

*Creating and Representing  
Nationalist Culture in the Risorgimento:  
the Historical Novel and Medievalism.*

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A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

2019

**Declaration of Authorship.**

I, Bruno Grazioli

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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## **Thesis abstract.**

This thesis analyses the interaction between medievalism and historical novels in nineteenth-century Italian culture in relation to the identity formation process of the early Risorgimento period. The focus of my research is on the remarkable production of historical novels (nearly ninety) from the second quarter of the 1800s. These historical novels became nineteenth-century bestsellers because they popularised patriotic ideals and sentiments that were felt deeply at a time when a nationalistic movement was emerging in Italy, and also because they were largely based on the time's most popular topic, the Middle Ages. Authors reformulated the concept of the Middle Ages so as to create a malleable category that could provide historical proof of Italian patriotism and whose chronological limits stretched beyond the medieval aeon and well into the early Renaissance. As such, these historical novels are examples of the rich 'fenomeno del gusto' that was nineteenth-century medievalism.

Narratively speaking, the novels present recurring patterns, such as character archetypes embodying universal human values. They also depict the eternal struggle between Good and Evil, and emphasise the importance of strong family and cultural bonds. As a consequence, they legitimise the existence of an ethnically and culturally homogenous community of people, which informed the national identity formation process.

I identify the four most successful novels that were written and published in the thriving Milanese cultural environment of 1820s, 30s and 40s, forming the medieval canon of Risorgimento historical novels. These literary works communicate a fundamental message, a universal statement about the plight of Italy and the imperative necessity to take action. To sustain this message, authors established a direct conversation with their readers by means of the literary medium and also introduced extra-diegetic elements (namely historical and geographical digressions) intended to educate the readers. In so doing, they shaped their cultural, local, and national, identity.

## **Acknowledgments.**

This PhD thesis marks the culmination of an unexpectedly prolonged and rather eventful period of professional and personal growth. Looking back to when and where this research started, I would never have anticipated the extent of the opportunities I encountered on the journey that has led me to where I am today. In spite of all the challenges, somehow it all makes sense, now.

Foremost, I am indebted to my thesis supervisor, Dr Giuliana Pieri, Professor of Italian and the Visual Arts in the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Royal Holloway, University of London, without whose unflinching support this accomplishment would not have been possible. With her knowledge and scholarship, Prof. Pieri patiently guided me throughout the entire process, while always being supportive of my career goals.

I want to express my sincerest gratitude to my colleagues at Smith College: Alfonso, Anna, Giovanna, Lauren, Maria and Victoria. Thank you for encouraging me in all of my pursuits and for inspiring me during these last ten years collaborating, teaching, creating together.

I am incredibly grateful for the constant support of people I have the honour to call friends: Barbara, Elena, Monica, Valentina and Max, Jonathan, Raffaella. Thank you for listening and offering your advice.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the Italian Cultural Association “Il Circolo” of London (UK) for a scholarship that helped me navigate uncertain times at the beginning of my research.

Finally, thanks to my family, and particularly to *mamma e papà*.

Thank you for simply being there. No questions asked.

*Grazie di cuore.*

Bruno

**‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.’**

William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1957)

**‘People seem to like the Middle Ages.’**

Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality* (1986)

**‘The nineteenth century stands like a pervasive refractive  
and distorting medium between us and the past.’**

Leslie J. Workman, *Studies in Medievalism* (1997)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Culture and nationalism**

Academic interest in and research on the history of the nineteenth century is growing. For one thing, historiographical research on the nineteenth century has been the subject of several seminal publications, which, in most recent years, placed particular emphasis on the importance of the transnational exchange of ideas, as well as people, and on the pertinence of comparisons between different national histories.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the 2011 celebrations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian Unification were instrumental in creating momentum around the topic of Italian national identity and the Italian nation-building process, and, as a consequence, in prompting numerous publications on this topic.<sup>2</sup> All in all, there is consensus among scholars that further research on the Italian Risorgimento is needed to assess the peculiarity of Italy's state formation and its culture.<sup>3</sup>

These, as well as other more traditional, scholarly contributions, have tried to shed light on the nature of the concept of 'nation' by pointing out, for instance, the different connotations associated with it since the Middle Ages or even before.<sup>4</sup> Concepts of nation and state are contingent constructs and they have developed over time.<sup>5</sup> Or else, as

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004) and Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Two collective volumes in particular are to be mentioned: *Storia d'Italia: Annali, 22, Il Risorgimento* ed. by Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), pp. 184-224, and *Fare l'Italia: unità e disunità nel Risorgimento*, ed. by Eva Cecchinato and Mario Isnenghi (Torino: UTET, 2008). Among other publications worth mentioning, see: Adriano Roccucci, *La costruzione dello stato-nazione in Italia* (Roma: Viella, 2012); Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Oliver Janz and Lucy Riall, 'Special Issue: The Italian Risorgimento: Transnational Perspectives: Introduction', *Modern Italy*, 19:1 (2014), 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> See Maurizio Isabella, 'Review Article: Rethinking Italy's Nation-Building 150 Years Afterwards: The New Risorgimento Historiography', *Past & Present*, 217 (2012) 267.

<sup>4</sup> See Rudolf Rucker, *Nationalism and Culture* (Los Angeles: Rucker Publications Committee, 1937); Johan Huizinga, *Men and Ideas* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1960); Paul James, *Nation Formation. Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London: Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996); Guido Zernatto, 'Nation: The History of a Word', *The Review of Politics*, 6 (1944), 351-366.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 6-7.

Benedict Anderson puts it, nations are imagined political communities, where the modalities of imagination are open to a variety of possibilities.<sup>6</sup> Core nationalist doctrine is generic and adaptable because it depends on abstract categories (fatherland, motherland, nation, people), which can convey different meanings to different people in different moments, articulating categories of belonging, the membership definitions of which remain fluid and indeterminate.<sup>7</sup>

According to these studies, the connotation of the term nation as a ‘large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular country or territory’ is, in fact, a quite recent creation dating back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Considering that various European countries underwent a nation-state formation process during the nineteenth century, this period has been appropriately called ‘the age of nationalism.’<sup>9</sup> It is in relation to nationalism that nations must be defined, because it is nationalism that endangers nations and not the contrary.

An important and powerful shift in popular attitude took place between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when people became more aware of their role in society and, as a consequence, their attention started to focus on collective problems and possible solutions. Public opinion began emerging and the circulation of ideas acquired new force because of their revolutionary potential. This was possible only through the creation of a centralised and standardised educational and communication system, vital

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<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Dennis Smith defined nationalism as ‘sketchy and incomplete.’ See, Anthony Dennis Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971), pp. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Nation’ in The Oxford English Dictionary [online], <<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/nation>> [accessed 15 August 2019]. In discussing the political climate in Napoleon’s France at the end of the eighteenth century, Hans Kohn suggested that ‘nationalism had not yet sufficiently consolidated nations, nor was it possible to elaborate a doctrine for the masses or forge a mass party.’ See Hans Kohn, “Napoleon and the Age of Nationalism”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 22:1 (1950), 21-37 (p. 26).

<sup>9</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 54.

to the process of nation formation.<sup>10</sup> Since we cannot know what kind of ideas people commonly discussed, in order to explore the increasing sense of collective consciousness of the time, one must investigate the means of expression and communication that facilitated the circulation of ideas. This is why combining the evidence of popular movements such as nationalism with popular literature to see if patterns emerge is especially fruitful. The most popular literary genre in Italy during the first half of the 1800s was that of historical novels, in which the emerging pattern looks remarkably like the rise of political consciousness.<sup>11</sup> In early nineteenth-century Italy, political awareness developed in accordance with the appreciation of and identification with a common cultural heritage and historical tradition, and especially a common language. The process generated a new sense of self, a new unified identity in opposition to the fragmentary identities of the past.<sup>12</sup>

It was on people's sense of loyalty, on their cooperation towards attaining a common goal and on a shared feeling of belonging that nations could be invented.<sup>13</sup> The notion of people as a collective social category is another seminal hallmark of the period, one that is implicitly present in every critical work focusing on either nationalism or national identity.<sup>14</sup> Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the concept of the masses of people gained social legitimacy as they formed 'the final court of appeal, and increasingly the goal of individual striving.'<sup>15</sup> People had to be educated to think of

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<sup>10</sup> Gellner, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Burke explains political consciousness as awareness of community-related problems and their possible solutions 'involving a "public opinion", and a critical [...] attitude to the government.' See, Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2017), p. 353

<sup>12</sup> See Emiliana Pasca Noether, *Seeds of Italian Nationalism. 1700-1815* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

<sup>13</sup> See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses; Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 171.

themselves not in individualistic terms, but as part of a larger community bonding over common principles, ideals, but mostly over a shared sense of history and culture.

In my thesis I focus on the early Risorgimento period. The Italian Risorgimento is that phase in modern Italian history that, broadly speaking, determined the political aspect of the Italian nation as it looks in this day and age. As we know, Risorgimento, a term that has been associated with this period to indicate a fundamental turning point in the history of Italy, indicates a series of events that paved the way for Italian political unification. Conventionally the outset of the Risorgimento is placed between 1815, when the Congress of Vienna re-established the pre-Napoleonic dominions over the Italian territory, and 1870, when Rome was incorporated in the newly formed Italian state. Yet movements such as the Risorgimento do not mature overnight and if, on the one hand, they can be easily defined by means of chronological references, on the other hand, dates prove imperfect when the cultural as well as ideological components of such transforming processes are considered. The area of investigation is naturally broad, and the study of the Risorgimento must necessarily cut across different and diverse disciplines. To define a long-lasting and significant occurrence such as the Risorgimento one must necessarily overlook chronological boundaries and consider historical events holistically. This is particularly important if, instead of specific events, we focus upon how ideas developed, how they were shaped, and how they may have impacted the course of history. To understand how people favourably embraced the idea of political change and how it progressively became a disrupting force in nineteenth-century Italian culture, we must approach the subject from different angles.<sup>16</sup> To this end, the focus of my thesis, though literary, is placed in a broader cultural frame.

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<sup>16</sup> Of this line of criticism, Renato Bordone is certainly the most prolific and eclectic researcher. See, for instance, Renato Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott: l'invenzione del Medioevo nella cultura dell'Ottocento* (Napoli: Liguori, 1993).

At a time when foreign administrations over the Italian territories had been unaltered for two centuries and national aspirations were slowly crystallizing around the idea of a unique Italian state, one that would eventually encompass all the various regions of the subdivided peninsula into one form of union, ‘the Italians hoped to find incontrovertible proof of their common origin in history.’<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, the dissemination and appeal of nationalistic ideas aimed towards fostering the political modernisation of the country largely rested on the recuperation of a shared sense of historical past and identity. As Anthony D. Smith indicated in his influential study on the ethnic origins of the nations, the survival of a community of people depends not only on its ability to continue existing pragmatically, but also symbolically. By associating oneself to ‘a “community of history and destiny”, the individual hopes to achieve a measure of immortality which will preserve his or her person and achievement from oblivion.’<sup>18</sup> All human beings have, Smith also maintains, ‘is memory and hope, history and destiny.’<sup>19</sup>

Memory and history are key-concepts in the historical revival that took place between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century in Italy and Europe more broadly. It was through memory of the past and reconstruction of a collective history that the community could survive. Historiography received considerable attention, and the relevance of its national character grew accordingly. History had to be probed in order to find distinctive instances when Italy and its people had shown qualities and attributes that could be categorized as national, revealing a typical Italian character so as to stimulate a sense of national pride. That being said, not all Italian history could serve this purpose.

Already in 1911 historian Ettore Pais denounced the controversial role of Roman

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<sup>17</sup> Pasca Noether, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 175.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, p. 176.

history in the midst of the Italian unification process and how historians of the Risorgimento deliberately omitted it. Pais wrote that ‘l’Istituto storico italiano, pur essendo sorto dopo l’unione di Roma e l’Italia, pur essendosi proposto di illustrare il nostro passato, ha escluso come estraneo al suo compito lo studio delle antiche memorie di Roma.’<sup>20</sup> Indeed, one of the characteristics of the Italian historiography of this period was its neglect of Rome and Roman tradition with its universalism. In spite of the glorious achievements of the Roman Empire with its potent symbolic connotation, Rome’s heritage was rejected because it was not compatible with the nationalistic aspirations of the Risorgimento. Rome was ‘criticized both as a republic and as an empire, seen as despotic and dominating.’<sup>21</sup> Political thinkers of the Risorgimento, which by 1848 had fundamentally become an anticlerical movement, opposed the idea that the Papacy could unite the Italian nation and, as a result, the image of ancient Rome, seen as too closely connected to the Catholic Church, was also opposed.<sup>22</sup> This line of interpretation of Roman history had already begun during the eighteenth century, when the Papal States were depicted by foreign travellers as a stronghold of ‘begging and indolence, superstition and pomp, promiscuity and malaria,’ but, most importantly, the pope’s temporal power was considered despotic and anachronistic.<sup>23</sup> This explains why the image of Rome came to be seen as a despoiler of the Italian nation: instead of supporting its rebirth, it would have resulted in a deterioration of the nationalist

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<sup>20</sup> See Ettore Pais, ‘Roma antica e la genesi dell’Unità d’Italia. Nel cinquantenario del riscatto italiano’, *Rivista d’Italia* (1911), 333-357. For further information on Ettore Pais and his role as advocate for the study of Roman history and antiquity after the unification of Italy, see: Luciano Polverini, ‘La storia antica nella storia dell’Italia Unita. Il caso di Ettore Pais (1856-1939)’, in *La tradizione classica e l’unità d’Italia: atti del seminario, Napoli - Santa Maria Capua Vetere 2-4 Ottobre 2013*, ed. by Salvatore Cerasuolo, Maria Luisa Chirico, Serena Cannavale, Cristina Pepe, Natale Rampazzo, I (Napoli: Satura Editrice, 2014), pp. 261-276.

<sup>21</sup> Pasca Noether, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Clark, *The Italian Risorgimento* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Manuel Borutta, ‘Anti-Catholicism and the Culture War in Risorgimento Italy’, in Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, eds., *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 202.

discourse.<sup>24</sup>

The phase in Italian history that was reclaimed in a nationalistic perspective was one which did not directly give evidence of the distinctiveness of the nation, but which revealed the Italian people's character and strength to fight for independence from foreign invasions: the Middle Ages. Research in this field by pioneering historians of the eighteenth century sustained a growing awareness about the medieval period. In 1738, Antonio Ludovico Muratori published *Dissertazioni sopra le antichità italiane*, an extended dissertation on Italian medieval life intended to show the continuity of Italian history by means of an accurate study of medieval feudal society, culture, and legislation with its customs, arts, and crafts. Interest in the Middle Ages was also furthered by the Romantic aesthetic for things medieval, an inclination which has often been seen as more sophisticated in other European countries than in Italy. Italian medievalism never became a movement of proportions comparable, for instance, to the Gothic Revival that had vast impact and long-lasting influence on English society. Although as a cultural phenomenon Italian medievalism was more localised, it was primarily adapted to express and fulfil nationalistic aspirations. Yet, as we shall see, research on Italian medievalism has suffered because of the unresolved identity of this phenomenon, too often perceived as only instrumental to a nationalistic agenda. This aspect of Italian culture in the early stages of the Risorgimento has yet to be properly investigated.

One final aspect central to the revival of the interest in the Middle Ages was the recuperation of the figure of Dante Alighieri. It was precisely in the nineteenth century that the poet gained considerable attention and became Italy's great national emblem. Most importantly, Dante's popularity and image shifted according to political and social

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<sup>24</sup> For an overview of the myth of Rome from antiquity to the Fascist period see: André Vauchez and Andrea Giardina, *Il mito di Roma: Da Carlo Magno a Mussolini* (Roma: Laterza, 2000).

changes, thus producing numerous constructions and myths of the figure of Dante, which were variously negotiated in the process of creation and legitimation of Italian national identity.<sup>25</sup> Dante is an illuminating example of how popular figures from the past were transformed into social myths, and exploited for political reasons. Between the first and second half of the nineteenth century Dante was exalted for two quite opposite reasons. First, as the rebellious Italian who refused to subjugate himself to the tyranny of rulers he did not recognise, and then as the peaceful and hopeful patriot infused with the serene mood of the *Commedia* and confident in the nation's regeneration. Whilst these readings are contradictory, they show how ideas of the nation and a shared past could be projected and focused on particular individuals and moments in Italian history, paving the way for a recuperation of the Middle Ages as the cradle of the Italian nation.

For the most part, the debate centred on the Middle Ages during the Risorgimento engaged intellectuals and social thinkers who, in recognising the lack of socially cohesive ties among the Italians, identified the Middle Ages as a rich source of popular imagery. The educated middle class had to be taught how to embrace the national ideal, or to receive the national message favourably. Meaningful precedents to such national messages had to be identified and a whole narrative of what Italy was, and could be, had to be written. Adrian Lyttleton points out that conscious attempts to produce a national history became important only after unification was achieved.<sup>26</sup> While this is certainly the case, I also argue that the effort to historicise the national message and to create a common (i.e. national) cultural framework, albeit naïve and rudimentary, had in fact become manifest forty years prior to the unification of the peninsula, thanks to the allure

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<sup>25</sup> The literature on the role of the figure of Dante in nineteenth-century Italian culture is quite vast. For more information on the reception of Dante in the nineteenth century and how the poet was appropriated in Italy but also internationally, see: Aida Audeh and Nick Havely, *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna Clara Von Henneberg, eds., *Making and Remaking Italy. The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), p. 28.

of the Middle Ages and exemplified by the intense publication of historical novels which occurred in the second quarter of the 1800s, revealing a patent educational and nationalistic intent.

This is the subject that is at the core of my thesis, which focuses on the interplay between nationalism and medievalism as it is displayed in the Italian historical novels published between the 1820s and the mid 1840s. The Italian historical novel genre is analysed and contextualised not simply in literary terms, but as a singular manifestation of specific aesthetic and cultural tendencies that converged and coalesced in the first half of the nineteenth century: medievalism on the one hand and patriotic zeal on the other. Renato Bordone's influential comparative study of nineteenth-century medievalism remains an important influence on my approach to the study of this cultural phenomenon in Italy.<sup>27</sup> Yet scholarly interest in this phenomenon, whether considered in its early nineteenth-century or late twentieth-century manifestation, has not seen any further major studies, leaving significant gaps in the critical literature. My thesis investigates the unique synergy between medievalism, the production and circulation of historical novels, and national identity in nineteenth-century Italy.

To date, there is no relevant research on this specific topic, either in English or in Italian. In the English-speaking world, no publication has contributed to the advancement of this area of research. In Italy, no significant single study on the correlation between the three above-mentioned elements has been published in the last three decades, apart from the works of Bordone, who pioneered the field of research on medievalism, and

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<sup>27</sup> In 1982 Renato Bordone wrote: 'che il Medioevo sia oggi di moda è constatazione così ovvia da parere ormai addirittura stantia: letteratura, cinema, pubblicità da alcuni anni a questa parte hanno contribuito a creare un clima culturale di riscoperta del Medioevo avvertibile a tutti i livelli.' 'Medioevo americano. Modelli iconografici e modelli mentali', in "Quaderni medievali", 13 (1982), p.130.

Duccio Balestracci's monograph published in 2015.<sup>28</sup> Tellingly, these two studies were published more than twenty years apart, which confirms how slowly research in this field is progressing. What is missing is an analysis and explanation of how medievalism functioned as a cultural phenomenon in pre-unification Italy. To address this point, my thesis explores medievalism in connection with the frenzied publication of historical novels that occurred between 1827 and 1840 and how this impacted the rise of a nationalistic culture in pre-unification Italy. Connecting these factors will allow us to understand the development of the ensemble of symbolic codes that supported participation in the national movement.

To contextualise the cultural and literary climate of the period, the first chapter introduces the famous *querelle* between Classicists and Romantics in the 1820s regarding the use of historical subjects and fiction in narrative. This provides a helpful frame for the review of the critical literature on the Risorgimento historical novel. The aim of this review is to reconstruct the development of the existing criticism on the topic and to identify unexplored areas of research. The analysis follows the chronology of the publications, divided into three periods according to the main critical trends, and highlights a radical change of perspective on the value of the historical novel genre, from marginal to complex literary product. It also emphasises how the Risorgimento historical novel is still today considered a secondary phenomenon of the Italian *Ottocento* and remains overshadowed by both Manzoni's influential work and the post-unification redrafting of the Italian literary canon which immediately marginalised the rich but

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<sup>28</sup> By Bordone, see especially the above-mentioned publication, *Lo specchio di Shalott*. Among other publications that focus on the topic of the revival of the Middle Ages in nineteenth-century Italian culture, see: Simonetta Soldani, 'Il Medioevo del Risorgimento nello Specchio della Nazione', pp. 149-186; Ilaria Porciani, 'L'Invenzione del Medioevo', pp. 253-280, in *Arti e storia nel Medioevo*, ed. by Enrico Castelnuovo and Giuseppe Sergi (Torino: Einaudi, 2004). The most recent publication on the connection between medievalism and national identity is: Duccio Balestracci, *Medioevo e Risorgimento: l'invenzione dell'identità italiana nell'Ottocento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015).

literary uneven phenomenon of the Italian Risorgimento historical novel. To this end, I propose to redefine the role of historical novels not in consideration of their literary achievement, but of their cultural implications. In the first half of the nineteenth century, in fact, the publication of historical novels constituted the first real case of a modernising literary industry, in which the availability of printed material was deeply dependent on the readers' interest and on the publishers' strategies to satisfy it, all aspects that the following chapter investigates.

Chapter 2 deals with cultural production and exchange in the first half of the nineteenth century in order to clarify the socio-cultural circumstances in which the authors of historical novels operated. In the first section, I discuss the role of printmakers and publishers in the actual production of books, and their role in illicit printing and reprinting. These practices were quite pervasive, and, as explained in the second section of the chapter, led to the first agreement on copyright regulations in 1840 between the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Austrian Empire. The underpinning assumption is that, in spite of the lack of a unified and modern publishing industry in Italy, the formation and growth of a philosophical movement in favour of the Italian unification and the development of an Italian nationalistic culture were intensely informed by the proliferation of historical novels. This is a necessary step in the analysis of the historical novels of this period, and it is needed in order to connect the narrative innovations the authors introduced in the novels, the popularity of the historical subjects, and the amplification of patriotic ideals, which began with the re-evaluation of national history, and more precisely of medieval history.

Chapter 3 offers an explanation of the term *medievalism* as the cultural and aesthetic movement characterized by a return of interest in the Middle Ages, and of its use and adaptation for specific purposes. In this chapter I also focus on medievalism as a

phenomenon grounded in the historiography of the eighteenth century and in the innovative research of historians of the Enlightenment, like Antonio Ludovico Muratori, who helped redefine the historical and cultural significance of the medieval aeon. New historiography of the time informed the Romantic Movement's ideological appropriation of the Middle Ages, which sustained the debate over national identity in the nineteenth century. To this end, I detail the development of the Romantic debate on the interpretation of the Middle Ages and clarify how medievalism became a powerful discourse by recalling precise themes and episodes of Italian medieval history, which spawned, for example, the so-called *questione longobarda*. This chapter concludes the first segment of the thesis that intends to situate the production of historical novels of the second quarter of the nineteenth century at the centre of the process of cultural modernisation of Italy.

Chapters 4 and 5 are solely dedicated to the analysis of historical novels and their authors. In chapter 4 I circumscribe the medieval canon of Risorgimento historical novels by indicating the literary works later analysed, which is needed in order to conduct a close reading of a representative sample of novels from the larger literary corpus. The second section in this chapter focuses on the authors and their literary works. It intends to clarify the context in which the novels were conceived, and also highlight the close-knit community and cultural environment to which the authors belonged. This will allow us to approach and study novels in the canon as an authentic literary corpus. The last section in this chapter introduces the notion of a tacit agreement between narrator and readers, who are, thereby, defined by a unique relationship, where the narrator acts as guarantor of historical truth. The role and functions of the narrator in the novels of the canon blur the line of demarcation between fixed narrative categories. Although they are technically extradiegetic narrators, they regularly align with the authors' or the readers'

identities. Narrators are responsible for implementing the authors' mission to educate readers on a variety of subjects: historical events, facts and prominent figures, local history and geography, and the evolution of urban spaces. This narrative technique confers a quality of realism to the novels, and it characterises them as examples of didactic literature, which informed the readers' cultural awareness and set the tone for reconsidering the past in the construction of their identity as members of the same national community.

Lastly, in chapter 5 I investigate how medievalism became a distinctive component of Italian historical novels of the first half of the nineteenth century by analysing narrative patterns in the representation of three types of characters: knights, damsels, and villains. These characters are recurrently presented as moral or behavioural models and stand as symbols that project very clear messages about embracing heroic values to defend motherly or virginal women against despotic enemies. In keeping with the way nineteenth-century political propaganda made use of national symbols, I argue that the way characters in Italian historical novels of this time were constructed rekindled national sentiments and inspired a sense of collective conscience.<sup>29</sup> At the centre of this process is the revival of the figure of the medieval knight, which was deeply influenced by Walter Scott's reclamation and codification of the traditional chivalric code. The figure of the knight in historical novels, as well as other characters that revolve around him, helped delineate a specific system of values that supported the rise of a nationalist culture.

In the end, the appendix to the dissertation provides a comprehensive bibliography of all the editions of novels in the canon, as well as a detailed list of all

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<sup>29</sup> I employ the expression 'collective conscience' in Émile Durkheim's sense as the range of ideas, beliefs, and values that a great number of individuals in a given society share. See, Émile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), p. xxxvii.

historical novels published during the time frame of my consideration. The latter is another original contribution of my research to the study of Risorgimento historical novels. By establishing and clarifying connections between the medieval revival of the early nineteenth century, the success of historical novels and their modes of circulation, with, finally, the powerful narrative of patriotism these novels created, it is my hope to further, and to deepen, the understanding of the Italian Risorgimento, particularly the struggle for a meaningful sense of belonging to a unified Italian nation.

# **1 THE HISTORICAL NOVEL**

## **Introduction**

Critical contributions focused on the production of historical novels in the Risorgimento period remain scarce. Apart from a few authors who have conducted narratological analyses on individual novels, the lack of an innovative approach is amplified by the fact that critics have essentially limited themselves to commenting on the distinctive combination of history and fiction in these literary works. Risorgimento historical novels have received strong condemnation because of their intrinsic ambiguity, and they have repeatedly and disparagingly been compared with the two best-known nineteenth-century representatives of this genre, Walter Scott and Alessandro Manzoni. In all instances, these novels have been represented as far less remarkable literary products in the Italian *Ottocento*. From the time the genre originated and up until the 1980s this has been the dominant critical approach. In addition, in the last three decades scholarly interest in the historical novel of the Risorgimento has lost momentum.

A new study and a new approach to the subject is needed, especially in order to clarify the correlation between the intense production of historical novels that occurred between the mid 1820s and the late 1840s and the general cultural implications of their vast editorial success. The influence of Risorgimento historical novels on Italian culture has been studied only rarely. Even more rarely have critical studies observed and commented on these novels' interest in the Middle Ages and connected this to the political climate of pre-unification Italy. Studies on medievalism as a multi-faceted cultural and artistic phenomenon in nineteenth-century Italy, or on the creation of Italian

national identity in the nineteenth century do exist.<sup>30</sup> However, Risorgimento historical novels are only marginally mentioned, and they certainly do not constitute the focus of the critical research.

The present chapter intends to review the critical literature on the Risorgimento historical novel from the second half of the nineteenth century until our present day so as to bring to the fore areas of research which are as yet unexplored. Following the chronology of the publication of the critical contributions, this review will highlight three evolving critical trends in three separate sections. An analysis of the controversy about the use of history and fiction in historical novels, which fuelled the opposition between Classicists and Romantics during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, will introduce the major points of discussion in the survey of the critical literature on the Risorgimento historical novel.

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<sup>30</sup> See for example: Renato Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*; Alberto Maria Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000).

## **1.1 The controversy about the Italian historical novel**

The Italian historical novel gained critical attention only after 1827 when Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* was published and gave more credibility to a literary genre considered only minor up until then. In fact, historical narratives had been written since the late eighteenth century and their production intensified considerably after Italian translations of Walter Scott's novels began being published in 1821.<sup>31</sup>

Not being the product of a specific movement or school, the historical genre followed a path of development different from traditional ones. Yet the widespread circulation of historical novels after 1821 contributed to the formation of a pseudo literary movement, which declined after approximately two decades. The historical novel attracted writers' attention for its ground-breaking potential in opposition to the classicistic literary tradition. It was favourably welcomed by the emerging middle class, whose lifestyle and achievements were documented in it. However, the new literary form of the novel was disregarded for many years by critics until Manzoni's work was published.

As a genre without a definite status within the Italian literary tradition, the historical novel remained fundamentally ostracised. There were no specific rules, no literary statutes that regulated it. On the one hand, the Italian cultural establishment, traditionally classicistic, ignored the novel because of its alleged literary inferiority. On the other hand, because of the lack of control and guidelines, writers of novels could operate free of restrictions. This explains why other authors modelled their works on Walter Scott's successful novels.

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<sup>31</sup> Gaetano Barbieri was the first translator of Scott's novels. He published *Kenilworth* in 1821 and *Ivanhoe* the following year. For a detailed account of the production of literary works based on the use of history before 1820 see: Adolfo Albertazzi, *Il romanzo: storia dei generi letterari italiani* (Milano: Casa Editrice Francesco Vallardi, 1902).

