without speculation, without one gleam of fancy. The mouth was large, full, taciturn, lighted up by two rows of strong, even teeth. The hair, so black that it showed gleams of purple, was parted over the low, broad forehead, and done in two plaits, which were twisted up behind each ear like the horns of a ram. She was almost always to be found sitting nursing the baby in a statuesque attitude [...] I would see the white bundle lying in the arms of the sombre, imposing woman who fixed the inanimate eyes of an idol upon me [281]).

The description of the statuary foster-mother is composed of excerpts from Terra Vergine’s various mighty and primitive women: Fiora lends the mouth (“Fiora si voltò, nel sorriso della bocca sanguigna mostrando le due file bianchissime di denti mandorlati,” Terra Vergine, 7 [Fiora turned around, showing in the smile of her blood-red mouth two rows of almond-like white teeth (my translation)]); Nara the bust (“parve una bella femmina fiorente di salute [...] il petto pregno di latte le ondeggiava in un anelare pregno e profondo,” 16 [she looked like a woman blooming with health [...] her breast full of milk undulated with her deep and pregnant breath-
ing (my translation)); Mena the outfit (“Mena, in mezzo all’altre due aveva le braccia nude fino al gomito e il seno chiuso a fatica nel corpetto nero ricamato di seta gialla,” 40 [Mena, between the two others, had her arms naked up to the elbow and her breast barely fitting in the black corsage embroidered with yellow silk (my translation)]); Gatta the white of the eyes (“non era bella la Gatta: non aveva che quelle due iridi gialle, talvolta verdognole, immobili sul bianco largo dell’occhio,” 43-44 [Gatta wasn’t beautiful: she only had those yellow irises, sometimes turning greenish, motionless in the wide whiteness of the eye (my translation)]). A precise reference is found in Ecloga Fluviale: “Ella [Mila] passava le ore muta, guardando la campagna, come un grande idolo di rame dagli occhi di smalto” (61) (“She [Mila] spent her time in silence, gazing at the countryside, like a large copper idol with enameled eyes” [my translation]). The woman-Medusa, which for a moment stalls the fetishistic process of the narrative, is accompanied, therefore, by the medusean threat of realism. 46

In conclusion, Giovanni Episcopo and L’Innocente identify a very peculiar moment in D’Annunzio’s prose in the years between 1880 and 1894.

46 Spackman has shown in Fascist Virilities (102-09) that the Medusa figure is inscribed within other D’Annunzian novels, developing its threat to the vital centre of the literary production. In Il Trionfo della Morte, the “enemy” Ippolita, in medusean form, threatens Giorgio’s knowledge and spirituality. In Le Vergini delle Rocce, Violante-Medusa sets a number of traps for the main character’s genealogical project and for the author’s political rhetoric.

Without entering into detail, it can be observed that the same horror-value in connection with the past production is found in the “ethnographic” inserts of Il Trionfo della Morte, especially in the lengthy part dedicated to the pilgrimage to Casalbordino. The episode of the religious mass hysteria during the pilgrimage at Casalbordino (book IV, ch. 5 and 6) is recognizably similar in tone and narrative to the short story “Gli idolatri” (San Pantaleone). It was originated by direct observation – D’Annunzio took various trips to Casalbordino between 1887 (when a description in many ways similar to the later one is recorded in a letter to Barbara Leoni) and 1893, often with his friend, the painter-photographer Michetti, whose 1883 painting “il voto” is also said to have influenced the passage of Il Trionfo, together with Del Nino’s Studi Abruzzesi and, later, Zola’s L’Ombre. However, the hysterical crowd, reminiscent in its horror of Terra Vergine and of the Novelle, is not isolated only from a philological point of view. In the episode of Casalbordino the two main characters (Giorgio and Ippolita) are removed like mere stickers from the quasi-animal scene that unfolds before their eyes. Indeed, this episode is a truly closed scar within the text and testifies to the utter impossibility of the exchange between the two narratives.
In the staged clash between the old and the new literature, two structures come into play: a scar and a sore type of narrative. The former, which refers to an event of castration in the psychoanalytical text, appears as a unique, closed structure that signals the scarring and liquidation of realism; the latter, which refers to an event of fetishism in the psychoanalytical text, as a reproducible, open structure attached to the “new” decadent production.

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