Despite its identity as a work of fiction, the historical novel was presented as a source of historical truth by means of a complex paratextual apparatus: titles, introductions, epigraphs, footnotes, etc. This was intended to provide as much credibility as possible to the content. At the same time, authors of historical novels exploited the literary controversy of the time, which focused on the immorality of the combination of fiction and history in a literary work and on its detrimental effect on the moral advancement of Italian society.<sup>32</sup>

The dispute between critics and writers of the time essentially centred around two arguments: the lack of novels in Italian literature (especially when compared to that of other European countries) and the inadequacy of combining history with fiction. Already in 1816, the Italian literary backwardness was denounced by intellectual Pietro Borsieri who, although defending the morality of the genre, admitted to the novel's possible negative influence on young generations.<sup>33</sup> With much stronger emphasis, in 1821, Paride Zaiotti deemed the juxtaposition of fiction and history incompatible and firmly condemned the 'atrocious combination' of the two elements.<sup>34</sup>

Both Borsieri and Zaiotti and the accusations they made against the genre of endangering historical truth were contested by Sansone Uzielli, who published a two-part essay on the historical novel in 1824.<sup>35</sup> Uzielli declared that history 'serve a farci conoscere tutti gli uomini in massa, la società, nel suo aspetto generale ed esterno. Ma noi amiamo anche vedere l'interno delle famiglie e il loro vivere domestico, l'apprendere

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<sup>32</sup> Graziella Pagliano, 'Le costanti narrative', in AA.VV., *L'età romantica e il romanzo storico in Italia* (Roma: Bonacci, 1988 (pp. 41-55), p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> Pietro Borsieri, *Avventure letterarie di un giorno e altri scritti inediti*, ed. by Giorgio Alessandrini (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> Paride Zaiotti, 'Viaggi di F. Petrarca in Francia, in Germania e in Italia descritti dal professor Ambrogio Levati. Lettera di A.M. al suo amico F.S. con cui si fanno alcune osservazioni sul primo tomo dei viaggi del Petrarca del professor Ambrogio Levati', *Biblioteca Italiana* XXIII (1821), 145-149.

<sup>35</sup> Sansone Uzielli, 'Considerazioni sul romanzo in prosa, desunte dalle diverse vicende della letteratura in Italia e in Francia, e dalla considerazione sociale delle donne', *Antologia*, XII (1824), 71; 'Del romanzo storico e di W. Scott', *Antologia*, XIII (1824), 118-144, and *Antologia*, XII (1824), 1-18.

i costumi, la educazione, le consuetudini, le opinioni, i pregiudizi.<sup>36</sup> Uzielli claimed that, while history provides the reader with a description of society on a large scale, historical novels offer a different and new perspective on the daily lives of our predecessors.

The opposition between Classicists and Romantics revolved around the superiority of traditional literary forms, particularly poetry, over the historical genre. In a way, the concepts of history and art were being challenged, and society's relationship with literature was being redefined to serve new functions ('come "impegno" civile e sociale [e] come evasione dalla realtà').<sup>37</sup> Only with the publication of *I promessi sposi* in 1827 did the tone of the controversy on the historical novel change radically, because of the widespread perceived literary relevance of Manzoni's work. The main argument for this critical reappraisal of the genre centred on the fact that Manzoni's novel could not be labelled merely Scott-like, because it elevated both the form of the novel and the genre of the historical novel to unparalleled standards.

The fierce condemnation of the historical novel that Zaiotti published in 1827 is considered the starting point of this literary controversy in Italian culture. Albeit an admirer of Manzoni, in his essay 'Del romanzo in generale e anche dei "Promessi Sposi"', Zaiotti criticised this hybrid genre, which, instead of making fiction useful and history pleasurable, resulted in the vilification of both.<sup>38</sup> Zaiotti declared himself in favour of the so-called 'romanzo meraviglioso,' which, as a work of pure fiction, could prove more informative and educational than the pretentious historical novel. Alessandro Manzoni himself condemned the historical novel as an untruthful genre, which fails to create organic unity because of its dual purpose of entertaining while educating in *Del*

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Mario Santoro, *Momenti della narrativa italiana: dal romanzo storico al romanzo neorealista* (Napoli: Liguori, 1971), p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Santoro, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Paride Zaiotti, 'Del romanzo in generale ed anche dei "Promessi Sposi"', *Biblioteca Italiana*, XLVIII (1827).

*romanzo storico e in genere de' componimenti misti di storia e d'invenzione*.<sup>39</sup> Manzoni's critique, written between 1828 and 1831 but published both in 1845 and 1850, is considered the epilogue of the debate over the genre of the historical novel.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of the tone, such criticism is interesting because it validates the coming to prominence of the historical novel with the advent of a new epoch and the changed social needs of the time. Even though Manzoni considered the appeal of the historical novel to be fading at the time when he wrote his condemnation, he could still see the reasons for the success of the genre. The historical novel exposed the omissions of contemporary historiography, which focused on events of the greater communal interest and neglected more specific aspects of social life. Manzoni's idea of historical truth is the so-called 'vero positivo' in which history is the product of well-documented facts. Yet, historical truth cannot be known without the reconstruction of the past through a relativistic approach, which attempts to recreate history as authentically as possible.<sup>41</sup>

Manzoni's consideration reflects much of the Classicist thinking in this literary debate. The Romantics' defence of the genre of the historical novel was centred instead on its didactic nature. They believed it was necessary to combine truth with fiction in order to encourage a deeper historical consciousness and knowledge among the masses. To the Romantics, the role of the writer was that of a mediator, an interpreter, whose voice is expressed through a figure that acquired a much higher status at this time: the narrator. This represented the intermediary in the literary process, and influenced the relationship between writer, literary work, and reader.

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<sup>39</sup> See Cristina Della Coletta, 'Alessandro Manzoni's J'accuse: Literary Debates, the Essay "Del romanzo storico", and Theory of Creative Historiography', in Cristina Della Coletta, *Plotting the Past. Metamorphoses of Historical Narrative in Modern Italian Fiction* (West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 19-69.

<sup>40</sup> Among the numerous editions of this text, a fairly recent one, particularly worthy of note is: Alessandro Manzoni, *Del romanzo storico e, in genere, de' componimenti misti di storia e d'invenzione*, ed. by Fabio Danelon and Silvia De Laude (Milano: Centro nazionale di studi manzoniani, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Margherita Ganeri, *Il romanzo storico in Italia. Il dibattito critico dalle origini al post-moderno* (Lecce: Piero Manni, 1999), pp. 38-40.

It is important to underline how the new role of the writer developed in accordance not only with the higher status of the narrator, but also with the transformation of the novel into a vehicle of communication and information. To this end, the structure of the novel underwent a process of modification by which specific sections, such as preface, introduction and conclusion, were invested with a social function. Increasingly, such sections became a means for writers to participate in the general debate about the historical novel and to affirm and validate their own ideas. Writers posed as interpreters of history, and novels were needed to mediate between low and high culture or, as one of these nineteenth-century authors put it, ‘per passare agevolmente senza pericolo dalle sbiaditure nauseose degli arcadi agli studi severi della storia, si richiedeva una letteratura intermedia.’<sup>42</sup>

Writers of historical novels saw themselves on a mission to supplement the work of historians in order to make ‘più evidente e collegare ciò che imperfettamente le cronache ne accennano o ci fanno intravedere.’<sup>43</sup> Historical novels act as a magnifying lens that focus on details of the past unknown before, as Giambattista Bazzoni describes: ‘La storia si può chiamare un gran quadro [...]. Il romanzo storico è una gran lente che si applica ad un punto di quell’immenso quadro: per esso ciò c’era appena visibile riceve le sue naturali dimensioni [...]. I romanzi di tal genere sono insomma i *panorama* della storia.’<sup>44</sup> Bazzoni’s words suggest a renewed attitude towards the social function of

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<sup>42</sup> Adolfo Albertazzi, p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> Giovanni Campiglio, *Elena della Torre o sia Milano seicento anni fa* (Milano: Truffi, 1839), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> It is worth quoting the whole passage: ‘La storia si può chiamare un gran quadro dove sono tracciati tutti gli avvenimenti, collocati i grandi personaggi, e la serie d’alcuni fatti esposta con ordine, ma dove la moltitudine delle cose è negletta o appena accennata in confuso e di scorcio, e solo le azioni più straordinarie e gli uomini sommi vi stanno dipinti isolatamente [...]. Il romanzo storico è una gran lente che si applica ad un punto di quell’immenso quadro: per esso ciò c’era appena visibile riceve le sue naturali dimensioni, un lieve abbozzato contorno diventa un disegno regolare e perfetto, o meglio un quadro in cui tutti gli oggetti riprendono il loro vero colore. Non più i soli re, i duci, i magistrati, ma la gente del popolo, i fanciulli vi fanno la loro mostra: vi sono messi in azione i vizi, le virtù domestiche, e palesata l’influenza delle pubbliche istituzioni sui privati costumi, sui bisogni e la felicità della vita [...]. I romanzi di tal genere sono insomma i *panorama* della storia. Alcuni rigoristi portano loro l’accusa di frammischiare cose menzognere alle reali, e deturparne in tal modo la storica purità [...]. Ora, perché, tenendosi nei limiti della

historical novels, as these writers were interested in educating their readers. This was one point of discussion on which much of the subsequent literary criticism focused.

### **1.2 History and fiction: an ambiguous relationship (19<sup>th</sup> c.-1940s)**

The first trend in the criticism of the historical novel genre is the one that covers the period between the second half of the nineteenth-century and the first half of the twentieth century. In the course of approximately one hundred years, historical novels were generally criticised for manipulating history and for their cumbersome ideological drive. Criticism of this period focused mainly on historical novels published before 1827, the year conventionally regarded as the beginning of the historical novel genre in Italy, and reveals an interesting fixation with authors' biography over their actual literary works.

Francesco De Sanctis's 1870 commentary on Risorgimento historical novels in the highly influential *Storia della letteratura* is arguably the first authoritative contribution and, given the role of de Sanctis' work in the process of canon formation, held a special place in the process of the reception of these novels. Whereas he acknowledged the central role of history in Italian Romanticism as a channel for patriotic ideals, he also pointed out that the historical genre quickly lost its interest in genuine historical research and novels became a mere 'involucro de' nostri ideali, l'espressione abbastanza trasparente delle nostre speranze.'<sup>45</sup> According to De Sanctis, this was concretised in the use of medievalism and in the new readership's desire to read in-between the lines because 'ciascuno sentiva sotto la scorza del medio evo palpitare le

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verisimiglianza, non sarà lecito, anzi utilissimo intrecciare la storia con fatti d'invenzione che la rendono più drammatica, più evidente, quindi più studiata e proficua?' Giovan Battista Bazzoni, *Falco della rupe o la guerra di Musso* (Milano: Stella, 1831), p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Francesco De Sanctis, "La nuova letteratura", *Storia della letteratura* (Napoli: Tipografia Morano, 1870), pp. 381-493.

nostre aspirazioni; le minime allusioni, le più lontane somiglianze erano colte a volo da un pubblico che si sentiva uno con gli scrittori.<sup>46</sup> The connection between the medieval setting and the barely disguised political function of the novels is set out very clearly by De Sanctis.

The combination of medievalism and patriotism found new meaning with the advent of the Fascist period, because it acquired a further political layer, which favoured nationalistic readings of the historical novels. The number of works of criticism published in this period is limited and overtly ideological given the Fascist re-reading and re-framing of the Italian past.<sup>47</sup> A first valuable work on the origins of the Italian historical novel was by Galileo Agnoli, who sought to clarify the connections between the historical fiction genre and the popularity of Walter Scott's novels.<sup>48</sup> In this contribution, the Italian historical novel is analysed for the first time from the point of view of its evolution, although concentrated on its early stages, up until 1827. Only De Sanctis had previously referred to it as a 'ciclo letterario,' an expression that emphasises the transitory nature of its popularity and publication, but that nevertheless does indicate an understanding of these novels as a more or less cohesive phenomenon.

Agnoli investigated the use of elements of history in literary works predating 1827 and underlined the fusion between private and public sphere in novels by Ugo Foscolo. According to Agnoli history was a fundamental element of fictional creation, and as such 'il romanzo foscoliano si può considerare come una forma primordiale di romanzo storico.'<sup>49</sup> History in novels of the first two decades of the nineteenth century was,

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<sup>46</sup> De Sanctis, p. 485.

<sup>47</sup> About Fascist appropriation of cultural symbols see: Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum, *Donatello Among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Galileo Agnoli, *Gli albori del romanzo storico in Italia e i primi imitatori di Walter Scott* (Piacenza: Stab. D'Arti Grafiche G. Favari, 1906).

<sup>49</sup> Agnoli, p. 21.

however, artificial and fabricated, so much so that ‘si potrebbe togliere senza danneggiare il racconto.’<sup>50</sup> In these novels ‘il corso degli avvenimenti si attribuisce alla azione individuale, quindi la trattazione di un periodo storico si raccoglie intorno a uno solo o a pochi personaggi,’ whereas in Scott’s novels ‘l’evoluzione storica è il risultato di forze molteplici e varie, sconosciute, quindi il vero attore che apparisce (*sic*) sulla scena è il popolo.’<sup>51</sup>

Agnoli’s study is written in pompous and over-articulated language, similarly to another publication of the same year by Luigi Fassò that retraces the life of author Giambattista Bazzoni with overabundance of information.<sup>52</sup> This is an analysis of Bazzoni’s life and work, primarily of his most famous novel, *Il castello di Trezzo*, which, in fact, reads more like a biography than a study on the Italian historical novel. This is why it is difficult to pin down an underlying principle of the study by Fassò, as it does not so much evaluate Bazzoni’s work critically, as simply presents it.

The biography of authors of historical novels is also emphasised in two articles by Vittorio Cian published in 1919.<sup>53</sup> The titles of these two articles suggest a commemoration of the first one hundred years of the Italian historical novel, while focussing on two authors (Cesare Balbo and Santorre di Santarosa) whose literary production preceded that of the historical novel. The style of analysis is tinged with patriotic tones and presents the literary activity of these authors as a social mission. Both studies give emphasis to the writers’ young age, and the missionary quality of their writing, an aspect indebted to the nineteenth-century literary tradition and the Romantic

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<sup>50</sup> Agnoli, p. 104.

<sup>51</sup> Agnoli, pp. 106-107.

<sup>52</sup> Luigi Fassò, *Giambattista Bazzoni (1803-1850): contributo alla storia del romanzo storico italiano con lettere e documenti inediti* (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1906).

<sup>53</sup> Vittorio Cian, ‘Il primo centenario del romanzo storico italiano (1816-1824): Cesare Balbo romanziere’, *Nuova Antologia*, (Ott. 1919), 241-250; ‘Il primo centenario del romanzo storico italiano (1816-1824): Il Santorre Santarosa romanziere’, *Nuova antologia* (Nov 1919), 3-30.

fixation with the strength of youth and its revolutionary potential. As such, Cian's study testifies to the recurrence of Romantic archetypes and of the stagnation of the critical debate up until the first two decades of the twentieth century.

An original critical contribution from this period is *Il romanzo storico in Italia. Dai prescottiani alle odierne vite romanzate* by Furio Lopez-Celly.<sup>54</sup> The chronological span of this study is far broader than those previously published as it attempts to consider an entire century of production of historical novels, although it is primarily centred on the predecessor of the historical novel post-1827. Similarly to other critics of the time, Lopez-Celly exposes the unbalanced relationship between history and fiction because 'o prevale la storia sulla fantasia, o la storia viene troppo deformata e deviata dall'immaginazione, e infiorata e appesantita da episodi che rompono l'organicità dell'insieme.'<sup>55</sup> The use of history in the novels is decorative and ancillary as it was borne out of 'un ambiente già ricco di studi archeologici, alimentati da scavi importanti, che hanno per massimi centri Roma e Napoli, e da un nuovo impulso culturale.'<sup>56</sup> This is where Lopez-Celly's original contribution lays, as it introduced a theme that would be examined in the criticism that followed; that is concurrence between the development of new methods of historiography research and the birth of the historical novel.

### **1.3 Historical novels between Scott and Manzoni (1940s-1975)**

The second phase in the reception of the historical novel genre occupied the three central decades of the twentieth century when historical novels were consistently demoted to the rank of minor literary products as well as criticized for imitating more successful literary

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<sup>54</sup> Furio Lopez-Celly, *Il romanzo storico in Italia. Dai prescottiani alle odierne vite romanzate*, (Bologna: Licino Cappelli Editore, 1939).

<sup>55</sup> Lopez-Celly, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Lopez-Celly, p. 8.

models (i.e. Walter Scott and Alessandro Manzoni) too closely. As a matter of fact, the success and role of Scott's novels in Italian culture dominated the critical debate of the 1940s. Scott was praised for reviving an interest in popular narrative among the European bourgeoisie, and for providing this emerging social class with an historical validation of their status.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the production of historical novels of the early nineteenth century is put in connection with Manzoni. Polarised between the two most eloquent representatives of the genre, less-known writers of historical novels were either categorised as imitators of Scott or as participating in the school of Manzoni. An example of this line of criticism is Mario Appollonio, who strongly emphasises the concept of a literary circle that revolved around Manzoni and how influential it was on other authors.<sup>58</sup> Italian writers of historical novels began to be regarded as subordinate to the two literary masters and, in a way, deprived of their own unique contributions.

Criticism after 1940 fluctuated between stern condemnations of historical novels and evaluations that, in some ways, restored the credibility of the genre. On the one hand, a severe judgement on Risorgimento novels was expressed by Alessandro Bonsanti in a two-part article from 1945.<sup>59</sup> While the first part provides an excursus on late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century literature, in the second part, Bonsanti quite openly categorises the literary production of the first half of the nineteenth century, Manzoni excluded, as 'roba di secondo ordine.'<sup>60</sup> This consideration was expressed on the basis of an analysis conducted on a limited selection of novels, and nothing was said about the wider production of novels published between 1827 and the mid 1840s.<sup>61</sup> On the other

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<sup>57</sup> Mario Apollonio, 'Il Romanzo Storico', *Introduzione allo studio della narrativa italiana dell'Ottocento da Foscolo a Verga* (Milano-Varese: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1945), p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> Mario Apollonio, pp. 63-69

<sup>59</sup> Alessandro Bonsanti, 'Il romanzo risorgimentale', *Rassegna d'Italia*, 6 (1946), 22-28.

<sup>60</sup> Bonsanti, p. 34.

<sup>61</sup> Bonsanti firstly considers Foscolo's *Ortis* and Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, and secondly, five more novels: Tommaseo's *Fede e Bellezza*, Guerrazzi's *Il Buco nel Muro*, Bini's *Manoscritto di un prigioniero*, Ruffini's *Lorenzo Benoni*, Nievo's *Angelo di bontà*.

hand, a few years later, Gaetano Mariani published *Gli umili nella narrativa degli epigoni manzoniani*, where minor writers of historical novels who gravitated to the circle of Manzoni (including Grossi, D'Azeglio and Cantù) appeared in a different light.<sup>62</sup> Although they were considered chiefly in the context of their relations to the Italian master, their novels were nonetheless analysed as autonomous literary works, and some innovations introduced by the authors were highlighted. For example, Mariani exposed the interaction of Catholicism and Sansimonism in the representation of humble characters as a reflection of the bourgeoisie's interest in the teachings of Henri de Saint Simon, that validated the identity of the new social class and sustained the idea of a society achieved through non-revolutionary means.<sup>63</sup>

*La polemica sul romanzo storico* by Arcangelo Leone De Castris, published in 1959, continued the negative line of criticism that had begun in the 1940s.<sup>64</sup> For De Castris the historical novel was a hybrid genre with no clear identity that was 'praticamente ignorato o paternalisticamente sottovalutato' by Classicists.<sup>65</sup> The historical novel genre, exemplified by Scott's production, 'colpiva molto di più l'immaginazione e la sensibilità e l'esigenza genericamente storicistica della società dei lettori che non l'attenzione di quella sparuta élite intellettuale nell'ambito della quale stava a cuore discutere, pro e contro, sulla poetica del romanzo.'<sup>66</sup> Only regarded as a literary mania, historical novels appealed to the wider majority of uncultivated readers, which De Castris called 'società', as opposed to 'cultura consapevole', that was the literary establishment.

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<sup>62</sup> Gaetano Mariani, *Gli umili nella narrativa degli epigoni manzoniani* (Roma: Edizioni "Idea", 1953).

<sup>63</sup> Mariani, pp. 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> Arcangelo Leone De Castris, *La polemica sul romanzo storico* (Bari: Cressati, 1959).

<sup>65</sup> De Castris, p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> De Castris, p. 49.

Michele Cataudella's *Il romanzo storico italiano*, published in 1960, offered a different perspective on the contribution of Scott's novels, seen as influential in the development of Italian historical novels.<sup>67</sup> Scott's lesson was received by writers who operated in a cultural climate favourable to the revival of the past and to the concept of national awareness. While history in pre-Scott novels 'è mera avventura o mero giuoco del caso, e, in ogni modo, narrazione gratuita che si esaurisce in se stessa,' Italian historical novels after 1821 were all in a way Scott-like, because they showed a shift in the fundamental notion of the novel, in the use of dialogue, in the presence of descriptive passages, in the typology of characters, and in the representation of a national ideal.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of Cataudella's cautious appreciation of Scott's novels, the wide production of nineteenth-century historical novels continued to be largely ignored in the following decade. Two contributions by Aldo Borlenghi are significant in this respect.<sup>69</sup> On the one hand, Borlenghi claimed that the historical novel genre 's'esaurì in una ridotta tastiera di variazioni al modello del Manzoni.'<sup>70</sup> And on the other hand, he placed only Manzoni and *I promessi sposi* at the centre of the discourse on the Italian historical novel. Borlenghi also introduced the idea that historical novels had the specific function of educating the masses, an idea that emerged also in another critical contribution from the same year, Renato Bertacchini's *Il romanzo italiano dell'ottocento*.<sup>71</sup>

The central tenet in Bertacchini's work was that, although an inferior genre, historical novels could serve other purposes, such as historical divulgation and patriotic

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<sup>67</sup> Michele Cataudella, *Il romanzo storico italiano*, (Napoli: Liguori, 1960).

<sup>68</sup> Cataudella, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> Aldo Borlenghi, 'Introduzione', in AA.VV., *Narratori dell'ottocento e del primo novecento* (Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1961), pp. IX-CII; Aldo Borlenghi, *La narrativa italiana nell'ottocento dai romanzi storici alla scapigliatura* (Milano: La Goliardica, 1961).

<sup>70</sup> Borlenghi, *Introduzione*, p. IX.

<sup>71</sup> Renato Bertacchini, *Il romanzo italiano dell'ottocento* (Roma: Studium, 1961). In particular, see: 'Alle origini del genere: le imitazioni scottiane e la polemica del romanzo storico', pp. 5-28, 'L'esperienza manzoniana dal "Fermo e Lucia" al realismo morale dei "Promessi sposi"', pp. 29-51.

celebration.<sup>72</sup> Bertacchini's words resonate with Classicistic overtones and this is particularly evident in his judgement on Scott, whose works he defined as 'marginali,' not worth the attention of those 'a cui sta a cuore discutere intorno al romanzo.'<sup>73</sup> In line with previous critics, Bertacchini also reiterated the idea of the separation between high and low culture when he differentiated 'tra il gusto comune, tra il livello culturale dei lettori e la schiera esigua dei letterati,' 'tra società e cultura, tra vita e letteratura.'<sup>74</sup> Some years later, Bertacchini reinforced the idea of high and low culture in another article, where he stated that Italian writers were essentially attracted by the immediacy, dramatic pace and picturesque quality of Scott's stories.<sup>75</sup> Italian novelists sought a dramatic and emotional effect on the audience, which Bertacchini associated with the librettists and opera composers of the time.<sup>76</sup>

In the same year Giorgio Petrocchi underlined the connection between nineteenth-century authors' participation in the Italian political turmoil and their literary production.<sup>77</sup> Petrocchi claimed that Italian Romantic writers had a profound interest in historical subjects and in the representation of past times because of the potential these themes offered to express patriotic ideas and to legitimate the unification movement.<sup>78</sup> Such patriotic impulses led writers to overlook what was historically plausible and to manipulate historical information, thus revealing 'una minore capacità d'indagare, utilizzare e sfruttare, ai fini del romanzo, una rigorosa documentazione.'<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bertacchini, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bertacchini, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Bertacchini, p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Renato Bertacchini, 'Lo svolgimento del romanzo storico nel primo ottocento', *Cultura e scuola*, 24, (1967), 13-26.

<sup>76</sup> Bertacchini, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Giorgio Petrocchi, *Il romanzo storico nell'800 italiano* (Torino: ERI, 1967).

<sup>78</sup> Petrocchi, p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Petrocchi, pp. 53-54.

The genre's propensity to historical manipulation was also exposed by Armando Balduino in 1967.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the critic deemed the expression 'historical novel' too general a label. He drew attention to the existence of a variety of types of historical novels, not only those presenting a version of history filtered through the political lens of the time, but also others that 'accentrano il proprio interesse su una obiettiva e documentata ricostruzione dei fatti storici,' and still others 'che puntano piuttosto sulla psicologia del personaggio e arrivano consapevolmente a deformare, spesso in chiave umoristica, i fatti e le figure assunte dalla storia o liberamente inserite e create dalla fantasia.'<sup>81</sup>

The distinction Balduino indicates highlights the complexity of the historical novel genre and anticipated critical studies that in the 1970s exposed the presence of narrative superstructures and patterns. In a different way, another study from the same year introduced a new interpretation of historical novels as products and commodities of a new kind of literary market. In *Giuseppe Rovani e il problema del romanzo dell'Ottocento italiano* Guido Baldi firstly exposes Rovani, whose novel, *Cento anni*, was published in installments between 1859 and 1864, as one of the earliest critical commentators on the production of Italian historical novels.<sup>82</sup> Rovani was, as Baldi's book reveals, aware of the turbulent reception of historical novels and himself criticised the genre because of its 'facili evasioni esotico-sentimentali' and for being 'a congegno stereotipo composto di materiali prefabbricati, eludendo ogni serio impegno culturale.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> 'una esterna scenografia medioevale che si giustappone, come cornice, a laboriosi e melensi intrecci ed altri invece in cui, essendo l'impegno etico-politico forza motrice effettiva, l'allontanamento nel tempo offre la possibilità di pronunciarsi per simboli ed allusioni su temi di pressante attualità.' Armando Balduino, *Letteratura romantica dal Prati al Carducci* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1967), pp. 76-77.

<sup>81</sup> Balduino, pp. 76-77.

<sup>82</sup> Guido Baldi, *Giuseppe Rovani e il problema del romanzo dell'ottocento italiano* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1967).

<sup>83</sup> Baldi, p. 10.

For Rovani, historical novels offered the middle class an oneiric escape from their reality into a different adventurous world populated with chivalric figures and dominated by sentimentalism. Rovani believed that the success of historical novels was the result of an accurate editorial strategy, which yielded commercial success. In turn, this process naturally influenced the production of novels and compromised their quality, because writers had to satisfy the demands of the literary marketplace.<sup>84</sup> Rovani offered an excellent example of the line of a criticism that has prevailed in the debate since then, which differentiates between high and low culture. However, by virtue of their patent commercial success and the fact that they reached pockets of readership generally excluded from the dynamics of literary production and circulation, I argue that Risorgimento historical novels cannot be disregarded simply as products of low culture.

Between the end of the 1960s and all through the mid 1970s, publications on the Risorgimento historical novels confirmed the stagnating line of criticism that has been observed above. As such, historical novels were either seen as weak literary works, a pastiche of historical elements and fiction that lacked a three-dimensional quality;<sup>85</sup> or as a literary phenomenon that gained momentum essentially in conjunction with the rise of the middle class.<sup>86</sup> Historical novels were again accused of manipulating historical truth and of exploiting history as a container of past traditions, events and figures.<sup>87</sup> Manzoni and Scott's models still held a central role as elements of comparison, which either highlighted the inferior literary status of writers of historical novels or categorised them as mere imitators.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Baldi, p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Kalikst Morawski, *Il romanzo italiano nell'epoca del Risorgimento* (Wroclaw: Zaklad Narodowy Imienia Ossolinskich Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1970), pp. 1-46.

<sup>86</sup> Renato Bertacchini, *La narrativa italiana dell'ottocento* (Torino: SEI, 1974).

<sup>87</sup> Piero De Tommaso, *Nievo e altri studi sul romanzo storico* (Padova: Liviana, 1975).

<sup>88</sup> Giovanni Macchia, 'Il romanzo storico' in AA.VV. *Storia della letteratura italiana. L'ottocento*, VII (Milano: Garzanti, 1969), pp. 400-403; Sergio Romagnoli, 'Il brigante nel romanzo storico italiano', *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania*, XLII (1975), 177-212; Franca Ruggieri Punzo, *Walter Scott in Italia* (Bari: Adriatica, 1975), pp. 17-18.

#### **1.4 New directions in the literary criticism (1975-2000s)**

The year 1975 represents a defining moment in the development of the literary criticism on the subject, bringing the publication of new critical works stimulated by recent studies in narratology.<sup>89</sup> This marked the beginning of the third critical trend in which scholarly attention shifted towards an analysis of the Risorgimento novels which aimed at explaining their mechanics, uncovering recurring themes, and defining the central role of the narrator. The new interest resulted in a partial overcoming of the tendency to view historical novels as a minor genre and prompted a series of studies that attempted to understand the phenomenon independently from Scott or Manzoni. Other studies put the production of historical novels in connection with the modernisation of the literary market.<sup>90</sup> Paola Luciani, for one, claims that the Italian historical novel offered the first example of a modern relationship between literary market and readership, which also revealed the changing relationship between culture and society. The fruition of culture became a commodity and historical novels not only offered the middle class a means of escapism, but also fed their social ambitions through the reconstruction of an idealised world like the medieval one. This line of interpretation remained unchallenged in the following decade.<sup>91</sup>

This beginning of a new trend in the critical reception of historical novels has to be traced back to Folco Portinari's studies of Scott's influence on Italian writers of the 1800s.<sup>92</sup> This was where the concept of narrative patterns was introduced for the first time, as Portinari's analysis highlighted recurring themes in the novels such as a

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<sup>89</sup> Studies in narratology by the Italian critic Cesare Segre had appeared the previous years: *I segni e la critica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1969); *Le strutture e il tempo* (Torino: Einaudi 1974).

<sup>90</sup> Paola Luciani, 'Le macchine romanzesche di C. Varese', in *Italianistica*, 3 (1975), 548-581.

<sup>91</sup> See Silvana Ghiazza, 'Remissività e trasgressione nel romanzo storico', *La parabola della donna nella letteratura italiana dell'ottocento*, ed. by Gigliola De Donato (Bari: Adriarica Editrice, 1983), pp. 171-231.

<sup>92</sup> Folco Portinari, 'I figli di Walter Scott', pp. 3-11; 'Il meloromanzo', pp. 12-22, both in Folco Portinari, *Le parabole del reale. Romanzi italiani dell'Ottocento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976).

kidnapping, the siege of a town or a castle, and the unfavourable situation of the protagonists, which is unexpectedly reversed in the end. All in all, these tropes display a ‘organizzazione del bene e del male [secondo una] elementarità di funzione pedagogica.’<sup>93</sup> One significant example is the binomial ‘divieto e trasgressione’ represented in the form of the hindered love relationship.<sup>94</sup> According to Portinari, this is the most suitable metaphor to represent ‘il conflitto pratico tra aspirazioni e realizzazioni’ and, in a more general sense, it can also be seen to represent an entire existential condition.<sup>95</sup>

Portinari also drew attention to the representation of the environment in the historical novels. Only rarely had the historical representation of the environment, whether interior or exterior, landscape or architecture, been studied in connection with the representation of the characters and the action.<sup>96</sup> Portinari underlined the fact that setting the action in places known to the reader constitutes a ‘lenocinio turistico-sentimentale’ by means of which a reader’s familiarity or even emotional attachment to places mentioned in the novel is exploited to enhance the credibility of the content. The perception of what is real in historical novels by means of referencing actual locations, spaces, or buildings is ‘manipolata con sovrastrutture che la modificano nella sua consistenza storica [...] È la mania che l’inganno sia verosimile. Anzi che tutto sia vero a misura di tangibilità.’<sup>97</sup> At the same time it promotes readers’ participation in and empathy with the story.

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<sup>93</sup> Portinari, ‘I figli di Walter Scott’, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Portinari, ‘I figli di Walter Scott’, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Portinari, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Ten years later the aspect of the representation of interiors and exteriors in the historical novels would be touched upon by Roberto Paolo Ciardi, in ‘Descrivere la storia: alcuni modi di impiego delle fonti figurative’, *Il romanzo della storia*, ed. by E. Scarano and others, (Nistri-Lischi: Pisa, 1986), pp. 86-131. The scope of this study is broad, and the critic tries to establish a connection between historical novels and other artistic forms of the time, from historical painting to Gothic architecture. However, the analysis is not placed in the context of the use of medievalism and the creation of national identity in nineteenth-century Italy.

<sup>97</sup> Folco Portinari, ‘I figli di Walter Scott’, pp. 9-10.

The importance of readers' participation and identification is essentially what *Il romanzo storico* by Leonardo Lattaruolo, published at the end of the 1970s, emphasised. The book retraced the development of the historical novel genre by bringing together selected passages from literary works and examples of nineteenth and twentieth-century critical contributions by Uzielli, Mazzini, De Sanctis, Croce, and Lukacs.<sup>98</sup> Lattaruolo ultimately suggested that historical novels in the first half of the nineteenth century could not be underestimated and deemed a temporary trend. On the contrary, he contended that these novels were 'espressione di un bisogno reale e profondo [...] Il bisogno di storia è un bisogno profondamente rivoluzionario, un bisogno di piena riappropriazione di sé stessi e delle proprie cose, di pieno ritrovamento della propria identità.'<sup>99</sup>

The 1980s witnessed an important shift in the critical debate about the historical novel.<sup>100</sup> One example is the edited book *Storie su storie: indagine sui romanzi storici*, published in 1985, which brought together essays on historical novels from different European literatures. The one by Marinella Colummi Camerino focused on the Italian historical novel.<sup>101</sup> She believed that since its early manifestations, literary criticism on the Italian historical novel had suffered from an immobilising monotony that had followed the same line of interpretation over the years, which was the antagonism between history and fiction. Colummi Camerino found the pivotal element of these novels in the figure of the narrator, because 'regge le fila di una *fictio* che da lui unitariamente discende e della cui verisimiglianza globalmente garantisce: il suo statuto

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<sup>98</sup> Leonardo Lattaruolo, ed., *Il romanzo storico* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1978).

<sup>99</sup> Lattaruolo, pp. 11-12.

<sup>100</sup> In 1980 an article on the relation between Giuseppe Mazzini and the Italian historical novel was published: Paolo Mario Sipala, 'Mazzini e il romanzo storico', *Italianistica*, 1 (1980), 159-167. The article explains that Mazzini became deeply interested in the historical novel after 1828 as a potential means through which his ideal of a civic literature could be realised. Mazzini also believed that these novels should be inspired by the history of the Middle Ages in order to benefit the public.

<sup>101</sup> Marinella Colummi Camerino, 'Il narratore dimezzato. Legittimazione del racconto nel romanzo storico italiano', in *Storie su storie: indagine sui romanzi storici, 1814-1840*, ed. by Enrica Villari et al. (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1985), pp. 95-119.

definisce una situazione narrativa autoriale.’<sup>102</sup> The narrator ‘è colui che deve dare connotazione dinamica, in senso forte, alla storia; è colui, infine, che guida il lettore attraverso punti di vista molteplici e differenziati.’<sup>103</sup>

What Colummi Camerino referred to is the ‘patto con il lettore’ or the tacit agreement between narrator and reader on the plausibility of the plot. This pact is generally sealed in the preface, where the conditions of readability of the novel are set.<sup>104</sup> Focussing primarily on the analysis of the evolution of the prefaces to the novels prior and after 1827, Colummi Camerino claims that it is possible to trace both the changes in the role of the narrator and the foundation of a new literary genre. She explained that:

il narratore chiama dunque la storia a garantire ciò che nella sua veste tradizionale non può più garantire: alla crisi di delegittimazione del genere [...] risponde mostrando di adeguarsi al regime non ficzionale della storiografia, per cui ciò che sa lo sa non perché se lo inventa ma perché è attestato da fonti che egli ha ripercorso in un lavoro di ricerca, di lettura, di trascrizione, di traduzione.<sup>105</sup>

The role of the novelist underwent a substantial transformation since it became analogous to the one of a historian, in that the novelist made use of the same sources, but with a different purpose.<sup>106</sup> The novelist became a *metteur en scène* whose responsibility is to combine and present the selected historical material within the work of fiction.<sup>107</sup>

After 1985 the critical discussion was dominated by specific attention to the structural composition of the historical novel and to a closer investigation of the significance of paratextual elements (introductions, epigraphs, footnotes, etc.) and how

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<sup>102</sup> Colummi Camerino, p. 99.

<sup>103</sup> Colummi Camerino, p. 100.

<sup>104</sup> In underscoring the role of the preface within the context of the novel, Marinella Colummi Camerino clearly intends to refer to the paratextual apparatus (all components of a literary work other than the text: preface, title and subtitles, notes and epigraphs etc.) as theorised by Gérard Genette, whose *Palimpsestes* was published in French in 1982 and in Italian as *Palinsesti* in 1997.

<sup>105</sup> Colummi Camerino, pp. 104-105.

<sup>106</sup> A direct reference to the new role of the novelist can be found in the prefaces to two novels in particular, which interestingly enough fall within the flourishing period of production of the Italian historical novel: *Folco della Rupe* (1828) by Giambattista Bazzoni; *Niccolò de' Lapi* (1841) by Massimo D'Azeglio.

<sup>107</sup> Colummi Camerino, p. 108.

they dialogue within the texts. This is the case in an essay by Graziella Pagliano, where she examined a selection of six historical novels and studied similarities and recurring structural and thematic patterns.<sup>108</sup> Pagliano underscored the use and effect of a paratextual apparatus and concluded that:

sia le epigrafi sia le note e le citazioni di testimonianze storiche configurano un discorso-cornice alla narrazione che ha come effetto strategico quello di allontanare gli eventi narrati allentando, interrompendo e impedendo il processo di identificazione del lettore in quegli eventi.<sup>109</sup>

Pagliano found that there can be no understanding of the past without the mediating presence of the narrator, who moves constantly between history and the reader and represents the mainstay of the literary experience. For this very reason, I disagree with what Pagliano claimed about the distancing effect of the ‘discorso-cornice’ on the reader’s identification process with the events narrated. As chapter 4 in this thesis will demonstrate, it was precisely through the narrator’s interpolations in the plot that authors of historical novels sought to establish a direct connection with their readers intended to guide them on a path that resembles an educational process.

The narrator is also responsible for filtering the use of extra-literary elements borrowed, for example, from archival documents, which are not presented explicitly to the reader, but rather reinterpreted. It is the narrator who ultimately the reader has to believe or identify with, in order to seal the pact outlined in the novel’s preface, thus generating a ‘spostamento dalle vicende e dai personaggi al loro commento e alla loro

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<sup>108</sup> Pagliano’s ‘Il romanzo storico del Risorgimento italiano’ was first published in AA.VV., *La pratica sociale del testo* (Bologna: Clueb, 1983), pp. 189-202; and a couple of years later in Graziella Pagliano, *Il mondo narrato. Scritti di sociologia della letteratura moderna e contemporanea* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1985), pp. 85-100. The historical novels analysed by Pagliano are: *La battaglia di Benevento* (1828) and *L’assedio di Firenze* (1836) by Gian Domenico Guerrazzi; *Ettore Fieramosca* (1833) and *Niccolò de’ Lapi* (1841) by Massimo D’Azeglio; *Marco Visconti* (1834) by Tommaso Grossi and *Rinnegato salentino* (1839) by Giuseppe Castiglione.

<sup>109</sup> Pagliano, pp. 90-91.

valutazione, allontanandoli dunque in una operazione di riflessione critica, e offrendo un codice per decodificarli.<sup>110</sup> This literary structure exhibits a patent ideological strategy.

A similar investigation was carried out in ‘Riscrivere la storia: storiografia e romanzo storico’ by Emanuella Scarano published in 1986.<sup>111</sup> Scarano held that the act of referencing other texts exposes the sophisticated nature of the novel and serves as a reminder that the author carried out essential research in order to write the novel. These elements confer a degree of authenticity to the literary work as a whole and particularly to the passages that contain a reference to an external source. Through this process, Scarano explained, ‘il narratore sottrae esplicitamente alla sfera dell’“invenzione” una parte del racconto e, ascrivendolo alla sfera della “storia”, rafforza il patto di lettura con una perorazione di credibilità avallata dalla provenienza storiografica del narrato.’<sup>112</sup> The more detailed a reference is, the tighter the pact is, because citing precise sources offers historically knowledgeable readers the option to conduct their own independent research. In so doing, the scaffold of historical novels is exposed, as well as the possible manipulation that has been made of historical facts.

Scarano’s clarification helps us appreciate how the intense production of historical novels generated stern dissent among the cultivated audience, at the same time that it met with the public’s favour and enjoyed widespread popular success. Scarano underlined how the combination of history and fiction in these novels is not an irreversible flaw of the genre, but in fact constitutes its rationale. The binomial history-fiction is, according to Scarano, the foundation of nineteenth-century novels, which

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<sup>110</sup> Pagliano, p. 91.

<sup>111</sup> Emanuella Scarano, ‘Riscrivere la storia: storiografia e romanzo storico’, in *Il romanzo della storia*, ed. by E. Scarano and others, (Nistri-Lischi: Pisa, 1986), pp. 9-83. In the same year there was another publication on the historical novel. This is: Michele Cataudella *Il romanzo storico nell’età della restaurazione. Le origini e “il problema” del genere* (Napoli: Massimo, 1986). The book collects class notes from the cycle of university lessons on the subject taught by Cataudella and it considers eminently one novel by Giambattista Bazzoni, *Falco della Rupe*.

<sup>112</sup> Scarano, p. 13.

introduced a new style of narration governed by new laws and intended for a different type of audience. A certain degree of freedom with what is historically true is part of this new literary product. Scarano warned us not to consider this freedom:

nei termini banalizzanti di *infedeltà al vero storico*, ma come la condizione necessaria della rielaborazione formale e della nuova contestualizzazione di informazioni che si trovano già ripetutamente selezionate, serializzate e organizzate in forme tra loro differenti nei testi storiografici, ossia in altre scritture letterarie codificate da specifici criteri formali.<sup>113</sup>

This clarifies that the inclusion of historical elements in a fictional framework was a necessary prerequisite to the creation of the historical novel during the Italian *Ottocento* and it marked a significant progression in the critical debate.

Finally, Scarano echoed an idea expressed by Portinari about ten years earlier, which had not received much attention, about the role and the representation of the environment, natural and especially urban, in historical novels. The detailed descriptions of places and buildings typical of historical novels was in keeping with the nineteenth-century interest in the revival of ancient architectural styles. It can also be interpreted as tangible proof of the existence of the past, since the environment is:

la garanzia fisica e materiale di una continuità oggettiva tra passato e presente che in essi si manifesta simbolicamente come contiguità. È appunto tale contiguità che tale erudizione, nella “storia” del romanzo, decifra come continuità, individuando nel *luogo* il tramite visibile tra *l’allora* e *l’ora* e denotandolo come un *ancora* sempre virtualmente esplicitabile.<sup>114</sup>

The past survives in the present and it continues to operate a moral and educational function on the reader through historical novels.

In the second half of the 1980s, the critical debate came to a standstill and only minor studies were published, from which a few interesting ideas can be extrapolated. In ‘La narrazione del passato’ Roberto Bigazzi argued that narrating the past by means of

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<sup>113</sup> Scarano, pp. 22-23.

<sup>114</sup> Scarano, p. 43.

historical novels is a possible technique of historical investigation, so much so that Bigazzi did not discriminate between the role of historians and the role of novelists, but simply referred to them both as writers.<sup>115</sup> Bigazzi added that a writer of history in the nineteenth century had to possess more than literary or historical expertise, but also competency in anthropology and economics.<sup>116</sup> Far from considering them mere imitators, Bigazzi, in a way, elevated the role of writers of historical novels in the *Ottocento* to one of intellectuals who had a clear awareness of their mission. They took advantage of the medium of the novel, whose revolutionary potential laid the basis for the creation of a national identity.<sup>117</sup>

The conspicuous production of historical novels post 1827 also resulted from deliberate attempts to modernise the literary market and publishing industry that was obsolete in comparison to other European countries like France and England.<sup>118</sup> This is what induced Giuseppe Petronio to reformulate György Lukács' famous definition of the nineteenth-century novel as a bourgeois epos.<sup>119</sup> The novel as a genre was a bourgeois phenomenon because it connected middle class writers, consumers, or readers with the necessary intermediaries such as publishers, journalists, reviewers, and critics. Petronio emphasised that the notion of culture in Italy was already changing in the early 1830s, and that the circulation and exchange of books was becoming popular. The role of the writer changed accordingly, as it was influenced by the demands and expectations of the

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<sup>115</sup> Roberto Bigazzi, 'La narrazione del passato', in AA.VV., *I racconti di Clío: tecniche narrative della storiografia* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1987), pp. 221-239.

<sup>116</sup> Bigazzi, pp. 234-235.

<sup>117</sup> Sergio Romagnoli, 'Il romanzo italiano dell'ottocento', in *Il romanzo. Origine e sviluppo delle strutture narrative nella letteratura occidentale*, ed. by Marco Fantuzzi and others (Pisa: ETS, 1987), pp. 117-128.

<sup>118</sup> Gino Tellini, 'Sul romanzo del primo ottocento. Foscolo e lo sperimentalismo degli anni venti', *Studi italiani*, 1 (1995), 48-49.

<sup>119</sup> Giuseppe Petronio, 'Il romanzo italiano nel quadro del romanzo europeo', in *Restauri letterari da Verga a Pirandello* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1990), pp. 33-59.

readership. Writing was becoming a profession and, as such, it was defined by a ‘rapporto economico tra editore e autore.’<sup>120</sup>

Although in limited number, studies on the Italian historical novel published between the mid 1990s and mid 2000s were all unanimous in identifying the historical novel as a genre that grew and quickly developed during the critical socio-political and cultural transition of the first half of the nineteenth century. Gigliola De Donato observed that historical novels fostered participation and emotional adhesion to a patriotic message by conveying the idea that social progress comes from continuity between past and present; that the present is the result of the gradual evolution ‘del patrimonio di valori e di istituzioni della storia passata, interpretata e interrogata come misura e norma dell’azione patriottica.’<sup>121</sup> This approach marked the end of the third phase in the literary criticism, not because it subverted previous interpretations, but because it essentially analysed the historical novel genre as a form of literature independent from Manzoni’s authoritative example. ‘Romanzo storico non significa dunque romanzo manzoniano,’ claimed Angelo Stella: Italian historical novels after 1827 are evocative of Manzoni in the description of a landscape, in an aspect of a character, but they remain fundamentally two separate literary manifestations of the Italian *Ottocento*.<sup>122</sup>

One of the most important critical works on the Italian historical novel as a whole was *Il romanzo storico in Italia. Il dibattito critico dalle origini al postmoderno* by Margherita Ganeri.<sup>123</sup> Its underlying principle rests on the conviction that a line of

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<sup>120</sup> Petronio, p. 39.

<sup>121</sup> Gigliola De Donato, *Gli archivi del silenzio. La tradizione del romanzo storico italiano* (Fasano: Schena, 1995), p. 17.

<sup>122</sup> Angelo Stella, ‘Manzoni nella tradizione letteraria dell’ottocento. Il manzonismo’, in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, VII (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1998), pp. 716-717.

<sup>123</sup> Margherita Ganeri, *Il romanzo storico in Italia. Il dibattito critico dalle origini al postmoderno* (Lecce: Pietro Manni, 1999). The same author had previously published a book on György Lukács’ critique of the historical novel genre: Margherita Ganeri, *Il romanzo storico di György Lukács: per una fondazione politica del genere letterario* (Roma: Vecchiarelli Editore, 1998). Despite the obvious relevance of this publication with regard to the present dissertation, Ganeri’s discussion does not add to the current specific analysis on the Italian historical novel after 1827.

continuity exists between the Risorgimento historical novel and its subsequent manifestations, from Verismo until the historical novels published during the 1980s. From a theoretical perspective, Ganeri discarded the statutory autonomy of the Risorgimento novel, which cannot be defined as a literary genre, because of its transient chronological occurrence and its tight connection with the historical context in which it was cultivated.<sup>124</sup> Ganeri favoured the expression ‘modo letterario’ to refer to the historical novel and justified this choice by saying that ‘[il modo letterario] si fonda [...] sull’assunzione di un orizzonte cognitivo ed epistemologico prima ancora che tematico-formale.’<sup>125</sup> The regulating notion of the historical novel as a literary manifestation, beyond the Risorgimento achievements, is not to be found in a rigorous formal structure that dictates the modes of its literary composition, but in other elements. The narrative content of the historical novel has to be organised to resemble or to recall an historical document. Ultimately, it is the literary pact between author and reader that defines the historical *modo letterario* more precisely, since it authenticates the credibility of the novel.

In the twenty-first century little has been written on the Italian historical novel of the *Ottocento*. In 2001, only one study tangentially touched upon the topic of the historical novel.<sup>126</sup> The most recent monographic study of the Italian historical novel of the Risorgimento was published in 2002, and presents a close analysis of the narrative structure, language, and style of a selection of historical novels published between 1827

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<sup>124</sup> Ganeri, *Il romanzo storico in Italia*, p. 30.

<sup>125</sup> Ganeri, p. 9.

<sup>126</sup> Stefania Luttazi, *Belli e l'Ottocento europeo: romanzo storico e racconto fantastico nello Zibaldone* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2001).

and 1838.<sup>127</sup> The structure of the study is articulated through chapters that focus on narrative structures, syntax, and lexicon in the novels.

Since 2002, there has been a faint return of interest in the historical novel of the Risorgimento, which has encouraged new doctoral research on this topic, but has not produced substantial publications. Proof of this is the fact that a close literary analysis of historical novels of the Risorgimento was carried out only recently. Based on my research, the only critical work that has attempted a comprehensive re-evaluation of such literary production is a Ph.D. dissertation that was submitted, in Italian, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in August 2015: Roberto Risso, *Il romanzo storico intorno a Manzoni: D'Azeglio, Grossi, Guerrazzi, Tommaseo, Cantù*. Interestingly enough, the premises on which Dr Risso's dissertation is based are parallel to mine in that his research, in Risso's own words, sought the 'ridimensionamento e in certi casi il capovolgimento dell'assunto secondo il quale il cosiddetto romanzo storico minore dell'Ottocento nulla o quasi-nulla abbia di originale, che sia opera grossolana, che la storia vi sia stilizzata, schematizzata tramite i famigerati "fondali di cartapesta", di ambientazioni di maniera, non accurate quando non direttamente fittizie e inesatte' (p. ii). However, Risso's approach is antithetical to the one I adopt, in that it considers the novels purely as works of literature and is based on a 'lettura testuale dei romanzi fatta parallelamente alla lettura delle altre opere minori degli autori' (p. ii).

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<sup>127</sup> Alessandra Zangrandi, *Lingua e racconto nel romanzo storico italiano: 1827-1838* (Padova: Esedra, 2002), p. 7. The publication of this study was preceded by two journal publications, also by Zangrandi, which in part anticipated the results of the 2002 book. See, Alessandra Zangrandi, 'Il lessico del "Marco Visconti" di Tommaso Grossi nella prima edizione milanese: la componente dialettale e popolare', *Lingua e stile: trimestrale di filosofia del linguaggio, linguistica e analisi letteraria*, 33 (1998), 267-300; 'Il lessico del Marco Visconti di Tommaso Grossi nella prima edizione milanese: la componente aulica', *Lingua e stile: trimestrale di filosofia del linguaggio, linguistica e analisi letteraria*, 34 (1999), 227-25.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, more than one hundred and fifty years of debate on the Italian historical novel of the nineteenth century have witnessed a change of perspective on the whole genre, which has moved from describing it as a minor literary product only suitable for an uncultivated audience to understanding it as a complex literary manifestation worth investigating.

Of the three major critical trends only the most recent one, from the mid 1970s until the present day, has approached historical novels independently from Manzoni or Scott. Scholars have particularly tried to explain the mechanics of the construction of these novels, revealing a multi-layered composition of the formal structure and its elements (introduction, subdivision of chapters, titles, etc.). However, during this phase historical novels of the first half of the nineteenth century were still not analysed and approached as a single corpus and the idea of a literary movement, albeit unofficial, was not introduced.

The Risorgimento novel, with its juxtaposition of history and fiction that prompted critics to reject the genre up until the 1970s, is still in a way regarded as a secondary literary product of the *Ottocento*. Critics have failed to look beyond the quality of the literary works to explain the reasons for their pervasive success, guaranteed by the availability of the novels on the market. The next chapter intends to contextualise the production of historical novels as part of the modernisation process of the Italian publishing industry in the early nineteenth century. These social changes were spurred by the increasing importance of the middle class, which was, after all, the main consumer of the novels thus produced.

## **2 CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION IN ITALY BEFORE 1850**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the cultural panorama of the first half of the nineteenth century with particular focus on the places where cultural exchange through book production flourished and on the key actors involved in this process: printmakers, publishers, authors. This analysis is borne out of an underlying inquiry into the role of nineteenth-century readers in defining and determining the success of historical novels as the ultimate testimony of a growing nationalistic movement in favour of the unification of Italy.

Historical novels published before 1850 were nineteenth-century bestsellers.<sup>128</sup> This not only underscores the wide popularity and circulation of the novels, but also identifies them as products of a specific cultural climate in which patriotic ideals conveyed through the lens of history and, in particular, medieval history, were highly favoured and sought-after by a growing pool of passionate readers. For this reason, I suggest examining the production and circulation of historical novels of the second quarter of the nineteenth century as an example of supply and demand chain. This basic economic model accelerated the modernization of the publishing market in Italy and established the popularization of a sense of patriotism, which sustained the discourse on the creation of a cohesive Italian national identity.

Not only has criticism on nineteenth-century historical novels intermittently observed the uniqueness of this literary phenomenon, but it has also omitted to properly

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<sup>128</sup> See Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, 'Il romanzo storico: un best seller di cento cinquant'anni fa', in *I tre occhi dell'editore: saggi di storia dell'editoria* (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1990), pp. 59-68.

contextualize it as ‘fenomeno del gusto,’ rather than as an unresolved literary manifestation.<sup>129</sup> In the very infrequent cases where medieval-inspired novels of the Risorgimento have received critical attention, this has not been sufficiently connected to the novels’ abundant publication records lasting approximately twenty years and to the response of their avid readership.<sup>130</sup>

The first section in this chapter retraces the phases that led to the first agreement on copyright regulations endorsed in 1840 by the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Austrian Empire. The second section discusses the role of printmakers and publishers as the ones directly engaged in the actual production of books, and their responsibility in those cases when books were reprinted without authorization from the author or the original publisher. Whereas similar practices damaged what we call today an author’s intellectual property, they give strong proof of these novels’ wide popular success and of the audience’s demand for such publications. In the end, I will discuss the emergent role of the Milanese publishing industry as the main centre of cultural production in the first half of the nineteenth century. All these factors constitute the underlying rationale of the selection of a representative corpus of historical novels that is presented and detailed at in chapter 4 and closely analysed in chapter 4 and 5. The third and last section in this chapter provides specific information on historical novels published between 1827 and 1848, a crucial and original component of my research, that is complemented by a detailed bibliography of all these novels included in the Appendix.

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<sup>129</sup> I borrow the expression ‘fenomeno del gusto’ from Mario Praz to refer to ‘scuole abbastanza autorevoli da contrassegnare del loro carattere un determinato periodo.’ See Patrizia Rosaria Ferraris and Pietro Boitani, eds., *Scritti in onore di Mario Praz 1896-1982* (Roma: Gangemi, 2013), p. 35.

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, Bordone and Banti.

## **2.1 Between privilege and entitlement: censorship and copyright regulation**

The introduction of copyright laws in Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century is strictly connected to the implementation of censorship as a tool of governmental control.<sup>131</sup> The two ideas seem to be in opposition since the notion of exercising state power to control the expression of ideas conflicts with the one of protecting an author's right to administer the product of his or her creativity. However, one must consider the internal political fragmentation of Italy at the time, and the fact that political, social, and economic modernization in one state did not correspond to an equivalent situation in an adjacent state. The reorganization of the publishing industry of the time by means of laws advantageous to the individuals such industry involved (authors and publishers) was hindered by the absence of analogous laws in other areas of the country.

Occupying most of the first half of the nineteenth century, the phases that led to the first agreement in 1840 saw the debate on copyright (recognising an author's intellectual property and a publisher's rights over his or her products) move from the notion of *privilege*, that is the concession to publish given to certain publishing establishments by a centralized authority, to the notion of *entitlement*, that is an author's or a publisher's rightful claim over the products of his or her creativity. The notion of copyright as we know it today evolved in the modern era, although some legal protection was extended to authors and publishers as early as the fifteenth century with the introduction of the movable-type printing press.<sup>132</sup> This was also the time when the

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<sup>131</sup> It must be noted that, for the sake of the present dissertation, the use of the term *copyright* is assumed as the most fitting translation of the Italian *diritto d'autore*, even though the two expressions are not historically equivalent. *Copyright*, emphasizing the economic value of an author's work, is a product of those countries where the Common Law legal system is exercised (in England and essentially in the countries formerly part of the British Empire), whereas *diritto d'autore* derives from the Civil Law legal system, developed in Europe from Roman law, and highlights the moral nature of the relationship between an author and his or her work in light of the fact that such work resulted from the author's unique creative genius.

<sup>132</sup> Andrea Sirotti Gaudenzi, *Il nuovo diritto d'autore: la tutela della proprietà intellettuale nella società dell'informazione* (Rimini: Maggioli, 2012), p. 36.

*imprimatur*, that is an official licence dispensed by the Roman Catholic Church to print ecclesiastical or religious books, appeared for the first time. Disguised behind the appearance of a concession, and a privilege not everyone could afford, this act was in fact a means of exercising censorship. Modern norms defining and regulating copyright appeared during the eighteenth century: from the so-called *English Copyright Act of Queen Anne* issued in England in 1709 to the *Copyright Act* instituted in the United States in 1790, to the 1791 French legislation ‘concerning the works of living playwrights’ and the *French Literary and Artistic Property Act* of 1793.<sup>133</sup>

The critical literature detailing the introduction, uses, and modifications of these printing privileges in Italy is vast and complex to research and circumscribe given its ties with other areas of expertise, from history and literature to economics and law.<sup>134</sup> These concessions, also variously designated as ‘patente di privilegio, lettera patente, brevetto, diploma,’ bestowed on an author or publisher the exclusive right to print and sell a book for a specific, but variable, number of years. This special license was only valid within the limits of the territory upon which the power of the granting authority was exercised. In order to protect their literary work, it was not uncommon for authors to apply for a license in more than one state.<sup>135</sup> In centralized regimes where the ultimate governing

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<sup>133</sup> For a detailed presentation on the development of copyright laws up to the present day, see Lionel Bently, Uma Suthersanen, and Paul Torremans, eds., *Global Copyright: Three Hundred Years Since the Statute of Anne, from 1709 to Cyberspace* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010).

<sup>134</sup> It will suffice to provide some bibliographical references relevant to the topic of the present dissertation: Moise Amar, *Dei diritti degli autori di opere dell'ingegno: studi teorico-pratici sulla legislazione italiana in rapporto colle leggi delle altre nazioni, coi trattati internazionali e colle decisioni dei magistrati italiani e stranieri, dell'avvocato Moise Amar* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1874); Adriano Cavanna, *Storia del diritto moderno in Europa* (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1979); Carlo Stefano, *La censura teatrale in Italia (1600-1962)* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1964); Alberto Donati, ‘La fondazione giusnaturalistica del diritto sulle opere dell'ingegno’, in *Annali italiani del diritto d'autore della cultura e dello spettacolo* (1997), 405-422; Remo Franceschelli, ‘Brevetti e patenti industriali e d'autore nel periodo delle origini’, in *Studi in onore di Alfredo De Gregorio*, I (Città di castello: Soc. ed. Dante Alighieri, ed. Cremonese, Casa ed. S. Lapi, 1955); Luigi C. Ubertazzi, *I diritti d'autore e connessi: scritti* (Milano: Giuffrè, 2000).

<sup>135</sup> Well-known is the case of Ludovico Ariosto, whose famous epic poem *Orlando Furioso* was first published in 1515 by ‘Giovanni Mazzocco Stampator Ferrarese.’ In the same year, Pope Leone X granted the author a ‘privilegio di stampa,’ which, however, did not prevent numerous fraudulent editions being concurrently published (1524-1531). See Girolamo Baruffaldi, *La vita di Lodovico Ariosto* (Ferrara: Pe’

authority was exercised by one sovereign, especially one whose mandate derived from divine intervention, social stability was preserved by limiting people's participation to public life and by establishing arbitrarily what could or could not be discussed. The control enforced by authorities over ideas exposed in the press sought to establish its compliance with governmental directions, as well as prevent any public debate about such ideas.<sup>136</sup>

Whereas in post-Revolution France the copyright laws changed so as to allow authors unique ownership over their work, the defence of legal, as much as civic, rights in Italy clashed with a more hostile reality.<sup>137</sup> Although liberal ideas, such as the principle of the freedom of the press, were introduced in Italy by the Napoleonic occupation, new means of control like preventive censorship were also introduced to counteract the revolutionary potential of books as vehicles for new ideas. Controlling the press and the production of printed material acquired, as Domenico Bruni explains, 'una funzione strategica per sorvegliare un mezzo di comunicazione che non solo moltiplicava la velocità di circolazione di idee pericolose, ma ampliava anche gli effetti della capacità mobilitante della "parola" e, dunque, le sue ripercussioni sul piano dell'ordine pubblico.'<sup>138</sup>

An interesting example can be found in a decree published on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1803 intended to establish an author's responsibilities and recommend possible consequences about the content of published books. The foreword to the law sets the tone for the entire document by acknowledging 'la diretta influenza, che l'oggetto delle

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Soci Bianchi e Neri, Stamp. del Seminario, 1807), p. 169. See also Angela Nuovo and Christian Coppens, *I Giolito e la stampa nell'Italia del XVI secolo* (Genève: Droz, 2005), p. 179.

<sup>136</sup> Domenico M. Bruni, *Potere e circolazione delle idee: stampa, accademie e censura nel Risorgimento italiano: atti del convegno di studi nel bicentenario della nascita di Giuseppe Mazzini* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> Maurizio Borghi, *La manifattura del pensiero: diritti d'autore e mercato delle lettere in Italia (1801-1865)* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2003), p. 24.

<sup>138</sup> Bruni, pp. 17-18.

stampe e libri, tiene sui rapporti morali e politici della pubblica istruzione.’<sup>139</sup> The document indicates that each author is responsible and must be held personally accountable for what is published in their name and must abide by applicable laws:

Art. I. Chiunque pubblica colle stampe i propri scritti, è responsabile al Governo.

1. Che non si offenda la Religione dello Stato, la pubblica morale, la libertà politica dei culti garantita dalla Costituzione.

2. Che non si attenti contro l’ordine pubblico, la subordinazione alle Leggi, ed il rispetto dovuto ai Governi ed alle Autorità.

3. Che non si turbino l’armonia ed i riguardi verso i Governi amici.

4. Che nulla sia diretto ad infamare le persone.<sup>140</sup>

To this end, all printed material was required to specify the name of the author and the publisher, lest the responsibility for anonymous works that violated these regulations fall upon the publisher. Failure to provide author information to the local police authorities could result in the confiscation of the publisher’s printing press.

The first official recognition of the value of intellectual property appeared in the preamble to an 1801 law of the Cisalpine Republic, which introduced in Italy an already existing norm set forth by the 1793 French Convention (19<sup>th</sup> July). The law sanctioned the authors’ right to sell or have their works sold in the territory of the Cisalpine Republic, centred in the Po river valley of northern Italy, and to surrender their ownership rights either partly or in full. The same rights were also bestowed on an author’s relatives for ten year after the death of the author. In addition, authors, as well as composers, painters and so forth, were legally permitted to take action against counterfeiters provided they had previously deposited two copies of their works at the national Library.<sup>141</sup> As

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<sup>139</sup> ‘Decreto di regolamento per le stampe e i libri’, in *Bollettino Delle Leggi Del Regno D’Italia* (Milano: Regis stamperia Veladini, 1805), p. 18. Internet resource: <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433008422440;view=1up;seq=42>> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

<sup>140</sup> ‘Decreto di regolamento per le stampe e i libri’, p. 19.

<sup>141</sup> Borghi, p. 25.

innovative as this law was, it did not bring the piracy of published material to an end because it did not apply to the rest of the Italian peninsula, inasmuch as it did not incorporate an agreement with the other Italian governments.

Although the law proved rather ineffectual in defending authors, publishers, and their works, it sparked a debate over whose rights should be protected, those of the good authors or of the bad ones.<sup>142</sup> It was suggested that the law did not distinguish between publications furthering the advancement of human knowledge and spirit and those publications that actually hampered such progress. The validity of the law could only be justified for authors belonging to the former category, or else it would have encouraged authors from the latter category to continue writing and publishing mediocre works. The French law was then modified by the ‘Decreto sulla revisione delle stampe’, published on the 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1804, that stated that any author or publisher willing to receive the benefits granted by the law of 19 Floréal of the year IX must submit their works for revision prior to publication. The implications of such modification were that ‘esistevano opere più o meno meritevoli di essere tutelate, raggiungendo il duplice obiettivo di limitare indirettamente la libertà di stampa e assicurare anche un maggiore controllo sulla produzione editoriale.’<sup>143</sup> This created an involution of the situation, whereby the intended progress introduced by the French law was completely obliterated.

The law underwent profound modifications before it was eventually extended to the entire Kingdom of Italy in 1810.<sup>144</sup> During this time, through the intervention of the Magistrato di revisione, the Milanese censorship authority appointed to review all printed material, a regressive variation of the language to the law was added.<sup>145</sup> The use of the

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<sup>142</sup> Marino Berengo, *Intellettuale e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), p. 259.

<sup>143</sup> Giancarlo Ciaramelli and Cesare Guerra, *Tipografi, editori e librai mantovani dell'Ottocento* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2005), p. 368.

<sup>144</sup> Borghi, p. 29.

<sup>145</sup> The law issued on 19 Floréal of the year IX of the French Republican calendar, the 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1801 (*Legge 19 fiorile anno IX repubblicano, che determina accordato il diritto esclusivo di vendere le loro opere agli*

term ‘proprietà’ associated with the expression ‘produzioni dell’ingegno’ in the 1801 version of the law was amended by the reintroduction of the word ‘privilegio’ in 1804. Essentially, this change ratified not the official recognition of an author’s ownership of a creative product, but the concession given to an author to claim a right to such ownership. Because this concession had to be bestowed by a specific governing agency, authors were, in effect, subject to the censorship of the agency. The same was basically reiterated in 1810 when the law was enforced in the whole Kingdom of Italy.<sup>146</sup>

The apparent progress of the first decade of the nineteenth century was destined to regress with the end of the French occupation. Whereas the revolutionary events of the Napoleonic occupation had led to the elimination of territorial borders between Italian nation states, and as a consequence, an increase in commercial and cultural relations between the regions of the Regno Italico, by reinstating former rulers according to the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the circulation of printed material decreased and was forced within the newly redesigned boundaries of each dynastic state. The difficulty of cultural exchange was also increased by the tighter censorship system introduced in these states.

The creation of a more modernised and less artisanal publishing industry in Italy at this time was hindered by two main factors. First and foremost was the enforcement of excise duties in all states, which naturally precluded the distribution of books.<sup>147</sup> Such limitations were primarily dictated by the preoccupation of the restored governments

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*Autori, Compositori, Pittori e Disegnatori nella Repubblica Cisalpina*) reads ‘Considerando, che le produzioni dell’ingegno sono la più preziosa e la più sacra delle proprietà; [...] Determina: 1. Gli Autori di scritture d’ogni maniera, i Compositori di musica, i Pittori, e i Disegnatori, che faranno incidere quadri, o disegni, godranno per l’intero decorso della loro vita il diritto esclusivo di vendere, far vendere, distribuire le opere loro nel Territorio Cisalpino, e di cederne la proprietà in tutto, o in parte.’ in *Raccolta delle leggi, proclami, ordini ed avvisi pubblicati in Milano: dal Giorno 13 Pratile anno Viii. (2 Giugno 1800), epoca del ritorno dell’armata francese in questa città*, II, (Milano: Luigi Veladini, 1800, p. 144 Internet resource: <<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/21932567.html>> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

<sup>146</sup> Borghi, p. 29.

<sup>147</sup> Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, ‘Geografia e dinamica degli insediamenti editoriali’, in Gabriele Turi and Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, *Storia dell’editoria nell’Italia contemporanea* (Firenze: Giunti, 1997) p. 37.

with foreign liberal ideas dangerous to their survival. At the same time, they were favourably received by those artisanal printing establishments that ‘su vincoli, privilegi e protezioni hanno costruito le loro piccole ma certe fortune, e che non sono disposti a rinunciarvi per lanciarsi in un mercato che vedono quanto mai incerto.’ It is precisely this sector of the publishing industry that, as Maria Iolanda Palazzolo indicates, ‘basa gran parte della propria attività sulle ristampe-pirata, [ed è] il più contrario alla fine del regime protezionistico e a qualsiasi trattato internazionale o accordo diplomatico che tenda a favorire la nascita di un mercato nazionale e a impedire contraffazioni.’<sup>148</sup>

The second factor was the lack of a law universally shared among the reinstated governments protecting authors’ and publishers’ rights. The complex mechanism of preventive censorship and its dubious success in limiting the amount of material printed unlawfully did not benefit authors and publishers. On the contrary, book smuggling and different applications of censorship criteria in different states allowed for illicitly printed texts to continue circulating.<sup>149</sup>

It is interesting to note that, although copyright was not legally granted to authors and publishers as a result of the modification of the 1801 law, it still acknowledged the existence of individuals acting to the detriment of the publishing industry by means of illicit publications. It also assumed their deeds were actionable and subject to repercussions. Point four of the law reads that ‘Ogni contraffattore sarà tenuto di pagare al vero proprietario una somma equivalente al prezzo di due mila esemplari dell’edizione originale’ and point five that ‘Ogni spacciatore di edizione contraffatta, s’egli non è riconosciuto il contraffattore, sarà tenuto di pagare al vero proprietario una somma

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<sup>148</sup> Palazzolo, ‘Geografia e dinamica degli insediamenti editoriali’, p. 39.

<sup>149</sup> Carolina Castellano, *Il segreto e la censura: storia di due concetti nel Risorgimento italiano* (Trento: Tangram edizioni scientifiche, 2010), p. 63. See also Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, ‘Un sistema organizzato e nascosto. Contrabbando librario e censura politica nella Roma di primo Ottocento’, *Studi Storici*. 42.2 (2001), 503-527.

equivalente al prezzo di quattrocento esemplari della edizione originale.’<sup>150</sup> By employing the word ‘contraffattore’ the law revealed an implicit contradiction, by which, despite not recognizing intellectual property, it made it legal to prosecute whomever had fraudulently imitated works already existing in print. This contradiction worked in favour of publishers while doing nothing to benefit authors.

Martha Woodmansee’s contribution describing the rampant book piracy threatening the publishing industry in late eighteenth-century Germany provides understanding about what might have happened in Italy, given the parallel process of modernization of the two nations. In Germany, the privilege was applicable only within the territorial limits of the state or municipality granting it, a system that had worked for as long as the demand for books was limited. Because of the slow but progressive expansion of the readership that took place between the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, book trade became a very lucrative business and book piracy grew to epidemic proportions.<sup>151</sup> Since eighteenth-century Germany consisted of about three hundred independent states, writers and publishers would have had to obtain a privilege in all of them to benefit from copyright laws.<sup>152</sup>

The first attempt at resolving the situation of a largely malfunctioning publishing market comes from the agreement ‘a favore della proprietà e contro la contraffazione delle opere scientifiche, letterarie ed artistiche’ co-signed in Vienna by the Austrian Emperor and the King of Sardinia on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1840.<sup>153</sup> The agreement not only

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<sup>150</sup> *Raccolta delle leggi, proclami, ordini ed avvisi pubblicati in Milano*, p. 144.

<sup>151</sup> Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 45.

<sup>152</sup> Woodmansee, p. 46.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Convenzione tra S. M. il Re di Sardegna e S. M. l’Imperatore d’Austria, a favore della proprietà e contro la contraffazione delle opere scientifiche’, in *Annali universali di statistica, economia pubblica, storia, viaggi e commercio* (Milano: Società degli editori degli annali universali delle scienze e dell’industria, 1825), p. 75. <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433069120461;view=1up;seq=79>> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

responded to the requests, considerably increased during the previous decade, from intellectuals and publishers who tried to defend their work against counterfeiters, but was also in keeping with the legislation of other European countries at the time. The copyright, guaranteed for thirty years after the authors' death, was extended to 'le opere o produzioni dell'ingegno e dell'arte' (Art. 1), 'le opera teatrali' (Art. 2), and translations published in one of the two co-signing states of works originally published in a foreign language outside of the two states (Art. 3). It was also extended to adaptations of music compositions whenever these 'potranno riguardarsi come produzioni dell'ingegno.' As for unauthorised publications, it was determined that each state was responsible for designating the punishment according to their applicable laws (Art. 16).<sup>154</sup> Another interesting addition is Art. 27, which states: 'I due Governi contraenti inviteranno gli altri Governi d'Italia ed il Cantone del Ticino ad aderire alla presente convenzione.'<sup>155</sup> This was the first real step towards a unified regulation on copyright, which by the end of 1840, was countersigned by all the states (Papal States, Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Duchies of Parma, Modena, Lucca) except the Kingdom of Sicily.

The 'Convenzione' proved to be an imperfect law because it created new controversies between authors, whose works had been reproduced without permission, and publishers.<sup>156</sup> The language of the law lent itself to various interpretations about reprints of books published before 1840. It was contested that the law was not retroactive, and whenever a text had already been largely reproduced, legally or not, this continued even after the 1840 law was issued. Another problem generated by the new law was that it was not endorsed by the largest of the preunitarian states, the Kingdom of Sicily, where,

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<sup>154</sup> 'Convenzione', pp. 76-77 and p. 79.

<sup>155</sup> 'Convenzione', p. 80.

<sup>156</sup> Maria Iolanda Palazzolo underlines that those responsible for the proliferation of literary piracy were not simply small print makers and publishers attracted by the prospect of an easy profit, but also well-established ones lured by the possibility of advancing their status and prominence in the Italian publishing industry. See Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, 'Geografia e dinamica degli insediamenti editoriali', p. 41.

more frequently than in other states, books were reprinted without permission of the publisher. The intervention of foreign (from other states) police did not usually resolve the problem, and, in many occasions, legitimate publishers had to compromise with illegal printmakers and surrender part of their compensation to end illicit activities.<sup>157</sup>

## **2.2 Publishing in Italy before 1850**

The modernization of the publishing industry after unification is exemplified by the changed role of the publisher, who, in conjunction with the renewed status of intellectuals and authors and the diversification of a newly emerging reading public, underwent a process of professionalisation.<sup>158</sup> The relationship between authors and their readers must be studied in the context of the role of the publisher as the primary agent in the act of cultural production, the one able to identify and meet the demands of the literary market and capable of sensing changing trends in readers' interests.

It is necessary to acknowledge the direct involvement of publishers in the process of cultural production and reception in order to fully comprehend the extent of the circulation and impact of ideas. This aspect has been studied and researched particularly in the context of the fast-paced transformations of the publishing industry after the Italian unification.<sup>159</sup> It was between the annexation of Rome to the recently unified Italy (1870)

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<sup>157</sup> Achille De Rubertis, 'Il processo Manzoni-Le Monnier', in *Documenti Manzoniani* (Napoli: Perrella, 1926), pp. 17-18.

<sup>158</sup> On the process of the transformation of the figure of the publisher in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Giovanni Ragone, *Un secolo di libri: storia dell'editoria in Italia dall'unità al post-moderno* (Torino: Einaudi, 1999); Bruno Tobia, 'Una cultura per la nuova Italia', in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 2, *Il nuovo stato e la società civile, 1861-1887*, ed. by Giovanni Sabbatucci and Vittorio Vidotto (Bari: Laterza, 1995). On illiteracy and schooling in Italy after unification, see L. Faccini, R. Graglia, and G. Ricuperati, 'Analfabetismo e scolarizzazione', in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. VI, *Atlante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976); David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1980: Cultural Industries, Politics, and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

<sup>159</sup> See for example: Ragone, *Un secolo di libri*; Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile: media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni novanta* (Milano: Bompiani, 1999); Valerio Castronovo, *La stampa italiana dall'Unità al Fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1970); Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo*

and its entry into World War I (1915) that the country witnessed a fast, albeit uneven, growth of the reading public and an unprecedented expansion of the printing industry.<sup>160</sup>

During these years, the overall improved living conditions of the population and the partial drop in illiteracy rates were decisive factors in the expansion of the readership after the unification. The percentage of illiterates, averaged at 75% of the population over six years of age in 1861, decreased to 62% in 1881 and to 38% in 1911.<sup>161</sup> Reading was certainly encouraged by the creation of a state educational curriculum, which in turn required a publishing industry technologically equipped to provide texts for the use of the new Italians. It was also invigorated by a general attention to self-improvement and an interest in leisurely occupations, which fuelled the production of a variety of texts such as journals and magazines catering to the growing domestic and recreational needs of the urban middle-class in Italy.<sup>162</sup> The transformation of the Italian book industry from a myriad of competing printmakers inorganically distributed along the peninsula to a network of rationally organised publishing houses guaranteed the circulation and availability of printed material and the cultural solidification of the recently unified Italy.

Although the production of culture is unthinkable if severed from an investigation of the rise and development of publishing houses, limited attention has been given to the fragmented and far-from-modern literary market of the first half of the nineteenth

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*italiano* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1996); Silvia Franchini, *Editori, lettrici e stampa di moda: giornali di moda e di famiglia a Milano dal "Corriere delle Dame" agli editori dell'Italia unita* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2002).

<sup>160</sup> For up-to-date research into the printed media - books, magazines and journals - in Italy between 1870 and 1914 see Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani, and Jennifer Burns, eds., *The Printed Media in Fin-De-Siècle Italy: Publishers, Writers, and Readers* (London: Legenda, 2011).

<sup>161</sup> In this 75%, Sardinia counted for 90%, the south of Italy for 86%, and the northern regions (Liguria, Piedmont and Lombardy) for 54%. Nicola Tranfaglia and Albertina Vittoria. *Storia degli editori italiani: dall'unità alla fine degli anni sessanta* (Roma: Laterza, 2000), pp. 64-65. See also, Tullio de Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita* (Bari: Laterza, 1972), p. 43.

<sup>162</sup> John Davis, 'Media, Markets and Modernity: The Italian Case: 1870-1915', in Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani, and Jennifer Burns, p. 15.

century.<sup>163</sup> This was a market rich and dynamic in cultural exchange, which followed trajectories often transcending the geo-political limitations of a country that had no central government.<sup>164</sup> The discourse revolving around the published book does not pertain uniquely to those working in publishing. It extends to various sectors of society, such as the institution of a country's educational system and library network, people's consumerist preferences, the organization of leisure time, and the socio-economic divide between different geographical areas of the country.<sup>165</sup>

Ann Hallamore Caesar and Gabriella Romani echo the idea of interconnectedness when they suggest that literary and cultural productions 'follow a circular process of development and are indeed the complex and, sometimes, unpredictable outcome of a textual agency shared by readers, authors, publishers, illustrators, and printmakers.'<sup>166</sup> Cultural production does not reside exclusively in the elevated spheres of editorial decision-making and literary criticism, but is instead in constant communication with the more mundane, evolving aspects of society.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the role of publishers in Italy was not well-defined or separate from the one played by printmakers.<sup>167</sup> Publishing was after all regarded no differently from any other activity conducted for trade or business. In order to work as a printmaker, one was only required to present a personal statement and own the necessary printing equipment.<sup>168</sup> Printmakers and booksellers were typically in

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<sup>163</sup> 'In terms of both cultural and economic history, Italy's political unification did not mark a clean break with the past, although one consequence of the supposed *caesura* is that historians of the Italian media after the Unification have not shown much interest in the print media during the Risorgimento.' John Davis, p. 12. One of the most significant accounts is still, to this day, the above-mentioned Berengo, *Intellettuali e librai nella Milano della Restaurazione*.

<sup>164</sup> See Eugenio Garin, *Editori italiani tra '800 e '900* (Roma: Laterza, 1991), p. 45.

<sup>165</sup> Gabriele Turi and Maria Iolanda Palazzolo. *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea* (Firenze: Giunti, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>166</sup> Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani, and Jennifer Burns, p.1.

<sup>167</sup> Alberto Cadioli, and Giuliano Vignini. *Storia dell'editoria italiana dall'unità ad oggi: un profilo introduttivo* (Milano: Bibliografica, 2004), p. 13.

<sup>168</sup> Ciaramelli and Guerra, *Tipografi, editori e librai mantovani dell'ottocento*, pp. 369-370.

charge of book production and distribution, although anyone could commission a printmaker to print or reprint a manuscript and then put the final product into the hands of a bookseller for distribution and economic return.<sup>169</sup>

The new figure of the publisher as an entrepreneur who mediates between an author's offering and the demand from the readership but also supervises the production of printed material on a larger scale and as part of a vision of cultural improvement, established itself in Italy most clearly in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is when the figure of publisher acquired 'la capacità di concepire sempre nuovi progetti editoriali di respiro nei quali coinvolgere letterati e scrittori all'interno di una redazione che non fosse un'impresa occasionale.'<sup>170</sup> Scholars agree unanimously that the shift towards the new figure of the publisher took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and was spurred by the incumbent need to create and homogenize the national culture.<sup>171</sup>

With that said, I concur with John Davis' assertion that the history of the modern print media in Italy did not start in the late nineteenth century, but rather that it had expanded in the eighteenth century and grown subsequently.<sup>172</sup> Davis urged for a reevaluation of the role of publishers in early nineteenth-century cultural production. Maria Iolanda Palazzolo also argued that publishers' contribution to the ideological battle was essential to the modernisation of Italy and to its emancipation from the conservative politics of old regimes.<sup>173</sup> Focusing specifically on the role of Gian Pietro Vieusseux in advocating a cultural rejuvenation of the country, Palazzolo underlines that 'la battaglia per una diversa organizzazione della cultura [...] poteva costituire il nucleo centrale di

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<sup>169</sup> Berengo, p. 31.

<sup>170</sup> Mario Infelise, 'La nuova figura dell'editore', in Gabriele Turi and Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, p. 62.

<sup>171</sup> See Bruni, *Potere e circolazione delle idee*.

<sup>172</sup> John Davis, 'Media, Markets and Modernity', p. 15.

<sup>173</sup> Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, *Editori, librai e intellettuali: Vieusseux e i corrispondenti siciliani* (Napoli: Liguori, 1980), pp. 7-8.

una battaglia politica più complessiva.<sup>174</sup> Reforming the way culture was produced in Italy meant reforming the entire country as well.

The regression of the Italian cultural and political situation in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna underlies the rise of an Italian nationalistic movement, which, I argue, took a new turn in conjunction with the vast publication of historical novels that occurred between the 1820s and 1840s. The beneficiary of these novels was a new pool of eclectic readers, comprised of socially emerging groups like women and middle class men, pioneering and potentially vast, being limited only by the ability to read, not by social class or status.<sup>175</sup> They became the new target of the publishing industry: a readership with limited financial capacity, unsophisticated, not cultivated in the classical sense of the term and unaccustomed to high-brow literature or literary criticism, but with ‘una gran voglia di informazioni ed emozioni.’<sup>176</sup> Publishers’ entrepreneurial energy and the new readers’ yearning for books converged especially thanks to the existence of a literary market where books were rapidly printed and promptly distributed. Broadening the discussion about cultural production and formation of patriotic consciousness to include the historical novels that literary critics have recurrently dismissed as minor allows for a more historically balanced study of the rise of a nationalistic movement in Italy’s *Ottocento*.

The not-fully-efficient censorship system imposed by the restored governments and the absence of an international agreement on copyright regulations (or the presence of loopholes in such an agreement after it was first introduced in 1840) yielded to a plethora of historical novels that saturated the market and especially functioned as a vehicle of patriotic propaganda. The complications created by a governing establishment

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<sup>174</sup> Palazzolo, p. 9.

<sup>175</sup> Palazzolo, *I tre occhi dell'editore*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>176</sup> Palazzolo, p. 68.

unable, but also unwilling, to legislate in favour of the protection of authors and publishers certainly proved unfavourable for some, but extremely profitable for others. Marino Berengo, who researched the publishing scene in Milan after 1814, observed that the situation in the northern city ‘stava pur traendo stimolo e alimento dalle contraddizioni e dal disordine cui quel regime legislativo aveva dato luogo.’<sup>177</sup>

Always in reference to Milan, Carlo Tenca, Italian patriot, man of letters, and ultimately member of the newly-formed Italian Parliament (elected in 1861 in the Milan constituency), observed and commented on the immorality of what he called the book traffic of his time, which had by then become the monopoly of publishers.<sup>178</sup> Tenca denounced a situation in which ‘non sono più gli autori che pensano alle opere da pubblicarsi, ma sono gli editori’ and that the literary market of the time was subject to the publishers’ self-interest and audacity when undertaking new literary projects.<sup>179</sup> It is interesting to note that historical novels were among the top sellers in this closed market where publishers dictated the choice of texts to be published (understandably, with the prospect of higher profits). Tenca added that apart from a few publications by Manzoni, but also Grossi and D’Azeglio, whose literary status guaranteed them ‘una posizione indipendente dal giogo degli editori, non v’ha quasi pubblicazione in Italia, che non sia determinata dalla volontà degli editori.’<sup>180</sup> By comparing Grossi’s and D’Azeglio’s novels with Manzoni’s, Tenca implicitly reveals that, at the time, publication were all essentially historical novels, considering the literary production of the three authors

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<sup>177</sup> Berengo, p. 257.

<sup>178</sup> On the prominent salon of Clara Maffei see: Raffaello Barbiera, *Il Salotto della Contessa Maffei e la società milanese* (Treves: Milano, 1895); Davide Cugini, ‘Una Nobildonna Bergamasca del Risorgimento Italiano: la Contessa Clara Maffei e i suoi Salotti di Milano e Clusone’, *Bergomum*, 36 (1962), 239-256.

<sup>179</sup> Carlo Tenca, ‘Del Commercio Librario in Italia e dei Mezzi di Riordinarlo’, in G. Pomba, G. Vieusseux, C. Tenca, *Scritti sul commercio librario in Italia*, ed. by Maria Iolanda Palazzolo (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1986), p. 60.

<sup>180</sup> Carlo Tenca, p. 61.

mentioned. All other novels were not free of publishers' decision-making process, that is to say they would certainly be published if they guaranteed a secure economic return.

The fact that chaos pervaded the Milanese publishing scene is highly indicative of the situation in the rest of the peninsula since the northern city was the cultural capital of Italy during the Restoration period. At the end of the French occupation of the peninsula, and for the rest of the first half of the nineteenth century, publishing activity tended to congregate primarily in the larger capitals of northern-central Italy, particularly Milan, Turin, and Florence. Other important cultural centres like Venice and Genoa, formerly capitals of independent states, lost their role essentially because they were absorbed into larger realms, the former into the Austrian Empire, and the latter into the Kingdom of Sardinia.<sup>181</sup>

Milan's prominence persisted for most of the nineteenth century. In direct connection with the illiteracy rate, statistics on the presence of bookshops on the Italian territory after unification, when the advancement of the publishing sector became stronger in the north of Italy, reveal an uneven distribution between north and south. For instance, 57.4% of the places that sold books were located in the north of Italy, 22% in central Italy, and 20.6% in the south of the country, including the islands.<sup>182</sup> In light of this information, it is safe to say that when looking not only at the production of books but of culture at large in nineteenth-century Italy, the Milanese model was the most significant one in terms of availability of printed material, breadth of potential readership, and circulation of ideas.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Palazzolo, 'Geografia e dinamica degli insediamenti editoriali', pp. 14-15.

<sup>182</sup> Nicola Tranfaglia, *Editori italiani ieri e oggi* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>183</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the role of Milan as the leading centre of production of culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Gianluca Albergoni, *I mestieri delle lettere tra istituzioni e mercato: vivere e scrivere a Milano nella prima metà dell'Ottocento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006).

Although advanced, the Milanese literary industry also was pervaded by illicit publishing practices. Berengo defines this problem in terms of a disease rapidly running through one's body, for which not only there was no cure, but which continued spreading 'perché i ristampatori avevano via via modo di migliorare la propria organizzazione, e lo stesso sviluppo in senso capitalistico di tutta l'industria italiana, rendeva più lucrosa e conveniente questa speculazione.'<sup>184</sup> The gangrene of counterfeiting and the collapse of the publishing industry would have been inevitable if some actions had not been taken to prevent further damages to which the 1840 'Convenzione' offered a partial solution.

The fact that a multipolar publishing system spearheaded by Milan existed in the first half of the nineteenth century around the larger northern cities of the country does not imply that there was no publishing activity outside of those centres and/or in the south of Italy, but that the modernization of the industry happened at a much faster pace in bigger cities than elsewhere.<sup>185</sup> Provincial publishing was very much active, and is an aspect of the larger discussion about the Italian publishing industry that still needs to be better investigated and studied.<sup>186</sup> It essentially revolved around small-scale artisanal printing studios that produced material for religious purposes (holy pictures, histories of the lives of saints, etc.) or for practical popular use (almanacs).<sup>187</sup>

The resurgence of Italy was accelerated through the activity, albeit unauthorized at times, of printmakers who contributed to the creation of the best-selling phenomenon that was the Risorgimento historical novel. The liberal attitude toward the press,

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<sup>184</sup> Berengo, p. 295.

<sup>185</sup> Giovanni Ragone, 'La letteratura e il consumo: un profilo dei generi e dei modelli dell'editoria italiana 1845-1925', in *Letteratura italiana. Produzione e consumo*, ed. by A. Asor Rosa (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), p. 696.

<sup>186</sup> Maria Gioia Tavoni claims that 'si verificarono nell'Ottocento fenomeni sui quali varrebbe la pena indagare ancora: la proliferazione di officine tipografiche anche in centri provinciali, le nuove dotazioni per la stampa meccanica con il conseguente aumento della produzione e una sempre maggiore autonomia dei ruoli dell'editore, del tipografo e del librario', in *Quaderni del CIRSIL (Centro interuniversitario di ricerca sulla storia degli insegnamenti linguistici)*, p. 3, Internet resource: <<http://amsacta.unibo.it/2688/1/Tavoni.pdf>> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

<sup>187</sup> Palazzolo, p. 15.

introduced in Italy by the Napoleonic regime, brought such an unrestrained increase in the number of printing establishments that it became impossible for the authorities to control what was being published, especially material used without permission from the author or the legitimate publisher.<sup>188</sup> The plague, as it was called, of book piracy was made possible by the absence of any form of copyright regulation and was instrumental in the success of the publishing and literary boom of the historical novel.

### **2.3 Historical novels between 1827 and 1840.**

The criteria of classification of nineteenth-century Italian historical novels are based on four specific parameters: the rising status of the novel as a new literary genre and the historical form of the novel in particular; medievalism as a cultural discourse that emerged from Italian historical novels; the literary success of historical novels of the first half of the nineteenth century; and precise time boundaries (1827-1840).

The first parameter (the new genre of the novel and its historical form) has already been discussed in chapter 1, whereas the second parameter (medievalism) will be analysed in the next. As for the other two parameters of selection, publication date and popularity of the novels, a few aspects must be noted. As indicated in chapter 1, the year 1827 is traditionally regarded as the birth date of the Italian historical novel, seeing that Alessandro Manzoni's *ventisettana* edition of *I promessi sposi* was published that year. The duration of such thriving literary production was rather limited and the publication of medieval-inspired historical novels ended towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The year 1848 saw a dramatic disruption in the publication of novels, but most

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<sup>188</sup> Ciaramelli and Guerra, p. 367.

importantly it registered a drift away from the medieval-inspired themes that had monopolised the novels during the previous two decades. This is understandable if we consider the turmoil and upheavals that stormed Italy in 1848.

The fact that historical novels were among the most published (and reprinted, albeit illegally) texts during the time period 1827-1848, but especially between 1827-1840, the year the ‘Convenzione’ was enforced, testifies to their popularity with the public and readers’ own yearning to possess them. The production of historical novels continued after the ‘Convenzione’ was adopted, but the circulation of printed material, rather rampant when unregulated before copyright regulations were introduced, decreased. In just a few months, as of 1840, literary piracy became illegal in the central and northern regions of the Italian peninsula.<sup>189</sup> This is why, for the purpose of my research and analysis of this literary phenomenon, I have chosen to consider a selection of historical novels published between 1827 and 1840. This representative sample of novels is detailed in chapter 4.

The significance of 1827 as the beginning of the Italian historical novel season is also supported by the fact that literary criticism on these publications intensified after that year. With increasing attention, historical novels published after 1827 were reviewed, discussed, and analysed in newspapers or literary journals, whereas novels published before 1827 are difficult to track and access and information about them is often vague or inconsistent.<sup>190</sup> In order to compile an exact inventory of how many Italian historical

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<sup>189</sup> Berengo, p. 300.

<sup>190</sup> For example, Stefano Picozzi, who wrote two novels, published in 1824 and 1825/26, does not appear in major databases (OPAC SBN Catalogo del Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale italiano and WorldCat Online Computer Library Center). His novels are: *I viaggi di messer Francesco Novello da Carrara* (Torino: 1824) and *I viaggi di Pitagora* (1825 or 1826). However, both titles do appear on the OPAC SBN catalogue, but not associated with the author’s name. A brief mention of the author’s name and titles of novels is made, but no further information is provided, in Giovanni Bardazzi and Alain Grosrichard, eds., *Dénouement des lumières et invention Romantique: actes du colloque de Genève 24-25 Novembre 2000* (Genève: Droz, 2003). A similar case is Ottavio Falletti’s *Le peregrinazioni del nobile Romeo di Provenza* (Torino: Tipografia Chirio e Mina, 1824). The novel appears in the OPAC SBN catalogue, but

novels were published during the whole time of production of this genre, I primarily researched first editions, and subsequently the number of reprints. In general, this proved rather challenging because of the wide scope of this archival research and because of the array of variables that characterised each single novel and their literary accomplishment. Some novels are not easily accessible, since very few copies exist or because of incongruities in the way they have been catalogued.<sup>191</sup> Others, instead, have had constant success since their first publication and have been reprinted in recent years.

Based on this research, it appears that eighty-nine historical novels went to press between 1827 and 1848.<sup>192</sup> Fifty-nine of them were published before the end of 1840 by thirty-eight different writers.<sup>193</sup> Out of the thirty-eight authors, thirty wrote one single novel, whereas only two wrote more than three novels. The fact that some writers only authored one novel, or that others were more prolific during those two decades has no

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not under the author's name. Interestingly, I also found a digitalized version of the whole novel on Google Play, but no reference is given about who published it online and where the text is kept:

<[https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Peregrinazioni\\_ed\\_avventure\\_del\\_nobile\\_Romeo\\_da\\_Pr?id=GI4StFBvTDYC&hl=en](https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Peregrinazioni_ed_avventure_del_nobile_Romeo_da_Pr?id=GI4StFBvTDYC&hl=en)> (accessed 15 August 2019).

<sup>191</sup> In some cases, novels do not even appear on the OPAC SBN catalogue, which indicates that no copies of the printed book are owned by Italian libraries. This is the case for Matteo Benvenuti, *Il cavalier Bajardo, racconto del secolo XVI* (Milano: per Santo Bravetta, 1841), which instead is accessible online since it was digitized by the Austrian National Library in 2013. Another example is Pier Ambrogio Curti, *La figlia dell'armajuolo, storia domestica milanese del secolo XVII* (Milano: Paolo Ripamonti Carpano, 1842). Researching this novel is complicated by the fact that the word *armaiuolo* in the title is inconsistently spelled with an *i* or with a *j* (*armaiuolo* versus *armajuolo*) and the entry of the first edition on the OPAC SBN catalogue does not list any author. Finally, Alessandro Bulgarini's *L'assedio di Siena: racconto storico* (Firenze: a spese degli editori 1845) is completely missing from the OPAC SBN catalogue, although it is listed in *Bibliografia italiana: ossia elenco generale delle opere d'ogni specie e d'ogni lingua stampate in Italia e delle italiane pubblicate all'estero* of the same year as Bulgarini's novel (Milano: vedova di A. F. Stella e Giacomo figlio, 1845), p. 204.

<sup>192</sup> This estimate does not include Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*. A full detailed list of all historical novels published during this period is provided in the Appendix.

<sup>193</sup> In its preliminary phases, my research on the production of historical novels between 1827 and 1848 has benefited from a doctoral thesis submitted at the university of Basel in 1972: Suzanne Elisabeth Schlaepfer, *Temi e aspetti del romanzo storico italiano nella prima metà dell'Ottocento* (Basel: Express Druck K. Rüetschi, 1972). Although this thesis covers the same time period as mine (although reaching back to the beginning of the nineteenth century), the actual treatment of the subject is substantially dissimilar. Schlaepfer's work is essentially a compilation (a rather schematic one) of the different themes and motifs present in historical novels, but it lacks any attempt at interpretation, let alone any correlation to the areas of medievalism and Italian national identity. A sketchy chronological list of historical novels is also found in the appendix to the following publication: Friedrich Wolfzettel and Peter Ihring, eds., *Erzählte Nationalgeschichte: der Historische Roman im Italienischen Risorgimento* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), pp. 293-334.

connections with the success of a novel. Massimo d'Azeglio, for example, wrote one single novel before 1840, that is *Ettore Fieramosca*, which is to this day the most popular Risorgimento historical novel thanks to both critical attention and more current filmic adaptations.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, the richer literary production of one single author does not necessarily imply a bigger success on the literary market.

The vast majority of these novels are set in the north of Italy (fifty), and particularly in Lombardy (thirty-eight), with Milan being the city that most frequently appears in a novel. Tuscany, and more specifically Florence, is the chosen setting for twelve novels, whereas five of them are set in the south of the peninsula (Kingdom of Naples, Sicily, and Puglia). In addition, apart from a couple of novels partly or entirely set in Paris, only four others are set outside of Italy.

As for the historical framework favoured by Risorgimento authors, more than 55% of historical novels are set in a time frame between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, which corresponds to the Late Middle Ages/High Renaissance period, whereas the High Middle Ages (up until the year 1000 A.D.) are featured in approximately one-third of novels. The rest of the novels are variously set in the Late Renaissance/Post Reformation period (after 1580) and in epochs closer to the time of the authors. The predominance of historical subjects set in the Late Middle Ages/High Renaissance period indicates that the elaboration of a medieval ideal and, as a consequence, the definition of medievalism as it emerges from Risorgimento historical novels is largely based on the latter part of the Middle Ages leading up to the Renaissance era, and is then not medieval

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<sup>194</sup> The treatment of the topic in D'Azeglio's novel, more than the actual historically-documented event, inspired a number of artists, so much so that operas, sculptures, and films were based on the figure of Fieramosca, but also on his female counterpart, Ginevra. Of these four films, two were silent ones from the 1920s (now lost), one (1938) by director Alessandro Blasetti, whose *Ettore Fieramosca* was much appreciated by the ruling Fascist establishment for its nationalistic rendition of the plot, and the fourth one, *Soldato di ventura* (1976), directed by Pasquale Festa Campanile and starring Italian actor Bud Spencer offered a comic and grotesque interpretation of the story by D'Azeglio.

in the strict sense of the term. As the next chapter discusses, the designation of the concept of medievalism was a process that occupied a long period of time between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century and that emerged concurrently with the advance of historiography as an area of research and the rise of Medieval Studies as an academic discipline.

A defining factor that is characteristic of historical novels published during the time frame considered here is their more or less direct connection with Walter Scott's narrative model. With diminishing incidence as the production of novels neared the mid-century point, the Scottish author is often acknowledged as a source of inspiration in the creative process for Risorgimento writers, a trait just as often observed disapprovingly by literary critics.

Adolfo Francesco Falconetti, for example, turned the history of Venice from the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries into the subject of just as many novels, the first of which, *Irene Delfino*, is a romantic chronicle of Venice before the election of the first Doge in the sixth century. The other two novels, *La villa di San Giuliano* and *La naufraga di Malamocco*, continue to recount the vicissitudes of the rising Republic during the following two centuries. The three novels were published in the same year, 1830, the first two anonymously, the third with the author's name. Falconetti is an imitator of Scott, which he professes in the preface to *Irene Delfino*: 'giuntomi alle mani il nuovo romanzo di Walter Scott *Le cronache di Canongate* [...] venne a destarmi nella mente l'idea che [...] potesse forse alla maniera di quel sommo trattarsi eziandio la Storia Veneziana, così ricca di cose, così varia di accidenti, tanto sublime, per una parte, curiosa ed amena per l'altra.'<sup>195</sup> His idea of what writing a novel entails is 'inventare una trama [...]

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<sup>195</sup> Adolfo Francesco Falconetti, *Irene Delfino, storia veneziana del sec. VI* (Venezia: Gnoato, 1830), p. 9.

impregnarla di erudizione storica più o meno esatta [...] narrare, narrare e soprattutto ingrossare il volume.’<sup>196</sup>

Scott’s influence is also perceptible in the quality of the settings that are created in the novels, as well as a typical tendency to emphasise the sentimental and tragic connotation of a story. Defendente Sacchi’s novel *I Lambertazzi e i Geremei, o le fazioni di Bologna nel secolo XIII* (1830) is an example. Dense with Gothic atmosphere and locations such as weeping willow groves and cypress-shadowed cemeteries, Sacchi’s novel presents ‘the most doleful story of medieval Italy [...] the tragedy of love-sick Imelda throwing herself at the bleeding body of her wounded lover, and sucking death from his poisoned wounds.’<sup>197</sup>

Another example of Scott’s substantial influence on Risorgimento authors is Carlo Varese (1792-1866), who studied and trained as a doctor at Pavia and practised in Voghera and Genoa, and eventually became a parliamentary deputy. His name became popular after his first novel, *Sibilla Odaleta, episodio delle guerre d’Italia sul finire del secolo XV. Romanzo storico di un italiano*, was released in 1827. After this, seven more novels were published before the mid-nineteenth century; in 1828, twice in 1829, twice in 1830, in 1832, and in 1839, making him one of the most prolific authors of the period. To a certain degree, all his novels are written in imitation of Walter Scott, of whom the author was an enthusiastic admirer to the point that ‘it was even said of him that he wrote with the *falsa riga*, the ruling paper of Walter Scott, an expression in Italy denoting the lowest degree of servile imitation.’<sup>198</sup>

What is also interesting about Varese and what differentiates him from other writers of the time is his interest in Sardinian history, which he chose to make the subject

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<sup>196</sup> Agnoli, *Gli albori del romanzo storico e i primi imitatori di Walter Scott in Italia*, p. 168.

<sup>197</sup> Antonio Carlo Napoleone Gallenga, *Italy Past and Present* (London: John Chapman, 1848), p. 146.

<sup>198</sup> Gallenga, p. 131.

of two of his novels: *Il proscritto, storia sarda* (1831) and *Preziosa di Sanluri, ossia i montanari sardi* (1832). Even though essentially extraneous to the culture of Sardinia, he was stimulated both by his curiosity about the island, which he considered a distant, mysterious, and exotic land, and also by Giuseppe Manno's *Storia della Sardegna*, published only a few years before.<sup>199</sup> Varese's perception of his role as writer and of the relationship between history and literary narration is indirectly clarified at the beginning of another novel, *Torriani e Visconti, o scene casalinghe, pubbliche e storiche della vita milanese nel secolo XV*. In the foreword to the 1839 publication of this novel, the editors quote Varese's own words saying that historical novels benefited readers, because '[i] romanzi storici] sono stati per una classe di leggitori, quel che certi cibi ai convalescenti: destinati cioè a dispor lo stomaco infiacchito da una lunga malattia.'<sup>200</sup> Varese contributed to the understanding of history and the appreciation of the culture of Sardinia, a land of which he was not native, as an intermediary between that culture and his readers; that is by serving as an interpreter.

This approach stays essentially unchanged throughout the whole period of production of historical novels, as confirmed in the introductory words to the novels by other authors. Another example is Agostino Ademollo (1799-1841), who, in the preface to his only novel *Marietta de' Ricci, ovvero Firenze al tempo dell'assedio* (1840), reiterates the concept that historical novels do not alter historical facts, but rather make them more appealing for the readers. He explains that:

Per Romanzo Storico ho sempre inteso ed intendo non già di quel componimento, che non essendo nella sostanza né tutto storia né tutto invenzione, può pregiudicare alla prima senza accrescere merito alla seconda; non già di quella narrazione di un fatto nella sostanza ideale, ma abbellito con l'innesto di qualche circostanza storica; ma bensì della esposizione di un fatto vero con circostanze verosimili, che se

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<sup>199</sup> Giuseppe Manno, *Storia della Sardegna* (Torino: per Alliana e Paravia, 1825-1827).

<sup>200</sup> Carlo Varese, *Torriani e Visconti, o scene casalinghe, pubbliche e storiche della vita milanese nel secolo XV* (Milano: A. F. Stella, 1839), pp. i-ii.

l'abbelliscono ed infiorano rendendola più interessante, non alterano però la vera Storia.<sup>201</sup>

The idea of fashioning historical facts so as to make them more attractive to the readership is an indicator of the transformation of the publishing industry in Italy of the time, and of the changing identity of writers toward a professionalisation of their role so as to meet the evolving interests of different types of readers, who not only want to be educated, but also entertained.

An excellent example clarifying this last point is offered by Ignazio Cantù, whose novel *Cecco Maroni e la Celestina della Vedrà, cronaca milanese del secolo XVII* (1840) was publicised as ideal reading for the ladies. In this novel, beautiful Celestina lives in the milanese district known as Vetra and is courted by Cecco Maroni, who has come into some money after marrying a noblewoman. Because of his new luxurious lifestyle, he quickly squanders his fortune, thus leading Cecco to mourn the modest happiness he could have shared with Celestina. This typically romantic plot seemed to appeal to the female readership in particular, which is why Ignazio Cantù's novel was advertised in the journal *La Moda. Giornale dedicato al bel sesso* as a 'graziosa edizioncina fregiata d'incisioni e coperta di legature più o meno eleganti, onde servir di gradevol lettura alle nostre gentil signore.'<sup>202</sup>

The eclecticism of the lives of authors of Risorgimento historical novels is another characteristic that must be underlined as it speaks to their sense of civic engagement, participation in manifestation of political activism, and ultimately, patriotism. For instance, Antonio Zanolini (1791-1887) authored the novel *Il diavolo del Sant'Ufficio* (1847), which was published in three volumes and set in the author's own time.

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<sup>201</sup> Agostino Ademollo, *Marietta de' Ricci, ovvero Firenze al tempo dell'assedio* (Firenze, stamperia granducale, 1840), p. XIV.

<sup>202</sup> *La Moda. Giornale dedicato al bel sesso* (Estensore: Francesco Lampato, 24 dicembre 1840, Anno V, Numero 103), p. 410.

Approximately fifty years prior to this publication Zanolini was at the forefront of the Risorgimento in Bologna, participating in the uprisings of 1831 and becoming a member of the temporary government of the city. Another example is Pier Ambrogio Curti (1819-1899), whose *La figlia dell'armajuolo, storia domestica milanese del secolo XVII* was published in 1842. Curti was a lawyer, as the frontispiece to his novel indicates, but also a literary critic.<sup>203</sup> Antonio Vismara, who chronicled the 1848 uprisings in Milan known as Cinque Giornate, recorded Curti's direct involvement in the events as follows:

Occorreva però di provvedere acciò nel parapiglia non fuggissero gli altri detenuti per delitti, poiché essi eransi già accinti a procurarsi la libertà. Accorsovi però l'avv. Pier Ambrogio Curti, membro del Comitato di Pubblica Sicurezza, impugnando una sciabola nella destra e una pistola nella manca, come ebbimo in eguale atteggiamento già a vederlo nella contrada di S. Damiano, si affacciò arditamente alla porta d'uscita, minacciò d'esploder l'arme da fuoco sul primo che s'avanzasse, cercando con altre parole poi di persuadere i detenuti che si avrebbe tenuto grande calcolo della loro sottomissione; che egli impegnava la sua parola d'onore che l'instruttoria sarebbe stata accelerata, rimessi in libertà gli assoluti, ritenuta pei condannata una circostanza molto attenuante quella di aver ottemperato in quel momento all'ingiunzione di rientrare in carcere. E tanto disse e tanto fece, che quegli uomini, che pur sentivano amor di patria, deposero le armi che già stringevano e rientrarono nella prigione.<sup>204</sup>

Such demonstration of patriotic zeal was not atypical for authors of historical novels, who, in most cases, envisioned their role as writers as an expression of their civic commitment.

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<sup>203</sup> He was among the first to review Giambattista Bazzoni's 1845 novel *Zagranella* enthusiastically, saying that 'fu in me risvegliato il desiderio di leggerlo per intero.' See Fassò, *Giambattista Bazzoni (1803-1850): Contributo alla storia del romanzo storico*, p. 199.

<sup>204</sup> Antonio Vismara, *Storia delle cinque gloriose giornate di Milano nel 1848* (Milano: stabilimento tipografico dell'editore Francesco Pagnoni, 1873), pp. 127-128.

## **Conclusion**

The popularity of the historical novel genre in the first half of the nineteenth century can only be understood if the socio-cultural circumstances in which the authors of historical novels operated are exposed. The vast success of historical novels that took place especially between the 1820s and the mid 1840s was unique in the cultural panorama of early Risorgimento Italy and testifies to a high demand for this product. Indeed, books and especially novels became products to be consumed by a wide readership, one not defined by class and economic status, but by the ability to read. Consuming historical novels became an activity only limited by the availability of books on the market, which, not surprisingly, stimulated unconventional publishing practices. The popularity of and demand for historical novels of this time fostered the circulation of unauthorised publications, which was also accelerated by the absence of copyright protection laws in the geo-politically fragmented Italian peninsula.

The discussion around the legality of these publications, and the consequences such practices caused, engaged not only historical novels and their authors, but also the entire literary establishment. Well-known, for instance, is the controversy between Alessandro Manzoni and Felice Le Monnier, who, in 1845, republished a popular edition of *I promessi sposi* (1832, Passigli) at a much lower price than the original and without the author's consent. The economic damage suffered was worsened by the fact that Manzoni had amended and corrected the 1832 edition and had, essentially, rejected it. Le Monnier's argument in trying to defend and protect his right to publish Manzoni's work was that the 'Convenzione [...] a favore della proprietà e contro la contraffazione' endorsed in 1840 between Austria and the Kingdom of Sardinia could not be applied

retroactively to a publication from 1832. The legal dispute lasted for twenty years until Manzoni prevailed in 1864.<sup>205</sup>

Legal implications aside, book piracy and the ratification of the 1840 ‘Convenzione’ are factors indicative of the popularity and high demand for printed books, and particularly of historical novels whose production and circulation grew rapidly after 1827. Readers’ enthusiasm for historical novels fuelled the demand for more and more printed copies, which were reprinted not simply by Italian publishing houses, but also by foreign ones, not in translation, but in Italian. Ten different editions of Massimo d’Azeglio’s *Ettore Fieramosca*, for instance, appeared in seven years, between 1833 and 1840 (three in Turin; five in Paris; one in Brussels; one in Lugano; two in Florence).

The excitement with which historical novels were written, published, and sold in the two decades following 1827, and as we shall see, the degree to which authors engaged directly with readers on issues of historical and national relevance, also suggests that these novels were elected to feed, sustain, and serve as outlet of expression of people’s patriotic feelings. The discourse initiated in historical novels was more potent than all other forms of writing. The secular missionary spirit of this age, one that was densely characterised by nationalistic rhetoric and afterward largely reused in opera and painting, was effectively synthesised in Risorgimento historical novels.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> For more detailed information on the topic, see Rubertis, “Il processo Manzoni-Le Monnier”, pp. 5-59.

<sup>206</sup> For more specific information on the role of nineteenth-century music and painting during the Risorgimento period and their contribution in reinforcing patriotic ideals and producing nationalistic culture see: Massimo Riva and John Davis, eds., ‘Mediating the Risorgimento’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18 (2013). In particular, see these sections: ‘The Risorgimento in Opera’, pp. 172-204; ‘Easel Painting in the Age of Italian Unification’, pp. 205-231. Even though the connection between historical novels and nineteenth-century history painting is often noted in publications on the historical novel genre in Italy, little has been researched, written, and published on this subject clarifying how one influenced the other. For a general critical interpretation of the pictorial rendition of historical novels, see Emilio Faccioli, ‘Interpretazioni grafiche del romanzo storico’, in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa, 3 (Torino: Einaudi, 1984), pp. 342-384. Also see Roberto Paolo Ciardi, ‘Descrivere la storia: alcuni modi di impiego delle arti figurative’, in *Il romanzo della storia*, ed. by E. Scarano and others, (Nistri-Lischi: Pisa, 1986).

The specific historically based subject matter of these novels must also be accounted for as a source of attraction for nineteenth-century readers. As we shall see in the next chapter, history, but more specifically medieval history, had been re-evaluated thanks to new interest in historiography which had emerged during the previous century. The new attention to the Middle Ages prompted a real medieval mania in the first half of the nineteenth century. Such craze was conveyed in a variety of ways, from architecture to garden design, from fashion to the organization of medieval-inspired events, all artistic expressions and practices largely enjoyed by members of the upper class.<sup>207</sup> Medievalism was expressed especially in works of literature, that is in novels, a medium whose potentials were vastly democratic as they were associated with the rise of a literate middle class, with the professionalisation of letters, print culture, and with the development of revolutionary ideologies.

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<sup>207</sup> Exemplary are the wedding festivities for King Charles Albert's son Victor Emmanuel and Archduchess of Austria, Maria Adelaide. On 22 April 1842 a tournament and a carousel inspired by a historical event of the house of Savoy occurred in 1325 were held in Piazza San Carlo in Turin. This extravagant display of medieval heritage contained all the ingredients of a perfect dynastic celebration where the medieval ideal took the form of a neo-feudal and chivalric performance. See M. Viale Ferrero, 'Le nozze del 1842', in Enrico Castelnuovo and Marco Rosci, eds., *Cultura figurativa e architettonica negli stati del Re di Sardegna 1773-1861*, II (Torino: Stamperia Artistica Nazionale, 1980), pp. 873-881.

### **3 HISTORICISM, MEDIEVALISM, AND NATION-BUILDING**

#### **Introduction**

In international popular culture, the notion of the Middle Ages has a strong appeal thanks to its various fictional incarnations. The Middle Ages are associated with violence, superstition, diseases, death, and barbarian conquerors, all interpretations that largely rely upon the vast use that contemporary media and fantasy literature have made of the Middle Ages. This explosion of medieval images and tropes in popular culture is not a phenomenon limited to our times.<sup>208</sup>

The idea that modern European nations originated homogeneously as a whole, sharing common symbols, language, religion, values and history, traditions and myths (all essential elements in the formation of social identity) has long been demystified, and the notion that national character may be fixed across time and substantiated in a country's distant past has been proved groundless.<sup>209</sup> Nonetheless, the Middle Ages have been recurrently and repeatedly subjected to various interpretations that aimed at locating in that era the precise origin of modern-day national identities. These appropriations were certainly informed by the specific historical period and social conditions in which they were created and have resulted in a rich characterisation of the term medievalism. Therefore, in this chapter I will firstly attempt to redefine the implications of this expression, in order to expose the double nature of a term that can

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<sup>208</sup> David W. Marshall, *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture* (Jefferson: N.C., 2007), p. 6.

<sup>209</sup> See Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nation. The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 15.

simultaneously indicate a cultural phenomenon and refer to a legitimate field of academic interest and research.

An exposition of the array of nuances implicit in the term medievalism will be the focus of the first section of this chapter, in which I will consider medievalism as a field of study that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century in opposition to the discipline of Medieval Studies. The antagonism between the two attributed a lesser academic validity to medievalism, and, in so doing, encouraged the formation of a high culture/low culture divide, which persisted for a long time. It was only during the 1970s that perceptions about medievalism started shifting, both in Italy and internationally.

To provide a broader context for the Italian rebirth of interest in medieval culture and medievalism, in the second section I analyse how historians of the Enlightenment, particularly Antonio Ludovico Muratori, revamped a debate about the medieval aeon and opened up the field of historical research to new interpretations. Their work fostered a return of interest in the Middle Ages and, most importantly, questioned the established opinion of this age as one of human and cultural decline.

A turning point in this debate came with the Romantic movement and the discussion that centred around a few historical events from the Middle Ages, particularly the so-called ‘*questione longobarda*.’ The ideological appropriation the Romantics made of the Middle Ages impacted the national identity debate and informed the production of historical novels by Italian authors in the second quarter of the Ottocento. I will delineate these themes in the last section of the chapter.

### **3.1 Medievalism: a definition**

Medievalism interrogates the way in which various groups of individuals at different times in history and for different purposes (political, artistic, etc.) have imagined, fantasized, and reconstructed, often distortedly, the Middle Ages.<sup>210</sup> This focus on the acts of reimagining, fantasizing, and reconstructing is specific to the discipline of medievalism, and distinguishes it from the discipline of Medieval Studies.

The concept of medievalism is malleable and adaptable, which is why a precise definition for it does not exist. The notion of revival is intrinsic to the term itself as the process by which the period of the Middle Ages, or specific aspects of it, is reimagined. Naturally, it is problematic to constrain medievalism chronologically and to treat it as a cultural phenomenon limited to one historical period. C. A. Simmons has argued that, considering that the Middle Ages covered a period that spanned over a thousand years, the phenomenon of medievalism had already begun in medieval times.<sup>211</sup>

Although it was never a proper movement, because the notion of medievalism transcends chronological boundaries, it did have manifestations typical of cultural movements thanks to distinct artistic tendencies and a common philosophy. Medievalism was expressed in architecture and art, literature and philosophy, sociology, politics, and religion, and it resonated widely, from England and the European continent to North America.

Medievalism is ‘the process by which the Middle Ages is transformed into a useful discourse out of which can be produced ideologies and practices which comment upon or

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<sup>210</sup> For an overview of the concept of the Middle Ages, and of how this expression came to be introduced, see Sergio Bertelli, ‘L’erudizione antiquaria e la riscoperta del Medioevo’, in *La storia. I grandi problemi dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea*. Vol. IV. *L’età moderna*. 2. *La vita religiosa e la cultura*, ed. by Nicola Tranfaglia e Massimo Firpo (Torino: UTET, 1986), pp. 635-662.

<sup>211</sup> Clare A. Simmons, ed., *Medievalism and the Quest for the “Real” Middle Ages* (London and Portland: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 2001), p. 2.

contest other contemporary beliefs.<sup>212</sup> Medievalism does not refer to an era that lasted over a thousand years but to an abstract concept that has grown and become more articulate as people have tried to interpret the Middle Ages. Through medievalism the Middle Ages are experienced as a historical entity, a cultural and chronological alterity abundant in intellectual, aesthetic, political, and religious images that appealed to subsequent societies and their yearning for change (be it political, artistic etc.).

Two Italian scholars, writing almost fifty years apart from one another, support this notion of medievalism as an abstract concept.<sup>213</sup> Firstly, Giorgio Falco explained that the Middle Ages are largely perceived as ‘un’età torbida e confusa, piena di violenza, di rozzezza e di superstizione.’<sup>214</sup> Achievements and innovations introduced during the Middle Ages are so deep-rooted in modern societies that it is difficult to grasp ‘l’ideale unitario politico-religioso del medio evo, di un mondo retto da due potestà universali con distinte sfere d’azione e una missione comune [...] un mondo in cui fatalmente si fondano e si confondono il pubblico e il privato, il sacro e il profano.’<sup>215</sup> It is within this fusion and confusion of two antithetical social spheres that, according to Falco, the fascination with the Middle Ages resides.

Secondly, Renato Bordone, one of the leading Italian experts on medievalism, described medievalism as a form of escapism from ‘un mondo spersonalizzante,’ a world deprived of ideals and passion. Medievalism considers the Middle Ages as ‘un “luogo” del nostro immaginario occidentale [...] l’altrove primigenio, dai contorni cronologici sfumati, buoni per contenere i personaggi della leggenda e della fiaba, dell’avventura e

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<sup>212</sup> John Simons, ‘Medievalism as Cultural Process in Pre-Industrial Popular Literature’, *Studies in Medievalism* 7, (1995), p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> Giorgio Falco, ‘Attualità del Medioevo’, in *Pagine sparse di storia e di vita* (Milano-Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1951), pp. 533-536; Renato Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*.

<sup>214</sup> Falco, ‘Attualità del Medioevo’, p. 533.

<sup>215</sup> Falco, p. 534.

del sentimento.<sup>216</sup> Medievalism lends itself well to the production of a fertile narrative characterised by powerful symbols, which are often the bearers of grand messages.

The symbolism of medievalism is its strength, since it conjures up images of timeless virtues, heroism, knights, and battles fought in the name of honourable causes. At the same time, medievalism is responsible for manufacturing customs or practices that, although perceived as century-old traditions, were instead new nineteenth-century creations. This resonates with Eric Hobsbawm's concept of 'the invention of tradition', by which the British historian highlights the process through which traditions were devised in modern times as powerful tools of social representation and identity and were deliberately constructed to serve specific ideological ends.<sup>217</sup>

The role of medievalism in the construction of a historical imagination is very important. It sustains the idea that identity – of an individual or of an entire community – is composed of past and future, as it 'authorizes the presentation of the past as the present for a particular purpose, and therefore situates the present as the threshold of the future.'<sup>218</sup> The dualism inherent in the concept of medievalism, as the act of revisiting and reinventing the past, also applies to the use of the term medievalism, sometimes employed to refer to a cultural phenomenon, and sometimes to indicate the academic discipline of Medieval Studies, out of which medievalism has grown.

The difference between the two disciplines can be summarised as oppositions, where Medieval Studies essentially means 'professional; within the academy; research-based; objective; committed to discovering the authentic past' while medievalism means 'amateur; outside the academy; based on cultural preconceptions; subjective shaped by

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<sup>216</sup> Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*, p. 12.

<sup>217</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism. History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 12.

the individual's needs and desires.'<sup>219</sup> In the nineteenth century, the term medievalism became a label indicating 'less-positivist, "nonscientific" practices'.<sup>220</sup> Its methods and purpose were long considered unworthy of scholarly status. Its 'reputation as an aberration' from the Medieval Studies discipline persisted for a long time.<sup>221</sup>

The antagonism between the two disciplines brings to mind an interesting parallel between the concept of medievalism and that of Orientalism as conceived by Edward W. Said.<sup>222</sup> Said explains that Orientalism is a fundamental component of European material civilization and culture that expresses and represents the Orient 'culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines.'<sup>223</sup> Orientalism is a way of seeing, remembering, imagining and interpreting what is other than European by comparing it to what is indeed European. The similarities between Orientalism and medievalism are evident in that both have enabled individuals to analyse the object of their interest, the Orient or the Middle Ages, from a distance, either geographically or historically.

If Orientalism denotes a geographical separation, medievalism implies a chronological one. Said explains that Orientalism 'is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and [...] "the Occident"' and that Orientalism takes into account the distinction between East and West as 'the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient.'<sup>224</sup> While the justification for Orientalism lies in space, for medievalism it lies in time, as Franco Cardini argues when stating that 'il mondo

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<sup>219</sup> Simmons, *Medievalism and the Quest for the "Real" Middle Ages*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>220</sup> Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>221</sup> Clare Simmons, 'Introduction', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 3 (2000), 1.

<sup>222</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conception of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

<sup>223</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 2.

<sup>224</sup> Said, p. 2.

arabo o centroasiatico dei romantici [era] usato come “altrove” spaziale, esattamente come il medioevo veniva utilizzato quale “altrove” temporale.’<sup>225</sup>

It is in the context of such discursive dichotomy that the identity of medievalism has been shaped. If the area of exploration of Medieval Studies is well defined (i.e. the Middle Ages), this is not true for medievalism, which instead incorporates a wide variety of artistic manifestations as well as cultural ones, and it is difficult to pin down because it changed with the shape of the changed cultural environment. It was only in the 1970s that medievalism began being studied as a distinct field from the scholarly Medieval Studies because it interprets the past with a marked consciousness of the present.<sup>226</sup> At the end of that decade, scholars advocated for the progress of research in the field of medievalism so as to ‘begin the inter-disciplinary study of medievalism as a comprehensive cultural phenomenon, analogous to classicism or romanticism.’<sup>227</sup> However, controversy over the unresolved status of medievalism in opposition to Medieval Studies persisted.

The international debate in the 1970s was echoed in Italy by Umberto Eco whose ‘Il Medioevo è già cominciato’, published in 1973, proved very influential.<sup>228</sup> Eco highlighted the way in which the concept of the Middle Ages can be manipulated to convey specific emotions and to recreate a distinct mood. This led Eco to interrogate himself about why the Middle Ages are so appealing and, most importantly, what, in popular culture, the Middle Ages are made of. ‘Cosa ci vuole per fare un buon Medioevo?’ – Eco asks:

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<sup>225</sup> Franco Cardini, *Dal Medioevo alla Medievistica* (Genova: ECIG, 1989), p. 12.

<sup>226</sup> Leslie J. Workman, ‘Editorial’, *Studies in Medievalism*, 1 (Spring 1979), 1-3 (p. 1).

<sup>227</sup> Workman, ‘Editorial’, p. 2.

<sup>228</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Il Medioevo è già cominciato’, *Documenti su il nuovo Medioevo*, ed. by Umberto Eco, Furio Colombo, Francesco Alberoni, Giuseppe Sacco (Milano: Bompiani, 1973), pp. 5-28. Eco’s essay responded to Italian futurologist Roberto Vacca’s *Il Medioevo prossimo venturo: la degradazione dei grandi sistemi*, that presented an analogy between the Middle Ages and modernity, seen as on the verge of a technological collapse. Roberto Vacca, *Il Medioevo prossimo venturo: la degradazione dei grandi sistemi* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1971).

Anzitutto una grande Pace che si sfalda, un gran potere statale internazionale che aveva unificato il mondo come lingua, costumi, ideologie, religioni, arte e tecnologia e che a un certo punto, per la stessa complessità ingovernabile, crolla. Crolla perché ai confini premono “i barbari”, che non sono necessariamente incolti, ma portano nuovi costumi e nuove visioni del mondo.<sup>229</sup>

It is in the transition between one culture and another ‘che si è maturato l’uomo occidentale moderno’ because ‘al tracollo di una grande Pax subentrano crisi e insicurezze, si urtano civiltà diverse e si disegna lentamente l’immagine di un uomo nuovo.’<sup>230</sup>

Eco’s contribution is significant for two reasons. One is that it signals not just a return of interest in the Middle Ages, but a real ‘moda del Medioevo’ long after the Medieval Revival of the nineteenth century, which, according to Bordone, had essentially ended by the time World War II broke out.<sup>231</sup> The second reason is that it exposes the fluctuating nature of the debate centered on medievalism, considering that, as Giorgio Falco explains, ‘l’età di mezzo ha dato origine a due polemiche di diversa natura: l’una di carattere storiografico, l’altra, metodico’ because the Middle Ages ‘sono stati ora esaltati, ora condannati, secondo gli autori, cattolici o protestanti, secondo i momenti di cultura: rinascimento, riforma, controriforma, illuminismo, romanticismo.’<sup>232</sup> Eco further contributed to the debate with the essay ‘Dieci modi di sognare il Medioevo’ where he argued that the legacy of the Middle Ages (creation of a banking system, class struggle, pauperism, university education, the western concept of love) is very much alive in our world, although they are too often ‘[utilizzati] come

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<sup>229</sup> Eco, ‘Il Medioevo è già Cominciato’, p. 10.

<sup>230</sup> Eco, p. 11.

<sup>231</sup> Bordone, ‘Medioevo oggi’, pp. 263-264.

<sup>232</sup> Giorgio Falco, *La polemica sul Medioevo* (Napoli: Guida, 1977), p. 25

contenitore, per porvi qualcosa che non potrà mai essere radicalmente diverso.<sup>233</sup> Eco attributed the need to recurrently revisit the Middle Ages to an eternal search for our roots and our identity.<sup>234</sup>

The 1990s brought a revisionist approach to the field of Medieval Studies.<sup>235</sup> The *New Medievalism* was characterised by ‘a predisposition to interrogate and reformulate assumptions about the discipline of medieval studies broadly conceived,’ that is, to rethink the traditional categories that for too long have defined the opposition between medievalism and Medieval Studies.<sup>236</sup> Post-structuralism freed the latter from the traditional taxonomy imposed by the invention of the discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the result that, for example, literature ceased to be viewed as an autonomous category of hierarchical genres where epic is at the summit and courtly romance is at the opposite

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<sup>233</sup> Eco compiles a taxonomy of the multiple meanings of medievalism and enumerates ten different ways in which the Middle Ages have been and are utilised. The Middle Ages can be used as a pretext and a backdrop like in melodrama (‘maniera e pretesto’); as ironical revisitation of a past that is lost forever (‘rivisitazione ironica’); as representing a world ruled by Good and Evil, the Dark Ages *par excellence* (‘luogo barbarico’). Castles, cathedrals in ruins, stormy and gloomy atmosphere, the ossianic and neogothic facets of the Middle Ages, are classified by Eco in the ‘medioevo romantico,’ whereas medieval philosophical thought and doctrines constitute the ‘medioevo della philosophia perennis.’ The sixth category, or ‘medioevo delle identità nazionali’, includes Scott and ‘tutti i risorgimentali, che vedevano negli evi fulgidi della riscossa comunale un modello vincente di lotta contro il dominio straniero.’ The ‘medioevo carducciano’ from the late nineteenth-century is, instead, interested in the Middle Ages as they represent an antidote to modernity, and that includes figures such as Carducci, Ruskin, William Morris and the English Pre-Raphaelites. After this, according to Eco, is Ludovico Antonio Muratori’s interpretation of the Middle Ages as an era that ‘non si può ridurre a un cliché e va riscoperta nella sua pluralità, nel suo pluralismo e nelle sue contraddizioni’ and that aims at a ‘comprensione critica più che al riutilizzo passionale.’ The last two categories are ‘medioevo della Tradizione’ and ‘medioevo dell’attesa del Millennio’. The first deals with the tradition of an ancient knowledge; the second with the incessant fear of global destruction, whether caused by mysterious forces or by world wars. See Umberto Eco, ‘Dieci modi di sognare il Medioevo’, *Sugli specchi e altri saggi* (Milano: Bompiani, 1985), pp. 78-89.

<sup>234</sup> A similar classification of the diverse interpretations and uses of the Middle Ages is present in an essay about medievalism and nineteenth-century Germany. Here the author distinguishes between five types of medievalism: ‘cosmopolitan’ or pre-national medievalism; ‘Christian-German’ or national conservative medievalism; ‘national-liberal medievalism’; ‘escapist medievalism’; and ‘official medievalism.’ These categories broadly match Eco’s, although different social and historical contingencies between Italy and Germany account for different occurrences of medievalism. Nonetheless, it indicates a general common trend in nineteenth-century European medievalism. See David E. Barclay, ‘Medievalism and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany’, *Studies in Medievalism*, 5, (1993), 5-22.

<sup>235</sup> Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols, eds., *The New Medievalism* (Baltimore and London: The Hopkins University Press, 1991).

<sup>236</sup> Stephen G. Nichols, ‘The New Medievalism: Tradition and Discontinuity in Medieval Culture’, in *The New Medievalism*, ed. by Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 1.

end.<sup>237</sup> In this post-structural liberation one can see the creation of other branches of learning among which medievalism can find its place and where the medieval discourse as a whole becomes ‘a manifestation of a culture to be reconstructed afresh.’<sup>238</sup>

In the span of a short period of time, medievalism gained popularity and the study of medieval literature and culture reached an unprecedented innovating stage.<sup>239</sup> As the number of publications on the subject visibly increased in the 1990s, scholars of the Middle Ages became progressively more aware that their assumptions about such period were historically determined and framed by nineteenth-century perceptions of a medievalist’s area of research.<sup>240</sup> New studies published in this period challenged the principles of historical authenticity and objectivity and exposed how medievalists shaped our perception of the Middle Ages by including personal, generational, and societal preoccupations into their supposedly impartial research.<sup>241</sup> Other studies, instead, actively proposed an interdisciplinary and cross-national approach to the field.<sup>242</sup> These contributions further contested the nineteenth-century model of scientific history and separation of disciplines, and they supported the idea that subjectivity, personal interpretation, and sensibility are essential constituents of the contemporary understanding of the Middle Ages.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Nichols, ‘The New Medievalism’, p. 2.

<sup>238</sup> Nichols, p. 2.

<sup>239</sup> R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols, eds., *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Bloch and Nichols, *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, p. 2.

<sup>241</sup> See for example, Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Morrow 1991).

<sup>242</sup> Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Making the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1998).

<sup>243</sup> Simmons, *Medievalism and the Quest for the “Real” Middle Ages*, p. 16.

### **3.2 New trends in Medieval historiography of the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

For a long time the historiographic research of the Enlightenment was seen as having no bearing on the process of re-evaluation of the Middle Ages, and the Romantic fixation with this age was regarded as an isolated phenomenon.<sup>244</sup> However, it was during the Enlightenment that the concept of the Middle Ages acquired the specific notion of the historical period that occurred ‘fra la decadenza delle lettere, delle arti, delle scienze, delle istituzioni politiche e degli ordinamenti civili e il loro risorgere con l’umanesimo, il rinascimento.’<sup>245</sup> In order to assess the impact of the Middle Ages on the Italian *Ottocento*, the traditional antagonism between Enlightenment and Romanticism must be overcome by observing the connection between the historiography of the Enlightenment and the revival of the Middle Ages in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>246</sup>

Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750) is among the most prominent historians who contributed to redefining the concept of the Middle Ages in the eighteenth-century.<sup>247</sup> Apart from providing a clear chronological time frame of the medieval aeon, in his work Muratori redefined the essence of the Middle Ages and presented them as the period of time ‘in cui vivono e si affermano valori spirituali, politici, sociali, che vanno considerati e attentamente studiati per aver più chiaro lo sviluppo dell’età

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<sup>244</sup> Ludovico Gatto, *Viaggio intorno al concetto di Medioevo* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1977), p. 8. Gatto also adds that the break with the medieval epoch is to be placed in the second half of the eighteenth century, during the age of Positivism when ‘ci si scaglia apertamente contro il Medioevo, considerato a tutti gli effetti epoca di fanatismo, di barbarie, di oscurantismo, di superstizione [...] sono proprio i filosofi positivi, i quali in nome del progresso, della tecnica, della scienza recidono completamente ogni residuo contatto con un mondo [...] criticato ma non del tutto categoricamente respinto’, p. 9.

<sup>245</sup> Mario Scotti, ‘Il Medioevo nell’Illuminismo’, in *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo, 1, Il Medioevo latino, Vol. IV L’attualizzazione del testo*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo, Claudio Leonardi, and Enrico Menestò (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1997), p. 143.

<sup>246</sup> Enrico Artifoni, ‘Il Medioevo nel Romanticismo. Forme della storiografia tra sette e ottocento’, in *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo, 1, Il Medioevo latino, Vol. IV L’attualizzazione del testo*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo, Claudio Leonardi, and Enrico Menestò (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1997), pp. 175-221 (p. 175).

<sup>247</sup> In 1700 Muratori began working as an archivist and librarian for the Estense family in Modena. During this time his most significant works about the Medieval era were written. It was during the completion of the work commissioned by the Estense family, which would later become the *Antichità Estensi* (1717: vol. I; 1740: vol. II), that Muratori conceived the idea of other comprehensive projects: *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores ab anno aerae christianae 500 ad annum 1500* (1723-1738), and *Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevi* (1738-1741).

moderna.<sup>248</sup> Muratori presents the Middle Ages as no longer an interruption between the ancient and modern worlds, but rather as a continuity, a phase of evolution during which traditions, social practices, and values, as well as certain types of institutions (i.e., banks) became established.<sup>249</sup> Whereas the long historical period of the so-called barbarian invasions was marginalised because it did not compare to the splendour of the Greek and Roman epochs, at the same time, ‘se ne coglievano positivamente gli aspetti di operosità, di governo, di ordine, che non interruppero mai veramente la condizione di vita civile.’<sup>250</sup>

In the first volume of his *Antichità Estensi* (1717), Muratori openly asserts that the origins of modern Europe must be located in the times of the barbarian invasions: ‘è da dire non esserci ragione, per cui abbia principe veruno da sdegnar di trar l’origine sua dall’antica Germania e dai Longobardi [...] Se vi porremo ben mente, scorgeremo procedere da quella gran Provincia – cioè dalla Germania – la maggior parte dell’antica nobiltà ch’oggi resta in Europa.’<sup>251</sup> The same concept is reiterated in Muratori’s other works, the *Rerum* and the *Antiquitates*. Particularly in the latter, this idea is reinforced when Muratori declares that the present can only be known and understood if the past is also known and understood: ‘Tanti non solo sacri, ma famigliari e politici riti sono presso di noi, l’origine dei quali, non ai Romani, ma ai barbarici tempi dee riferirsi.’<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Gatto, *Viaggio intorno al concetto di Medioevo*, p. 114.

<sup>249</sup> Elisa Occhipinti, *Che cos’è il Medioevo?* (Bologna: Cisalpino, 1994), p. 102.

<sup>250</sup> Occhipinti, *Che cos’è il Medioevo?*, p. 102.

<sup>251</sup> Quoted in Giorgio Falco, ‘L. A. Muratori e il preilluminismo’, *La cultura illuministica in Italia*, ed. by Mario Fubini, (Torino: Edizioni Radio Italiana, 1957), p. 37.

<sup>252</sup> Falco, ‘L. A. Muratori e il preilluminismo’, p. 37.

Following the principle of accuracy and truth-seeking, Muratori conducted meticulous archival research.<sup>253</sup> He directed his attention toward ‘testimonianze scritte, in ispecie i diplomi e i placiti, unendo ad essi lo studio della sfragistica, dei sigilli, così importanti per stabilir l’autenticità o meno delle pergamene.’<sup>254</sup> Muratori favoured documents by writers who described their time and isolated what was fabricated by the authors from what could be documented and therefore proved.<sup>255</sup> Bertelli clarifies Muratori’s approach by saying that ‘il problema predominante era il superamento dell’empiria antiquaria, piuttosto che non la ricerca di una sistemazione teorica della propria storiografia.’<sup>256</sup> Muratori was conscious of his role as promoter of a new method of historical investigation aiming at uncovering the historically accurate by purging it of ‘quanto nella storia medievale fosse rito, leggenda, costume, folklore.’<sup>257</sup>

By and large, during the eighteenth century, the Middle Ages were still considered a dark era riddled with illiteracy and superstition, but their reputation began changing thanks to new historical research like Muratori’s. Pietro Giannone (1676-1748) and Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) also played a role in the process of reappreciation of the Medieval aeon. Giannone’s aim was to investigate the origins of Europe’s laws, habits and traditions, reigns and republican organisations with the clear awareness that

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<sup>253</sup> Truth was indeed Muratori’s highest principle. Falco clarifies that in all his writings, Muratori ‘professa con assoluta fermezza la Verità del Vangelo, di cui unica interprete è, per istituzione divina, la Chiesa, e fonda su di essa il suo sistema di vita e di pensiero, e da essa deriva il suo credo civile della rassegnazione [...]. Per il Muratori due sono le discipline indispensabili all’uomo: la teologia cristiana e la filosofia dei costumi [...] mentre la teologia ha una posizione suprema e un ambito circoscritto alle grandi Verità della fede secondo il magistero della Chiesa, la filosofia dei costumi [...] spazia ampiamente sui problemi della politica, dell’economia familiare, della morale individuale, ed ha a sue ministre la retorica, la poesia, la storia. | Se la fede del Muratori è la più rigorosa ortodossia cattolica, la sua vita è tutta spesa a far trionfare i nuovi ideali della filosofia dei costumi, o, come altrimenti potremmo dire, della coscienza civile’. Falco, pp. 23-25.

<sup>254</sup> Sergio Bertelli, *Erudizione e storia in L. A. Muratori* (Napoli: Nella sede dell’Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1960), p. 366.

<sup>255</sup> Muratori selected ‘parti singole, scartando quanto ai suoi occhi è leggenda, e ritenendo maggiormente ciò che riguarda invece atti e avvenimenti pubblici contemporanei a chi scrive, sottoponendo a critica, sempre, i motivi e le cause che vengono adottati a commento dei singoli fatti.’ See Bertelli, *Erudizione e storia in L. A. Muratori*, p. 368.

<sup>256</sup> Bertelli, p. 373.

<sup>257</sup> Bertelli, pp. 394-395.

modern states had their origins in medieval times.<sup>258</sup> As early as the second decade of the eighteenth century, his voice in *Istoria civile del regno di Napoli* (1723) was tinged with nationalistic tones as he urged all people to ‘sentire concordemente nel senso dell’interesse generale’ as ‘una forza ideale capace di esercitare, non solo sul ceto dirigente ma anche nella moltitudine, un influsso sollecitatore di concordi energie morali.’<sup>259</sup>

In a different way, Giambattista Vico examined the Middle Ages with the desire to warn against their potential return, which, as Giarrizzo explains, is a ‘minaccia psicologica prima ancora che un’esigenza storiografica: conoscerlo può voler dire liberarsene.’<sup>260</sup> As Gatto noted, Vico distinguished between two different kinds of barbarity in *Scienza nuova* (1725):

uno di barbarie vigorosa, in certo qual modo corroborante e salutare, ed uno cosiddetto della riflessione, insidiosa e pericolosa per l’umanità. Proprio per uscire da tale seconda forma di regresso, era necessario tuffarsi di nuovo nella religione, nella fede, nella verità perché solo questo avrebbe potuto condurre ad un nuovo modello di incivilimento.<sup>261</sup>

According to Gatto, this is Vico’s interpretation of the Middle Ages and of the human and cultural decline they represent: they are not seen as an era of complete regression, but as a transient phase of slow but certain growth. Vico’s ‘interesse erudito’ in the Middle Ages, as much as of other historians of the Enlightenment, helped shape a specific approach to the understanding of that era.<sup>262</sup> It also exposed the fabric of a complex historical period and contributed to the popularisation and reevaluation of key episodes from medieval Italian history.

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<sup>258</sup> Scotti, ‘Il Medioevo nell’Illuminismo’, pp. 20-21.

<sup>259</sup> Giuseppe Giarrizzo, ‘Alle origini della Medievistica moderna (Vico, Giannone, Muratori)’, *Bullettino dell’istituto italiano per il Medioevo e archivio muratoriano*, 74 (1962), 20.

<sup>260</sup> Giarrizzo, pp. 11-12.

<sup>261</sup> Gatto, p. 104.

<sup>262</sup> See Scotti, ‘Il Medioevo nell’Illuminismo’, p. 145.

### **3.3 Medieval historiography and political rhetoric**

One such episode goes under the name ‘questione longobarda,’ and focused on the Longobards’ occupation of most of the Italian peninsula between the sixth and the seventh century A.D. Whereas the controversy originated long before the Romantic period, it dominated the debate of the first half of the 1800s, in part because of the participation of personalities of the calibre of Alessandro Manzoni. The argument was whether to consider the Longobard’s presence in Italy as either responsible for the country’s cultural, political, and moral regressions, or if they had encouraged the resurgence that culminated in the Renaissance thanks to their progressive integration with native Italian populations.

Especially between the 1830s and the 1850s, crucial years for the Italian nation-building process, the ‘questione longobarda’ attracted considerable attention and produced polarised opinions because it had strong nationalistic ramifications. Accepting that the barbarian invaders and their domination favourably set things in motion for the gradual rebirth of Italy meant repudiating the ethnic origin and distinctive Italian character of the population of the peninsula because it was essentially ‘un giudizio sulla storia d’Italia: erano in gioco la sua coloritura nazionale o germanica.’<sup>263</sup> Construing the Longobard invasions as catastrophic or as beneficial to the political and cultural development of Italy would either support or undermine the movement for independence from foreign occupation that was arising in Italy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a result, conflicting interpretations about the barbarian invasion could sabotage the legitimacy of the Italian national movement.

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<sup>263</sup> Enrico Artifoni, ‘Il Medioevo nel Romanticismo’, pp. 209-210. See also, Paolo Delogu, ‘Longobardi e Bizantini in Italia’, in *La storia. I grandi problemi dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea, II, Il Medioevo: 2. Popoli e strutture politiche*, ed. by Nicola Tranfaglia e Massimo Firpo (Torino: UTET, 1986), pp. 145-170.

The expression ‘questione longobarda’ indicates an ongoing debate and controversy that started in the early sixteenth century and lasted until the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>264</sup> Falco indicates that the starting point of this discussion can be traced to Machiavelli, who in his *Istorie Fiorentine* (1525) wrote: ‘Erano stati i Longobardi due cento trentadue anni in Italia e di già non ritenevano di forestieri altro che il nome.’<sup>265</sup> The Longobards and the Italian population had integrated so effortlessly that all differences but the name had been levelled. Similarly, eighteenth-century historians like the above-mentioned Ludovico Antonio Muratori, Pietro Giannone, et al., offered a positive interpretation of the Longobard domination as mild and permissive to the so-called ‘romano-italici.’<sup>266</sup> They emphasized the progressive amalgamation between the Romans and the Germans and praised the Longobard legislation, its judicial system and the process of modernisation it introduced.<sup>267</sup>

The ‘questione longobarda’ was profoundly Italian in certain respects. Since the barbarians’ domination extended well into the age of the *comuni* (from the late eleventh to the thirteenth century), the very nature of this form of government, seen as quintessentially Italian, was also at stake. Artifoni explains that:

Da un lato, postulare nell’invasione il naufragio di ogni ordinamento civile significava negare radici secolari – dal punto di vista istituzionale – alla riuscita più alta del Medioevo italiano, l’età dei comuni; e d’altro canto, supporre invece continuità di ordinamenti attraverso l’alto Medioevo fino alla rinascita urbana significava attenuare il carattere eversivo del periodo germanico, e portava ad attribuire al regno longobardo la volontà di conservare – e magari di integrare originalmente – i funzionamenti di ascendenza latina.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> See Giorgio Falco, ‘La questione longobarda e la moderna storiografia italiana’, in *Pagine sparse di storia e di vita* (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1960), pp. 11-26.

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in Falco, p. 11.

<sup>266</sup> Artifoni, pp. 210-211.

<sup>267</sup> According to Falco, the interpretation of eighteenth-century historians was excessively tinted with optimism, and their enthusiasm for the legislation of the invaders was only a ‘polemica della ragione contro l’opinione, del moderno contro l’antico.’ In addition, Falco specifies that, during the Enlightenment, other thinkers and historians did not share a similar opinion. There were, in fact, ‘voci discordi, e voci molto autorevoli, come quella di Scipione Maffei, di Giuseppe Rovelli, di Girolamo Tiraboschi, che non credono a quel paradiso longobardo. [Essi] esprimono un occasionale dissenso di natura scientifica’, pp. 19-20.

<sup>268</sup> Artifoni, p. 212.

Whether the Longobards had halted or at least hindered the transformation and evolution of Italy as a unified country after the Romans or had in the end integrated with the native population and adjusted to their institutions, a coherent Italian character of the *comuni* was being challenged.

In *Discorso sur alcuni punti della storia longobardica in Italia* Manzoni expressed an opposing viewpoint. The *Discorso* provided an explanation of the idea of the Middle Ages that had inspired the 1822 tragedy it was published with, *Adelchi*.<sup>269</sup> Especially interested in confuting the positive interpretation of eighteenth-century historiography, Manzoni claims that foreign invaders had not assimilated with the native Italian populations.<sup>270</sup> On the contrary, the two had remained consistently separate: ‘Due popoli viventi nello stesso paese, e diversi di nome, di lingua, di vestiario, d’interessi, e in parte di leggi, tale è lo stato in cui, per un tempo, né definito, né definibile, si trovò quasi tutta l’Europa, dopo l’invasioni e gli stabilimenti de’ barbari.’<sup>271</sup> Manzoni did not believe in the peaceful integration of these populations and cultures, but rather recognized the coexistence of Longobards and Roman-Italians.<sup>272</sup>

The ‘questione longobarda’ represents a powerful example of the unresolved nature of the debate about the origins of the Italians and their institutions. For some scholars, it perfectly illustrates the Romantic interest in the Middle Ages and the birth of the Italian nationalistic movement.<sup>273</sup> It also indicates the desire to investigate the origins

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<sup>269</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, *Adelchi, tragedia di Alessandro Manzoni. Con un discorso sur alcuni punti della storia longobardica in Italia* (Milano: Ferrario, 1822). It was republished in 1847 as *Discorso sopra alcuni punti della storia longobardica in Italia*, now in: Alessandro Manzoni, *Tutte le Opere, II*, ed. by M. Martelli (Firenze: Sansoni, 1973). All future references are based on this edition.

<sup>270</sup> Falco, p. 20.

<sup>271</sup> Manzoni, p. 1987.

<sup>272</sup> See Massimiliano Pavan, ‘La fine dell’impero Romano nel giudizio di Alessandro Manzoni’, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 2 (1958), p. 176. See also, Gian Piero Bognetti, ‘La Genesi dell’ “Adelchi” e del “Discorso” e il pensiero storico e politico del Manzoni fino al 1821’, *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, 8.3 (1951-1952), 45-153, and Gian Piero Bognetti, ‘I ministri romani dei re longobardi e un’opinione di A. Manzoni’, *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, 8.1 (1948-1949), 10-24.

<sup>273</sup> See Artifoni, p. 217.

of the Italian identity, which encouraged the retrieval of figures and episodes in Italian medieval history that could be interpreted as specifically Italian.

One historical figure that received considerable attention was the German emperor Frederick I (1123 ca. – 1190) known in Italy as Federico Barbarossa. In the 1820s, when Barbarossa was being praised in Germany as the *pater patriae* and becoming a symbol of the German national movement, the Italian Romantics saw him as the prototype of the foreign tyrant and opponent to Italian freedom.<sup>274</sup> In Italy, Barbarossa emerged as part of the history of the movement for independence of the Communes that the German emperor attempted to halt. As a consequence, Barbarossa came to represent an antagonist to liberty. His infamy grew in connection with the way northern Italians of the time attempted to resist the German invader between his first arrival in Italy (around 1160) and the peace of Costanza (1183). Two events in particular stood out: the formation of the ‘Lega Lombarda’ (1167) and the battle of Legnano (1176).<sup>275</sup>

Between 1821 and 1849, ideals of freedom and independence were strongly felt and propaganda against foreign occupation was growing. The history of Italians fighting against the German commander strongly paralleled the socio-political fragmentation of northern Italy. At this time, the ideological use of medieval history became a powerful tool of nationalist propaganda. Cardini underlines that northern Italian patriotism, aggravated by the Austrian regime, turned the history of the Lombard League in ‘un episodio la cui emblematicità politica va forse al di là della [...] sua effettiva importanza storica’ and made ‘Legnano il simbolo e l’anticipazione delle “giornate del nostro riscatto”.’<sup>276</sup> The anti-Germanic movement of northern Italy that had grown stronger

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<sup>274</sup> See Franco Cardini, ‘Federico Barbarossa e il Romanticismo italiano’, in *Il medioevo nell’Ottocento in Italia e in Germania*, ed. by Reinhard Elze and Pierangelo Schiera (Bologna: Società editrice Il Mulino, e Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1988), pp. 83-126.

<sup>275</sup> Cardini, ‘Federico Barbarossa’, p. 84.

<sup>276</sup> Cardini, p. 85.

during the Restoration period found an outlet of expression in these two historical episodes.

According to Ernesto Sestan, the key reasons for the popularity of the Lombard League and Battle of Legnano episodes in the early nineteenth century are firstly that it was a military victory of Italians against foreigners (and not one of the several battles amongst Italians). Secondly, it represented the victory of not one single town, but of a league of municipalities, which could stand as symbol for the whole country. Thirdly, the foreigner was a German seen as ‘sinonimo dell’austriaco, impersonato ora in Italia con la molteplicità delle sue genti eterogenee sì, ma cooperanti ad una politica dinastica d’impronta tedesca.’<sup>277</sup> The two historical events represented the essence of the history of Italy, the *exemplum vitae* necessary to construct a historical narrative connecting past, present and future and intended to feed popular imagination and incite patriotic fervour.<sup>278</sup> The celebration of the Lombard League and the Battle of Legnano as key episodes in the history of Italy began in works of literature. Eighteenth-century historiography only hinted at these events, whereas early nineteenth-century culture transformed history into poetic material.<sup>279</sup>

Giovanni Berchet’s *Fantasie* (1829) centres on the character of an exiled man – just like Berchet was at the time – who dreams of his homeland. Among his visions, those of the Lombard league founded in Pontida and the Battle of Legnano are particularly compelling. In the 1829 introductory chapter to the London edition entitled ‘Ragguagli storici,’ Berchet points out that ‘nostre sono veramente le glorie degli italici repubblicani

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<sup>277</sup> Ernesto Sestan, ‘Legnano nella storiografia romantica’, in *Scritti vari. Storiografia dell’Otto e Novecento*, ed. by G. Pinto (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1991), p. 230.

<sup>278</sup> Mario Fubini, ‘La Lega Lombarda nella letteratura dell’Ottocento’, in *Popolo e stato in Italia nell’età di Federico Barbarossa. Alessandria e la Lega Lombarda. XXXIII Congresso Subalpino per la celebrazione dell’VIII Centenario della Fondazione di Alessandria* (Torino: Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, 1970), pp. 406-407.

<sup>279</sup> See Sestan, p. 318, and Cardini, pp. 86-87.

[...] l'epoca la più nobile forse e la più mirabile; quella certamente del più importante momento [...] in cui la penisola [...] poteva liberamente decretare l'assoluta sua indipendenza in futuro.<sup>280</sup> Accordingly, Berchet writes:

– L'han giurato. Gli ho visti in Pontida  
convenuti dal monte, dal piano.  
L'han giurato; e si strinser la mano  
cittadini di venti città.  
Oh spettacol di gioia! I lombardi  
son concordi, serrati a una lega.  
Lo straniero al pennon ch'ella spiega  
col suo sangue la tinta darà.<sup>281</sup>

The appeal addressed to his fellow citizens to engage in a real battle against the Germans for the sake of independence comes next:

Su! nell'irto, increscioso Allemanno,  
su! lombardi, puntate la spada [...]  
Presto, all'armi! Chi ha un ferro l'affili;  
chi un sopruso patì sel ricordi.  
Via da noi questo branco d'ingordi! [...]  
Questa terra ch'ei calca insolente,  
questa terra ei morda caduto;  
a lei volga l'estremo saluto,  
e sia il lagno dell'uomo che muor. —<sup>282</sup>

It is interesting to observe that Berchet's *Fantasia* is not an authentic historical document. As a poet, his mission 'non è di rappresentargli [al lettore] un fatto storico quale precisamente fu, ma è solo di suscitare in lui qualche cosa di simile all'impressione, al sentimento, all'affetto che susciterebbe in lui la presenza reale di quel fatto.'<sup>283</sup> His work is evocative of a bygone age. It expresses the author's nostalgia for an idealized past and is one of many powerful examples of the recuperation of the Middle Ages and particular episodes of medieval Italian history in aid of the construction of nationalism sentiment.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Giovanni Berchet, *Le fantasie, romanza* (Londra: nella stamperia di R. Taylor, Shoe-Lane, 1829), pp. 5-6.

<sup>281</sup> Berchet, *Le fantasie, romanza*, p. 31.

<sup>282</sup> Berchet, p. 33.

<sup>283</sup> Giovanni Berchet, *Raccolta completa delle poesie* (Londra: [s.n.], 1848), p. 15.

<sup>284</sup> Fubini, p. 407.

This explicitly demonstrates how patriotic intentions could transcend historical evidence, a technique later appropriated and manipulated as well by representatives of the neo-Guelph movement. This is the case with Terenzo Mariani's *A Dio in commemorazione della Lega Lombarda* published in 1842. It is especially evident in Vincenzo Gioberti's *Primato morale e civile degli italiani*, where the author indicates that the entire history of Italy is essentially a series of leagues, and that the Lombard League led by the Pontiff as peacemaker was the most significant of all.<sup>285</sup> By the same token, the *Storia della Lega Lombarda* by padre Tosti, dedicated to Pope Pius IX and published in 1848, strongly emphasized the direct parallelism between the formation of the Lombard League and the historical circumstances of his time.<sup>286</sup> Essentially, the characteristic that runs through all these accounts and variously subjective interpretations of the Lombard League is the urge to present historical instances of heroism and patriotism, that is of specific codes of values, so as to inspire the people and lead them by example.

### **Conclusion**

The manifestation of medievalism in the first half of the nineteenth century must be considered as a phenomenon grounded in the historiography of the eighteenth century. The medieval revival sprang from a precise interest in the medieval period and from a process of revisionism that refuted the image of the Middle Ages as a dark era in the history of the western world. Italian eighteenth-century historians, among whom

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<sup>285</sup> See Fubini, p. 410.

<sup>286</sup> Fubini, pp. 412-413.

Muratori was the most prominent, pioneered new historiographic research aimed at locating the origins of modern Europe in that time.

Not only did such research advance knowledge of the Middle Ages, it also contributed to the development of the discipline of Medieval Studies and its characterization as an exact field of study based on documentable facts. By contrast, the historiographic advancement that took place during the Enlightenment also helped define medievalism, that is the act of creatively re-imagining the Middle Ages, as a non-academic discipline, amateurish and imprecise, but rich in creative potential. The uncertain status of medievalism and the academic world's disdain toward it persevered for a long time, until well into the second half of the twentieth century and impacted the critical appreciation of the Italian historical novels, of which a significant selection is presented and analysed in the following chapters. It was only in the 1970s that a new wave of critical publications, both international and specific to Italian culture, advocated for a higher status of the discipline that focuses on the way the Middle Ages have been appropriated in different time periods. At that point, medievalism was promoted as a historical entity, as the way in which Western culture created a mythological narrative of its origins and essentially its identity.

The process of counter-revisionism that took place during the 1970s highlighted how medievalism was used as a powerful discourse in early nineteenth-century Italy to foster historical appreciation for the resilient Italian character and, as a result, disseminate nationalistic ideals. The debate generated by the 'questione longobarda' as well as the historical episodes of the Battle of Legnano, the Pontida oath, and the figure of Frederick I as the incarnation of the foreign enemy to be fought served as *exempla* to inspire a sense of nationalistic duty among Italians. Increasingly, Italian medieval history served as a platform for the dissemination of ideas of freedom, sovereignty, unity, and

to educate the people. Such pedagogical function was a distinctive characteristic of historical novels of the Risorgimento, which was made possible thanks to the innovative use of the literary medium of the novel as a didactic tool. This as well as the definition of what constitutes the medieval canon of historical novels is the subject of the next chapter.

#### **4. FRAMING NATIONALIST CULTURE IN THE RISORGIMENTO**

##### **Introduction**

As noted earlier, the critical reception of the Italian historical novel has proved rather static in its recurring consideration of the historical novel as a sub-genre in Italian literature. The cultural impact of this phenomenon must be reconsidered in light of the vast literary success these novels enjoyed in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. I suggest reading historical novels of the Italian *Ottocento* in a different light, not as works of high literature, but rather as expressions of well-defined cultural and aesthetic tendencies that contributed to the rise of an Italian nationalistic culture and furthered the discourse on national identity. To this end, in the present chapter, I outline a methodological approach to the analysis of historical novels based on a selection of highly popular works published in a relatively short span of time, 1827-1840, which formed what I call the Italian medieval canon. The defining feature of historical novels published between these dates is medievalism, understood as an all-encompassing discourse through which values, myths and symbols connected with the Italian past acquired new meaning; specifically, the revival of the code of chivalry. In the nineteenth century the Middle Ages served as a ‘battleground for the clash between competing visions of what the nation had been and what it should be.’<sup>287</sup> At the same time, medievalism – and in particular medievalism as it emerged in historical prose fiction – sustained the construction of a past ‘around which people could unite, but it also demonstrated just how difficult that unity could be to achieve in the present.’<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>288</sup> Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, p. 35.

This interest in knighthood and chivalry, and, more importantly, its distinctive value system, helped define the unique image of the Middle Ages that was revived in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Chivalric ethics started emerging towards the end of the medieval period, around 1100 AD, and reached its peak during the age of the ongoing battles between England and France, around 1500 AD.<sup>289</sup> By then chivalry had become largely institutionalized, recognized, and accepted. The nineteenth-century interest in the Middle Ages gravitated precisely to this period of time, which covers approximately half of the conventional duration of that age, concentrating on the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Age (1400/1500).

The interpretation of the concept of chivalry elaborated in the first half of the 1800s, although largely perceived as medieval in its historical sense, was only partly so. This ambiguity is rooted in the fact that the nineteenth-century myth of chivalry was comprised, says Bordone, of two components: ‘la realtà storica di una condizione di vita e l’elaborazione ideologica che [...] la trasfigura e la ripropone come esempio, trasformandone di fatto la sostanza.’<sup>290</sup> In turn, medievalism as a cultural phenomenon acquired a distinctive chivalric connotation, whose attractiveness is still perceptible today. The knight as the representative of the institution of knighthood became synonymous with the Middle Ages and with all things medieval. As already indicated in chapter 2 above, this peculiar connotation of the term medieval is reflected in the time frame of historical novels published during the early Risorgimento period.<sup>291</sup>

The first section in this chapter is dedicated to defining the medieval canon and the rationale behind the selection of the novels. In the second section I introduce each author in the medieval canon and present a brief but detailed account of their lives and

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<sup>289</sup> Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 238.

<sup>290</sup> Renato Bordone, “Armeria, armature, cavalieri: Medioevo sognato e Medioevo storico”, in *Il convitato di ferro*, ed. by Dario Lanzardo (Torino: Il Quadrante Edizioni, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>291</sup> See section 2.3.

achievements as writers in order to frame the context in which their novels were conceived. This will clarify two main aspects of the literary production within the medieval canon. Firstly, historical novels of the early phases of the Risorgimento period were written by individuals whose chief occupation was not that of the writer and who, in most cases, had not previously authored other novels. Secondly, the four authors on whom I focus my analysis were deeply connected among themselves, as friends and regulars of the same circles, supporting a contextual reading of their work. The concurrence of these two factors confers a distinctive and unique quality to the medieval canon and it helps define it as a proper corpus.

The last section in this chapter explores the relationship between the role of the narrator in the novel and the narrative techniques used by the authors to attract readers' interest, create an ideal bond with them, and educate them not only on episodes of their national history, but also on a proper form of conduct. The analysis will uncover similarities in the way the authors constructed their plots around the key figure of the narrator. In spite of their being strictly alien to the action of the story, narrators in these novels exhibit attributes that blur the line of demarcation between fixed narrative categories. Their presence is felt throughout the novels, in that narrators act as primary agents in the process of historical and cultural education, but they also equate themselves with the readers or stand as creators of the stories, and, as such, their roles coincide with that of the authors.

#### **4.1 The medieval canon of Risorgimento historical novels**

In *La nazione del Risorgimento* Italian historian Alberto M. Banti collects and analyses an assortment of texts (poems, prose, political pamphlets, popular songs, operas, etc.)

that represented the privileged means of expression for patriots, whose demonstration of support for Italian unification was controlled and limited by censorship.<sup>292</sup> Banti uses the expression ‘canone risorgimentale’ to indicate the collection of writings that sustained Italians’ aspirations for independence during the nineteenth century. Writing (and reading) about a unified country quickly became – Banti argues – a substitute for active political commitment.<sup>293</sup>

In the short period of time between the years 1827 and 1840, Italian historical novels served as a catalyst for various cultural impulses (i.e. return of interest in historiographic research, medievalism, genre of the novel, patriotic aspirations), which, combined together in the space of the historical novel and accentuated by the widespread availability of these literary products on the market (as well as their structural similarities displayed in the repetition of themes and motifs), created new interest in things medieval and captivated the interest of a substantial readership.

Drawing on Banti’s expression, I deliberately employ the expression medieval canon to designate a specific textual corpus comprising four of the most popular Italian historical novels derived from the larger production of novels published between the 1820s-1840s.<sup>294</sup> This representative literary sample will allow for a comparative analysis in these works, so as to unveil the analogies, which are certainly striking in their frequency and repetitiveness. Given the predominant role of the Milanese cultural environment in the Italian publishing panorama of the nineteenth century, already noted in chapter 2, the medieval canon includes works by authors who were either natives of Milan or surrounding areas or were culturally formed in the Milanese circles. As the following two

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<sup>292</sup> Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell’Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), pp. 44-55.

<sup>293</sup> See also, Alberto M. Banti e Roberto Bizzocchi, eds., *Immagini della nazione nell’Italia del Risorgimento* (Roma: Carocci, 2002).

<sup>294</sup> See section 2.3 above for detailed information about the production of historical novels, Also, see the Appendix below for a detailed bibliography of the publication history of each novel.

sections in this chapter clarify, these four authors participated in the same literary circles, exchanged ideas and read each other's works, which corroborates the idea of a real, albeit not recognised, literary movement. Novels in the medieval canon are: *Il castello di Trezzo* (1827) by Giambattista Bazzoni; *Ettore Fieramosca* (1833) by Massimo d'Azeglio; *Marco Visconti* (1834) by Tommaso Grossi; and *Margherita Pusterla* (1838) by Cesare Cantù.<sup>295</sup>

Banti's study does not take into consideration these historical novels and it does not connect their circulation with medievalism and the process of Italian identity formation in the nineteenth century. Banti's disquisition, illuminating as it is, offers a broader perspective (because of the wider range of material selected and the longer time-span it covers) on the phenomenon of Italian nationalism and, only tangentially, medievalism. As Lucy Riall remarks, Banti's 'culturalist' approach clarifies the creation of the idea of the nation in Restoration Italy, but it neglects to clarify the role played by activists in 'extracting [...] manipulating and popularising, this cultural manifestation.'<sup>296</sup> I argue that this can be achieved by means of an analysis of recurring narrative motifs typical of Risorgimento historical novels where the discourses of medievalism and nationalism intertwine. By manipulating medieval history and strategically using the novel as a direct means of communication between authors and readers, historical novels

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<sup>295</sup> For the purpose of my research, I wanted to stay as close as possible to the original novels, the ones the authors had printed in the first place. This was important especially in consideration of the alterations, authorised or not by the authors, made to each novel as soon as they became popular and were reprinted. In only two cases was I able to obtain a copy of the novels' first edition (Bazzoni and D'Azeglio). In all other cases, I have based the research and analysis in my dissertation on the available editions that were chronologically the closest to the original publications. The editions I consulted are: Giambattista Bazzoni, *Il castello di Trezzo. Novella storica di G.B.B* (Milano: presso Ant. Fort. Stella e figli, colle stampe di Gio. Pirotta, 1827); Massimo D'Azeglio, *Ettore Fieramosca ossia la Disfida di Barletta di Massimo D'Azeglio* (Torino: G. Pomba, 1833); Tommaso Grossi, *Marco Visconti; storia del Trecento, cavata dalle cronache di quel secolo e raccontata da Tommaso Grossi* (Parigi: presso Baudry, 1835); Cesare Cantù, *Margherita Pusterla: racconto* (Genova: presso gli editori, 1838).

<sup>296</sup> Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi. Invention of a Hero*, (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2007), p. 29.

of the early Italian *Ottocento* created the necessary cultural framework that fostered a debate on Italian identity.

Any examination of narrative structures must take into account the work of influential formalist critic Vladimir Propp and his seminal study *Morphology of the Folktale* where he argues that folk fairy tales have a common structure and a fixed taxonomy of situations and characters.<sup>297</sup> Apart from aspects specific to one or the other of these two genres (i.e. use of historical elements in one and presence of the supernatural in the other), the historical novel and the fairy tale essentially employ parallel narrative techniques. Therefore, inspiration can be drawn from Propp's model in order to expose the internal narrative dynamics and potential cultural implications of historical novels of the Risorgimento, where characters have fixed roles and their actions generate a plot quite openly intended to ignite readers' passion and imagination.<sup>298</sup> That being said, the

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<sup>297</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984). For further exposition of the structural approach, see also: Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of the Myth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 68 (1955), 428-444. For a very comprehensive organised listing of plot elements and recurring patterns across different literary genres, see: Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955). Propp's study was based on a standard set of Russian folk tales collected by Alexander Afanas'ev. See *Russian Fairy Tales*, translated by Norbert Guterman (London: Sheldon Press, 1975).

<sup>298</sup> The analytical comparison between historical novels and children's literature, fairy tales in particular, is primarily stimulated by interesting similarities between the narrative structures of the two genres. They can be regarded as a response to a specific socio-historical situation and, more importantly, as an expression of a collective way of feeling. Just like fairy tales, historical novels had a mass appeal for their reading audience; they operated not only on the level of imagination, but also on other sensory levels, especially an aesthetic one, and also on a psychological level. Critical works by Max Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), and Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell. Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), have shed light on the evolution of the children's narrative genre from its original oral form (the folk tale) to the written form we possess today (the fairy tale). The rite of passage from one to the other is to be found, according to Zipes, in the transformation of a feudal form of narrative into a capitalist one, which took place between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Interestingly, Risorgimento historical novels might be chronologically and culturally located in a similar moment of transformation as the one in the process of evolution from the folk to the fairy tale genre. That is, although they were products of an early capitalist society (like fairy tales), Risorgimento historical novels still remain fundamentally pre-capitalist in their narrative content, thus displaying more similarities to the folk tale than the fairy tale genre. At the same time, they share a common socio-cultural context of origin with the fairy tale genre: this is an upper, middle-class, and aristocratic context. Besides, the pedagogical purpose of these kinds of writing is very much similar: both Risorgimento historical novels and children's literature aim at providing their readers with morals or lessons by example. It is not surprising, then, that D'Azeglio's *Ettore Fieramosca* has been likened to post-unification children's best-sellers such as *Libro cuore* and *Pinocchio* for their analogous pedagogical functions. See David Ward, 'Massimo D'Azeglio's "Ettore Fieramosca":

aim of the present investigation is not to compile an inventory of morphological patterns and structures in the selected novels. Whereas this has not yet been methodically done, the goal of this dissertation is not to reduce historical novels to a sequence of narrative elements, but to analyse them in the context of the creation of a nationalistic movement of ideas in the pre-unification period.<sup>299</sup>

Historical novels in the canon will be studied as works of narrative and as artistic expression of a collective way of thinking and especially feeling, considering that very often these novels stemmed out of propagandistic impulse and not out of artistic creation per se. That is why authors' poetics and above all personal experiences as individuals who lived through the tumultuous years of the early Risorgimento period are relevant as manifestations of a larger cultural context and because they informed the content and the message of their novels. Ultimately, the present dissertation aspires to engage in a reading of the selected novels as the outcome of a particular cultural practice, to understand how cultural productions work and how cultural identities are constructed, to understand the 'mechanisms that produce meaning in social and cultural life.'<sup>300</sup>

In this light, we can appreciate enthusiastic expressions of support voiced by readers of historical novels who were participating in the cultural environment of the time. This is evidence of the cultural and political import of these novels on their public. Giovanni Visconti-Venosta, describing the salon of Italian patriot and political activist Cesare Correnti (1815-1888), noted:

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The Necessity and the Joy of Fiction', in Graziella Parati, *New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), p. 13.

<sup>299</sup> The only study that, to my knowledge, has attempted such analysis is: Folco Portinari, 'Il meloromanzo', in *Le parabole del reale. Romanzi italiani dell'Ottocento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), pp. 12-22. This study only focuses on one single novel, Tommaso Grossi's *Marco Visconti*. Moreover, despite clearly drawing from such theoretical background as Propp in his fairly systematic classification of motifs, no actual reference is made to these critical sources.

<sup>300</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, 'What is Cultural Studies', in *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, ed. by Mieke Bal and Bryan Gonzales (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 342.

Convenivano in casa sua molti studiosi e [...] li sentivo parlare dell’Azeglio, del Guerrazzi, del Giusti e allora m’affrettavo a procurarmi anch’io i libri di questi autori, e li leggevo e rileggevo, riscaldandomi sempre più a questo fuoco della patria ideale.<sup>301</sup>

This type of testimony is not infrequent in the so-called nineteenth-century ‘memorialistica’, that is, memoir writing, or more precisely as the title of Visconti-Venosta’s work suggests, a recollection of events, people, individuals seen, met, or known.<sup>302</sup> Cultural and literary salons were the privileged spheres of circulation of ideas, new cultural trends, and often the repository for political activism. They have been credited as one of the environments where modern public opinion was formed.<sup>303</sup> Salons were also a precious source of information about Italian and European affairs. It was in similar circles that one could hear about the latest political or merely worldly events; it was here that what was new and popular on the literary market circulated.<sup>304</sup> Historical novels were discussed on these occasions and their writers would frequently be in attendance.

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<sup>301</sup> Giovanni Visconti-Venosta, *Ricordi di gioventù. Cose vedute o sapute 1847-1860* (Milano: Tipografia Editrice L. F. Cogliati, 1904), p. 39.

<sup>302</sup> Among the best-known works of Italian ‘memorialistica’ of the nineteenth century is Massimo D’Azeglio, *I miei ricordi* (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1895). Other notable works, which offer a direct and first-hand perspective on the period, are: Gaspero Barbera, *Memorie di un editore. 1818-1880* (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1883); Sigismondo di Castromediano, *Memorie* (Lecce: Congedo Editore, 1895); Tullio Dandolo, *Reminescenze e fantasie* (Torino: Stab. Tip. Fonta, 1841); Edmondo De Amicis, *Un salotto fiorentino del secolo scorso* (Firenze: Barbera, 1902); Francesco Hayez, *Le mie memorie* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1995), originally published in 1890.

<sup>303</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989); Maurice Agulhon, *Le cercle dans la France bourgeoise 1810-1848. Études d’une mutation de sociabilité* (Paris: Colin, 1977).

<sup>304</sup> See Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, *I salotti di cultura nell’Italia dell’Ottocento* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1985), p. 50.

## **4.2 Political and literary commitment in authors of the canon**

The four authors considered here (Bazzoni, D’Azeglio, Grossi and Cantù) offer the ideal example of nineteenth-century Italian intellectuals who not only witnessed, but also contributed to the cultural revolution of the time, who were personally engaged, in different capacities, in the political turmoil of the first half of the century, and participated in the modernisation process of Italian culture. In purely descriptive terms, and with no presumption of establishing a causal argument, their commitment could be seen as anticipating the well-researched category of *impegno* that defined the relationship between art, politics, and culture in post WWII Italy, a period in which ‘cultural and political actors converged on a communal project based on strict ideological premises and tied to emancipatory and potentially revolutionary action.’<sup>305</sup>

The four authors were acutely aware of being in the midst of profound historical changes and of their responsibility in making change happen. D’Azeglio’s voice is the most powerful as, at the end of his life, in an attempt to gauge retrospectively the achievements of his career as a politician as well as an author and a painter, he wrote:

So bene quanto difficile ad uno scrittore non essere più o meno tinto del colore della sua epoca. [...] Ma io ho sempre tanto cercato nella mia vita politica di conoscere e seguire esclusivamente il vero ed il giusto [...] Io vorrei che queste pagine servissero, in un senso, anche all’età nostra [...] L’Italia da circa mezzo secolo s’agita, si travaglia per divenire un sol popolo e farsi nazione. Ha riacquisito il suo territorio in gran parte. La lotta collo straniero è portata a buon porto, ma non è questa la difficoltà maggiore. La maggiore, la vera, quello che mantiene tutto incerto, tutto in forse, è la lotta interna.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Pier Paolo Antonello, and Florian Mussgnug, eds., *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>306</sup> Massimo D’Azeglio, *I miei ricordi*, p. 4.

The domestic conflict about which D’Azeglio cautions the reader is the one affecting the solidification of the unification movement as Italians are unable to embrace change and modernity.<sup>307</sup>

Historical novels published within the time frame of my consideration, and especially the ones analysed here, unanimously denounce how the political, social, and also human disunity of Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century mirrored the situation endured in past times. Fictional writing based on historical events becomes the basis of an ethical-political project, the pretext by means of which nineteenth-century authors create an embryonic national consciousness in historical instances where it hardly existed. There is an agenda behind this writing, and to the extent that it is writing based on history, the type of history presented in Risorgimento historical novels is history with a clear political agenda.<sup>308</sup>

Massimo D’Azeglio is the most distinguished of all the authors examined here.<sup>309</sup>

Among his most famous literary works are three historical novels that celebrated Italian

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<sup>307</sup> This is where one version of D’Azeglio’s most famous line is to be found: ‘pur troppo s’è fatta l’Italia, ma non si fanno gli italiani.’ Massimo D’Azeglio, *I miei ricordi*, p. 7. The following publications are particularly interesting as they attempt to reestablish the correct authorship and recreate the proper context of a ubiquitous quotation like D’Azeglio’s. See Claudio Gigante, ‘Fatta l’Italia, facciamo gli italiani. Appunti su una massima da restituire a D’Azeglio’, *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi Italiani*, 26 (2011), 5-15, and Stephanie Malia Hom ‘On the Origins of Making Italy: Massimo D’Azeglio and “Fatta l’Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani”’, *Italian Culture* 31 (2013), 1-16.

<sup>308</sup> David Ward, ‘Massimo D’Azeglio’s “Ettore Fieramosca”’, p. 7.

<sup>309</sup> Massimo Tapparelli D’Azeglio was born to an aristocratic family in Turin on October 24, 1798. Of artistic temperament, he moved to Milan where he studied painting and joined the literary circle of Manzoni, whose daughter Chiara he married in 1831. In the mid-1840s, his interests turned to politics, thanks to the influence of his cousin Cesare Balbo, whose *Le speranze d’Italia* (1844) promoted a federal solution to the unification problem. Balbo recognized that military or diplomatic action was needed to drive the Austrians out of Italy, whereas D’Azeglio defended the idea of non-violent protests. In September 1845 D’Azeglio travelled through the Romagna region and reported on the political atmosphere in that area of the Papal States. D’Azeglio was critical of the Mazzinian republicans and supported a unification solution led by Piedmont’s King Charles Albert, who was attuned to the idea of leading a national movement. When King Charles Albert declared war on Austria in March 1848, D’Azeglio joined the papal forces that momentarily rallied to the national cause and when he returned to Turin in December 1848, he was offered the premiership, which he turned down in favour of Vincenzo Gioberti. D’Azeglio accepted this position only on May 7, 1849, after Piedmont’s second defeat, and resigned on October 22, 1852, in favour of Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour. Thereafter, he devoted himself mostly to writing. He supported Cavour in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and in the war against Austria (1859). In its wake, Cavour sent him to Romagna to arrange for its annexation, and in January 1860 named him governor of Milan. D’Azeglio broke with Cavour, however, on the issue of the Kingdom of Naples, arguing that it was too soon to add

bravery against foreign invaders: *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta* (1833), *Niccolò dei Lapi; ovvero i Palleschi e i Piagnoni* (1841), and, posthumously published, *La Lega Lombarda*. His memoir *I miei ricordi* (1863), also published posthumously, is a unique account of the author's inner life, political orientation as a moderate liberal, and firm belief in the importance of cooperation between nations. It is also a rich source of first-hand historical information from the Risorgimento period, throughout which D'Azeglio lived, as he died in January 1866.

*Ettore Fieramosca* was originally born as a painting. The path that led to the composition of this novel is one of artistic passion for landscape painting and interest in the recuperation of historical events and culture. The battle between thirteen Italian knights and thirteen French knights that took place in Barletta (Puglia) in 1503, when France and Spain were at war over Naples, appealed to D'Azeglio's imagination and hunger for an episode that could assume the status of myth for his readers. After painting, prose writing became a new tool of expression and communication for the author. In *I miei ricordi*, D'Azeglio enthusiastically and passionately describes the project to write a novel in such a way as to leave no doubt about his intentions and expectations. D'Azeglio explains that the story of a battle held in Barletta was ideal because 'ammetteva un bel cielo, una ricca vegetazione [...] ammetteva armi, ricche fogge, popolazione diversa; e poi aveva per me il gran merito, o piuttosto la condizione sine qua non di tutto quanto ho fatto d'un po' significante, serviva al pensiero italiano. Lavorando colla febbre del bello,

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the South to the new kingdom. For more information on D'Azeglio as writer and novelist, see: Alberto Maria Ghisalbetti, *Massimo D'Azeglio un moderato realizzatore* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1953); Giorgio Martellini and Maria Teresa Pichetto, *Massimo D'Azeglio. Un artista in politica* (Milano: Cumiana, 1990); Martina Corgnati, ed., *Massimo D'Azeglio: pittore* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1998); Arnaldo Di Benedetto, 'I racconti Romani di Massimo D'Azeglio', *Lettere italiane*, II (2010), 203-228; Claudio Gigante, *La nazione necessaria. La questione italiana nell'opera di Massimo D'Azeglio* (Firenze: Cesati, 2013).

del poetico, e soprattutto colla fede di far bene [...] per mettere un po' di foco in corpo agl'Italiani.<sup>310</sup>

The novel centres around the accusation of cowardice made by a French soldier toward Italian knights serving in the Spanish army. The predictable reaction of the Italian soldiers, who took offence at such insult to their honour, is construed by D'Azeglio as a sign of moral and spiritual unity against foreign attack. In the novel, Ettore Fieramosca, the audacious, incorruptible, and loyal hero, is the leader of the Italian knights who seek vengeance for such scornful offence, but he is also at the centre of a typically nineteenth-century desperate romance. Fieramosca endures an unhappy love affair with Ginevra, the wife of an Italian who fights for the French. In turn, she is harassed by Cesare Borgia (also known as Duke Valentino), is tormented at the idea that her lover (Fieramosca) might be unfaithful to her, and dies alone. Fieramosca is kept unaware of her death so as not to interfere with his performance in the battle between the Italians and the French. Only after the good name of the Italians has been avenged and restored does Fieramosca discover that Ginevra has passed away and disappears from the plot and from history. The novel ends on a flash-forward to more than a century later, in 1616, when the remains of a soldier, presumably Fieramosca himself, are found.<sup>311</sup>

Second after D'Azeglio in terms of notoriety and success of literary production is Cesare Cantù.<sup>312</sup> Cantù was strongly interested in history as an area of research, as

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<sup>310</sup> D'Azeglio, *I miei ricordi*, pp. 533-534.

<sup>311</sup> D'Azeglio's novel is undoubtedly the most successful of all Risorgimento historical novels, and it has been regularly reprinted since its first edition until the present day. See Appendix for a complete bibliography of all editions.

<sup>312</sup> Cesare Cantù was an Italian historian born in Brivio, a small town along the river Adda, thirty miles northeast of Milan. He belonged to an old and impoverished family and was destined to join the priesthood as a way to receive good and inexpensive education. His poem *Algisio, o la Lega Lombarda* published in 1825 received some attention and launched him as a writer. Notoriety finally came in 1829 with his *Storia della città e della diocesi di Como esposta in dieci libri dal professore Cesare Cantù. Dedicata all'inclita congregazione municipale di Como*. It was published as a feuilleton between August 7, 1829 and February 20, 1832 (Como: presso i figli di Carlantonio Ostinelli). Although not a member of the revolutionary society *Giovine Italia* Cantù knew and was close to one of its leaders, Vitale Albera, a circumstance that led to his arrest in 1833. Seized by the Austrian officials, he was incarcerated in the prison in the Convent

inspiration for writing, and as a source of educational and human advancement. *Margherita Pusterla* is situated at the convergence of these three elements and is intended to stir people's thinking and consciences.<sup>313</sup> An admonition placed at the very beginning of the novel urges readers not to continue reading the novel any further if they are not accustomed with the passions of life.<sup>314</sup> The plot, set in 1340 in Milan, is centred on the eponymous character and on the vexations she suffers because of the villain Luchino Visconti, *Signore* of Milan (also the protagonist of one of Grossi's novels). Visconti has resolved to seduce the virtuous Margherita, wife of Franciscolo Pusterla, one of Visconti's wealthiest and most powerful subjects. Margherita is wrongly implicated in a conspiracy against the *Signore*, and after a corrupt trial she is imprisoned and sentenced to death with her husband and their son. This book is crowded with subsidiary plots, scenes of violence, and pathos, and remained in print well into the twentieth century.

Although the main sequence of events is set in the two-year period between 1340 and 1341, the historical context of Cantù's novels stretches well before and after those dates. The author also cursorily describes the conflicts and battles that accompanied the rise to power of the Visconti's Signoria, from 1274 until 1395, when Holy Roman

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of Santa Margherita, located in the centre of Milan, where his first novel, *Margherita Pusterla*, came to life. He was freed at the end of that year, but also deprived of his teaching position at a Milanese *liceo*, and of his income. His living conditions change after the publication of *Storia universale*, a gigantic literary endeavour composed of 35 volumes that were published between 1838 and 1846 (Giuseppe Pomba e C., tip. Baglione e C. e stamp. sociale degli Artisti tip., Turin). This publication brought Cantù a modest independence. Cantù's work was not based on a critical study of documentary sources, and it was deeply influenced by the author's education as a member of the clergy. Naturally, also Cantù's political vision was also strongly tinged with Catholicism as he supported a federal union of the Italian States under the hegemony of Austria and the Papacy. Up to the time of his death in 1895, Cantù wrote almost without intermission producing ambitious works like *Storia dei cent'anni, 1750–1850* (1864), *Storia degli italiani*, and *Della indipendenza italiana: cronistoria* (1873). Criticism on the works by Cesare Cantù is limited: Adriano Bozzoli has curated various publications on Cantù's works, for instance: *Seconda Informazione, Dal 1848 in poi: memoria autobiografica inedita* (Milano-Varese: Istituto editoriale cisalpino, 1968); *Opere Giovanili Inedite* (Milano: Istituto editoriale cisalpino, 1968); 'Echi di un romanzo di Balzac nel Tommaseo e in Cesare Cantù', in *Contributi dell'Istituto di filologia moderna. Serie francese*, 5 (1968) 739-760; 'Introduzione', in Cesare Cantù, *Romanzo Autobiografico* (Milano-Napoli: R. Ricciardi, 1969). Another study to consider is: Franco Della Peruta, Carlo Marcora and Ernesto Travi, eds., *Cesare Cantù nella vita italiana dell'Ottocento* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1985).

<sup>313</sup> See Appendix for a complete bibliography of all editions of *Margherita Pusterla*.

<sup>314</sup> 'Lettor mio, hai tu spasimato?' 'No' 'Questo libro non è per te.' These words placed right before the beginning of the first chapter, are the author's address to the ideal reader of his novel.

Emperor Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia appointed Gian Galeazzo Visconti Duke of Milan. The story of the Visconti family was already fairly well-known to Milanese readers of the first half of the nineteenth century as it was a defining element of their cultural identity.<sup>315</sup> Consequently, by providing his readers with a detailed historiographical account of significant episodes of this important Milanese dynasty, Cantù knew that his novel would have been positively received by readers able to appreciate its intertextuality and subtle references to other works, literary or historical.

Tommaso Grossi's fame as a writer is comparable to Cantù's.<sup>316</sup> Two poems he wrote in the Milanese dialect, *La pioggia d'oro* and *La fuggitiva* (1816), received critical attention.<sup>317</sup> The first poem employs a satirical tone and warns against the excessive use of mythology in literature, whereas the second one, later translated into Italian by Grossi himself, is more sentimental and centres on the vicissitudes of a woman during the

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<sup>315</sup> Not surprisingly, in the larger *corpus* of historical novels published in this period, two other novels focused on important episodes and figures of the Visconti family. These were: Giuseppe Agrati's *Storia di Clarice Visconti Duchessa di Milano* (1817) and Carlo Varese's *I Torriani e i Visconti* (1839). See Appendix for more information.

<sup>316</sup> Born in Bellano, on Lake Como, he graduated in Law from the University of Pavia in 1810, and then moved to Milan to practice. The Austrian government, mistrusting his loyalty to the establishment, interfered with Grossi's ambition to establish himself as a lawyer. Instead he became and remained a notary all his life. Suspicions about his political affiliations were not groundless, as Grossi's poem *La Prineide*, written anonymously in Milanese, confirms. Here he described the tragic death of Giuseppe Prina, whom Napoleon had nominated Minister of Finance first for the Italian Republic in 1802 and then for the Kingdom of Italy in 1805. When the Emperor abdicated in 1814, a group of violent rioters, allegedly instigated by Austrian agitators, seized Prina, wounded and mutilated him by dragging him through the streets of Milan, and finally killed him. When the poem came out in 1816, it was first attributed to the celebrated Milanese poet Carlo Porta, but Grossi claimed responsibility, suffering a fine and two days of confinement in January 1817. Grossi's career as a writer and a poet came to an end in 1837 with the publication of a tale in verse, *Ulrico e Lida*. After his marriage in 1838 Grossi dedicated himself to the notary profession in Milan until his death in 1853. About the Prina case, see Massimo Fabi, *Milano ed il Ministro Prina: narrazione storica del Regno d'Italia, Aprile 1814* (Novara: presso Agostino Pedroli libraio-editore, 1860). Major works of research on Tommaso Grossi and his literary production are: Giuseppe Rovani, 'Tommaso Grossi', in *Storia delle lettere e delle arti in Italia*, 4 (Milano: Sanvito, 1858), pp. 184-188; Gioachino Brognoligo, *Tommaso Grossi: la vita e le opere* (Messina: G. Principato, 1916); AA. VV., *Studi su Tommaso Grossi pubblicati in occasione del centenario della morte* (Milano: Comune di Milano, 1953); Tommaso Grossi, *Opere poetiche*, ed. by Raffaele Sirri (Napoli: F. Rossi, 1972); Mario Barenghi, 'Marco Visconti fra Manzoni e Scott', in Tommaso Grossi, *Marco Visconti* (Milano: Arcipelago edizioni, 1994), pp. 7-30; Aurelio Sargenti, ed., *Carteggio: 1816-1853 / Tommaso Grossi* (Varese: Insubria University Press, 2005). In addition, given the proximity and close relationships the authors considered here often enjoyed, it is useful, if not merely interesting, to read what those who knew Tommaso Grossi wrote about him. In particular: Cesare Cantù, *Tommaso Grossi* (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1862); Ignazio Cantù, *Vita ed opere di Tommaso Grossi. Memoria* (Milano, Borroni e Scotti, 1853).

<sup>317</sup> Tommaso Grossi, *La pioggia d'oro* and *La fuggitiva* (Milano: Pirota, 1816).

Russian campaign of 1812. These compositions were positively received and helped him become part of the Milanese literary circles, particularly Manzoni's circle.<sup>318</sup> Grossi's first successful work in the Italian verse was the poem *Ildegonda* (1820).

Manzoni and Grossi shared a brotherly relationship and they exerted mutual influence on one another.<sup>319</sup> On a personal level, this is supported by the fact that Grossi moved into Manzoni's house in 1822, where he lived until 1836, a year before Manzoni's second marriage to Teresa Stampa Borri (a native of Brivio, Cesare Cantù's birthplace). On a professional level, the closeness between the two authors is demonstrated in Manzoni's admiration for Grossi's work, particularly *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, published by subscription in 1826. This epic poem made an impression on Manzoni, who enigmatically mentions it in chapter XI of his *I promessi sposi*.<sup>320</sup> Manzoni's house was also the place where Grossi's major work of literature, the historical novel *Marco Visconti* (1834), was written. Grossi's dedication is another testament of his devotion to the great master: 'Ad Alessandro Manzoni, colla riverenza d'un discepolo, coll'amore d'un fratello, candidamente offre l'autore.'<sup>321</sup> Another indication of Grossi's status and prominence in the Milanese social scene is his involvement in the Salotto Maffei, the liberal and patriotic literary salon hosted by Countess Clara Maffei, in 1834. Here he made the acquaintance of Verdi, a decade before the composer's famous opera *I*

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<sup>318</sup> For a well-documented study of this close-knit community of Milanese writers, see: Giovanni Albertocchi, *Non vedo l'ora di vederti: legami, affetti, ritrosie nei carteggi di Porta, Grossi & Manzoni* (Firenze: Clinamen, 2011).

<sup>319</sup> For more information on the relationship between the two authors, see: Luciano Minozzi, 'Alessandro Manzoni e Tommaso Grossi', in *Atti del VIII Congresso nazionale di studi manzoniani* (Lecco: Annoni, 1968), pp. 121-150.

<sup>320</sup> Manzoni explains the line 'leva il muso, fiutando il vento infido' referred to Griso saying that 'quel bel verso, chi volesse saper donde venga, è tratto da una diavoleria inedita di crociate e di lombardi, che presto non sarà più inedita, e farà un bel rumore; e io l'ho preso, perché mi veniva in taglio; e dico dove, per non farmi bello della roba altrui: che qualcheduno non pensasse che sia una mia astuzia per far sapere che l'autore di quella diavoleria ed io siamo come fratelli, e ch'io frugo a piacer mio ne' suoi manoscritti.' See Ignazio Cantù, *Cronaca ossia collezione di notizie contemporanee su le lettere, le scienze, la morale, l'arti e l'industria*, I (Milano: Vedova di A. F. Stella e Giacoo figlio, 1840), p. 110.

<sup>321</sup> Tommaso Grossi, *Marco Visconti*, p. v.

*Lombardi alla prima crociata*, inspired by Grossi's poem, premiered at La Scala in Milan in 1843.

*Marco Visconti* is Grossi's only novel.<sup>322</sup> Set in 1329 in a lakeside hamlet in the vicinity of Lecco, Bellagio, and Bellano (Grossi's own birth place), *Marco Visconti* presents a complicated love story intertwined with historical events. Grossi's rendition of the fourteenth-century geographical and historical context is distinctly modelled on Manzoni's novel. The descriptions of landscapes are reminiscent of the opening scene in *I promessi sposi* and characters are palpably Manzonian. At the core of the plot is another narrative element that is evocative of Manzoni's novel: the topos of the opposed marriage. In this case, the sixteen-year-old fair-haired damsel Bice del Balzo loves the graceful knight Ottorino Visconti, cousin of Marco, who fiercely opposes their union. The two lovers are not a replica of the Renzo and Lucia duo as they embody different character types and are headed for a different future. In the historical context of the struggle between Papacy and Empire, the invasion of Lombardy and the siege of Milan, Marco Visconti plots against his nephew Azzone in hope to be elected lord of Milan.

The series of intertwined storylines is further complicated by other elements: Marco's unforgotten first love Ermelinda, Bice's mother; Marco's ultimate, yet unredeeming conversion; Bice's agonizing death; and Ottorino's departure to join the Crusades. Minor figures in the novel are satellites of the main characters: Laretta is Bice's maid and confidant, Lupo is Ottorino's squire, and Tremacoldo is a clownish priest. In the end justice and order are not restored, which motivates the author to express closing remarks on the long-term workings of Divine Providence. The moral scheme of the narrative is neatly divided between good and evil characters. The responsibility of carrying out Marco Visconti's devious romantic and political plans falls on two dishonest

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<sup>322</sup> See Appendix for a complete bibliography of all editions of *Marco Visconti*.

individuals, Visconti's adviser Lodrisio and his right-hand man Pelagrua. In this way, Marco Visconti, whom Grossi describes in positive terms as generous, of ready wit and exemplary manners, rises above all characters and what they represent, and he is defined by his contradictory nature, capable as he is of pure rage and sublime emotions.

The fourth author under consideration is Giambattista Bazzoni, whose life and literary production have been scarcely researched and examined.<sup>323</sup> *Il castello di Trezzo*, Bazzoni's first novel, was published in twelve monthly instalments in *Il nuovo ricoglitore* between May 1826 and May 1827, and finally as a single book in the same year.<sup>324</sup> The subject of this novel is the imprisonment and murder of Italian soldier and statesman Bernabò Visconti by the hand of his treacherous nephew Gian Galeazzo in 1385.<sup>325</sup> In the

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<sup>323</sup> Born in Novara on February 12, 1803 to a Milanese family, he moved back to Milan with his parents in 1806. The trajectory of Bazzoni's life was rather linear as he followed in his grandfather and father's footsteps and was occupied in the legal profession until his sudden death on October 9, 1850 from pneumonia. After obtaining a Law degree in 1825 from the University of Pavia, Bazzoni worked at the mercantile court of justice and then at the criminal court of justice under the supervision of Paride Zaiotti, who was among the most vocal opponents of narrative compositions combining elements of history and fiction (see Chapter 1 in this thesis). In 1847, Bazzoni obtained the prestigious appointment of judge at the civil court of justice in Milan. In Milan, Bazzoni became acquainted with writers and artists. He met Cesare Cantù as a classmate in secondary school, and later Grossi, Niccolò Tommaseo, and Francesco Hayez in the prominent literary circle of Countess Clara Maffei. He began his literary occupation as a modest translator of Victor Hugo's novels, and continued as an author of historical novels after enjoying moderate but promising success. Bazzoni was among the first nineteenth-century intellectuals who deliberately emulated Walter Scott's historical novels in their writing. The array of critical studies on Giambattista Bazzoni (at times also spelled Giovan or Giovanni Battista) is rather limited in comparison to previous authors. Among these studies are: Galileo Agnoli, *Gli albori del romanzo storico in Italia e i primi imitatori di W. Scott* (Piacenza: Stab. d'arti grafiche G. Favari di Dante Foroni, 1906), pp. 147-59; Luigi Fassò, *Giambattista Bazzoni (1803-1850): contributo alla storia del romanzo storico italiano; con lettere e documenti inediti* (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1906); Alessandro Viglio, 'Un manipolo di manoscritti Bazzoniani inediti', in *Bollettino Storico della Provincia di Novara*, VIII (1914), pp. 201-213; Gioachino Brognoligo, 'Traduttori Italiani di W. Scott', in *Rassegna critica di letteratura italiana*, XXIII (1918), pp. 232-245; M. Cerini, 'Il Manzoniismo di G. B. B.', in *Rassegna Nazionale*, 2 (1919), 42-50; Elena Sala Di Felice, *La "quête" del romanzo: "Il castello di Trezzo" tra la fiaba e la storia* (Milano: Comune di Milano, 1981). Valuable information on Bazzoni also appears in: Gaetano Mariani, *Gli umili nella narrativa degli epigoni manzoniani* (Roma: Edizioni "Idea", 1953); Franca Tonella Regis, *Romantici in Valsesia. Ludovico Di Breme, Gian Battista Bazzoni, Davide Bertolotti, note critiche* (Borgosesia: Società Valsesiana di Cultura, 1985); Gabriele Federici, 'L'emozione del viaggio. Riflessioni su un diario inedito di Giovanni Battista Bazzoni', *Otto/Novecento*, 1 (2007), 77-89. A recent publication also includes a well-written and concise biography of the author as well as a review of the publishing process of his novels: Roberto Cicala, 'Su uno scaffale ottocentesco. Bazzoni e Calcaterra tra romanzi storici, carte d'archivio e radici', in *Inchiodati indelebili: itinerari di carta tra bibliografie, archivi ed editoria: 25 anni di scritti (1986-2011)* (Milano: EDUCatt, 2012), pp. 59-66.

<sup>324</sup> See Appendix for a complete bibliography of all editions of *Il castello di Trezzo*.

<sup>325</sup> The historical figure of Bernabò Visconti and of the House of Visconti who ruled over Milan between 1277 and 1447 was quite popular in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Several episodes about the Viscontis were retrieved and represented in works of painting. A few artists chose the historical figure

historical framework of family feuding, Bazzoni inserts the romance between Bernabò's daughter Ginevra and intrepid knight Palamede dei Bianchi. Several ancillary characters contribute to the intensification of the plot, where medieval micro-history is embellished with pathos and sentiment, but also with the dark and ominous atmosphere typical of the English gothic novel. Deceit and conspiracy, nocturnal escapes and underground passageways, dark woods and rivers populated with fishermen, and smugglers and bandits are all defining elements of Bazzoni's first novel.

Bazzoni's second novel, *Falco della rupe o la guerra di Musso* is set in the first half of the 1500s. It centres on the struggles and eventual failure of Gian Giacomo Medici Marchese di Marignano (not connected with the Medicis of Florence) to gain control of the territories surrounding Lake Como by stealing them from the legitimate ruler Francesco Sforza Duke of Milan and become an independent sovereign. The historical storyline is counterbalanced by a romantic love-tale between Gabriele, Gian Giacomo Medici's younger son, and Rina, the daughter of Falco, a bold pirate of Lake Como, whose name suffix *della rupe* acts as a reminder of the fact that he built his residence on a nearby inaccessible rock as well as indicator the character's sinister personality.

*Falco della rupe* was also published in *Il nuovo ricoglitore*, divided into thirteen episodes between March 1828 and September 1829, and finally published in its entirety in 1829 by the same publisher as Bazzoni's first novel. Again, Bazzoni's taste for the picturesque and the tragic is pervasive: Gian Giacomo Medici's struggle against his Duke is painted with vigour and graphic spirit, manners and superstitions of the age are often emphasised, and many scenes depicting Gabriele and Rina's love are sweetly pathetic. Bazzoni's third and last historical narrative, *La bella Celeste degli Spadari. Cronachetta*

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of Bernabò as their pictorial subject. For example: 'Bernabò Visconti riconosciuto da un contadino che lo accompagnava al castello di Marignano' (1820-1821) by Pasquale Vianelli (date unknown), and 'La caccia di Bernabò Visconti' (1834) by Enrico Scuri (1805-1884).

*milanese del 1666*, was received tepidly, and had only three editions (Milan and Turin, 1830, and Naples, 1835).

Bazzoni's literary production ranged beyond novels. He collaborated on several periodical publications, as well as with almanacs, small booklets usually divided into the four seasons and intended for different kinds of readers (city guides for foreigners, handbooks for ladies, etc.), and *strenne*, collection of poems in prose or poetry usually sold between the end of a year and the beginning of another.<sup>326</sup> Whereas Bazzoni's historical novels did not attract as much attention as the works by D'Azeglio, Cantù, and Grossi described above, his participation in the socio-political turmoil of the mid-nineteenth century was certainly more on the frontline, not as combatant, but as guarantor of justice. In his capacity as judge of the criminal court in Milan, in fact, he tried rioters implicated in the uprising spurred by the plebiscite for the annexation of Lombardy to the Kingdom of Sardinia on 29 May 1848. Bazzoni's role as an agent of the existing establishment provides a unique perspective, situated between the practicalities of the struggle for power that defined the process of emancipation from foreign domination and the creations of his narrative. Bazzoni's mediation resulted in the acquittal of the defendants, among whom was Carlo Cattaneo, leader of the republican group that had

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<sup>326</sup> As Gianluca Albergoni indicates in his study, contributions to almanacs or *strenne* were often not compensated. Popular authors of the time would give short compositions for free to publishers so that they might be included in these kinds of publications that were then used as Christmas holiday favours among members of the upper class. See Gianluca Albergoni, *I mestieri delle lettere tra istituzioni e mercato: vivere e scrivere a Milano nella prima metà dell'Ottocento* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2006), p. 205. In 1831 Bazzoni contributed to the first Milanese *strenna* by publishers Pietro and Giuseppe Vallardi with a novella entitled *Il bravo e la dama*. Interestingly, the same publication also included a poem by Cesare Cantù entitled *La viola del pensiero*. See A. C., eds., *Non ti scordar di me. Strenna pel capo d'anno, ovvero pei giorni onomastici, compilata per cura di A. C.*, I (Milano: Edit. Vallardi. Tip. Rusconi, 1832). This is included in *Antologia. giornale di scienze, lettere e arti Vol. XLIV della collezione, volume quarto del secondo decennio (Ottobre, Novembre e Dicembre 1831)* (Firenze: Gabinetto Scientifico e Letterario di G. P. Vieusseux, 1831), n. 12, images 346-347. <[http://www.antologia-vieusseux.org/scheda?IDV=44&seq=1&file\\_seq=1](http://www.antologia-vieusseux.org/scheda?IDV=44&seq=1&file_seq=1)> (accessed 15 August 2019). For a concise but well-documented study of the commercialisation of almanacs favoured by the emerging middle class in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Milan, see: Marina Bonomelli, 'Gli almanacchi milanesi nel settecento della società storica lombarda', *Archivio storico lombardo: giornale della società storica lombarda*, 15 (2010), 305-328.

initiated the revolt known as *Cinque giornate di Milano* in March 1848, who later acknowledged Bazzoni's decisive role in this trial.<sup>327</sup>

### **4.3 Historical narration as education**

Two interesting aspects about authors in the medieval canon emerge when comparing their lives and achievements: the eclecticism of their work and their interests, and a varied but active involvement in the national struggle. For the most part, the main occupation of these authors was not that of writers, but rather of artists (D'Azeglio), teachers and historians (Cantù), and lawyers (Grossi and Bazzoni). Their patriotism, manifested in the way they participated in different capacities in the political turmoil of the time, is also revealed in their commitment as authors of historical novels and particularly in the way they used the medium of the novel to spread specific ideas.

In the novels, history is evident in the development of the action and its presence is constantly reiterated by means of references to documents known only to the narrator. In addition, a sense of realism is conveyed through landscape descriptions as well as detailed portrayments of characters who become real historical figures in the eyes of the readers. The way in which these authors incorporated history in their narratives coincides with a new, quite revolutionary use of the medium of the novel to establish a direct relationship with their readership. To this end, historical novels were formally constructed as an adaptable container to accommodate paratextual elements that confer a quality of

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<sup>327</sup> See Carlo Cattaneo, *Dell'insurrezione di Milano nel 1848 e della successiva guerra* (Lugano: Tipografia della Svizzera italiana, 1849), p. 145.

authenticity to the literary works, and as a result, captivate readers' attention through a narrative development that is tightly controlled by the narrator.<sup>328</sup>

Among the innovations introduced in these novels is a renewed relationship between authors, narrators, and readers, one that closely resembles an educational process where authors impart knowledge to readers via the figure of narrators. This new relationship is immediately evident in the titles and subtitles of the novels in the canon: *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta, Il castello di Trezzo. Novella storica di G.B.B. Marco Visconti; Storia del Trecento, cavata dalle cronache di quel secolo*, and *Margherita Pusterla. Racconto: storia milanese del secolo 14°* (in this case the subtitle *storia milanese del secolo 14°* was added to the 1839 Neapolitan publication by Michele Stasi, a year after the first edition). What the titles communicate to the reader from the outset is that the novels are about a chivalric challenge (or duel), about tales of times past (the 14<sup>th</sup> century), and about a specific geographical region (Milan and its surroundings).

The most evident way in which Risorgimento historical novels imitate and incorporate characteristics of historical discourse and turn them into an appealing subject for the readers is through the figure of the narrator. The figures of the narrator in historical novels of the canon exist outside of the story world, and are therefore extradiegetic, as they do not partake in the action, neither as central characters nor as witnesses. Their function is to organise and prioritise events in a coherent fashion, revealing facts and character traits at auspicious moments, and making the story seem realistic. As a consequence, narrators are also omniscient.

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<sup>328</sup> There is no single study on the paratextual apparatus in Risorgimento historical novel. Since a detailed analysis of the paratextual material in historical novels is outside the remit of my study, for an overview on how extra-narrative elements contribute to the creation of a unique authorial role see: Margherita Di Fazio, *Dal titolo all'indice: forme di presentazione del testo*, (Parma: Pratiche, 1994), Marinella Colummi Camerino, 'Il narratore dimezzato. Legittimazioni del racconto nel romanzo storico italiano', in *Storie su storie: indagine sui romanzi storici*, ed. by Enrica Villari, and others (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1985), pp. 95-119.

Narrators in historical novels of the Risorgimento play a central role as they govern all the components necessary to the functioning of the narrative machine. In contrast to pre-Romantic literature, the new figure of the narrator brings to life ‘un mondo lontano e complesso, assicurandone la leggibilità; è colui che deve dare connotazione dinamica, in senso forte, alla storia; è colui, infine, che guida il lettore attraverso punti di vista molteplici e differenziati.’<sup>329</sup> Narrators are by definition storytellers. They act as commentators on the past and they guide readers through multiple interpretations of what once was. Their voice is audible and authoritative because it coincides precisely with the one of the author.<sup>330</sup> In perfect accord, authors and narrators stipulate a tacit narrative pact with their readers guaranteeing the truthfulness of the story being told.<sup>331</sup> In this pact, history plays the role of aggregating element between readers’ curiosity and authors/narrators’ documented knowledge on the subject.

The process of knowledge negotiation between narrators and readers is achieved by means of digressions, of which historical novels are crammed. Digressions serve different purposes: to integrate, clarify, justify, or add alternative interpretations to what is being said. The ability of the author/narrator is in maintaining the balance between the two movements that keep the narrative machine going: the progressive and the digressive, the plot and digressions.<sup>332</sup> Since digressions essentially veer off from the main storyline and delay the development of the plot, narrators must strengthen their bond with the readers so as not lose their interest. Not surprisingly digressions are precisely the moment in the novels when the narrative pact is implemented by creating a dialogue with the

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<sup>329</sup> Colummi Camerino, ‘Il narratore dimezzato’, p. 100.

<sup>330</sup> Ganeri, *Il romanzo storico in Italia*, p. 42.

<sup>331</sup> On the ‘patto narrativo’ between authors and readers see: Giovanna Rosa, *Il patto narrativo* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2008).

<sup>332</sup> According to Olivia Sansovetti, dialoguing with the reader is one of the four main functions of digressions in Italian novels: “They are used [...] to draw attention to the narrative process and open a dialogue with the reader, reproduce in the text the variety and disorder of life, emphasise minutiae, and postpone the end of the narration.” Olivia Santovetti, *Digression: A Narrative Strategy in the Italian Novel* (Oxford: P. Lang, 2007), p. 26.

readers, whom narrators address directly to stimulate their attention.<sup>333</sup> The result is a story characterised by an intimate and familiar tone that reads effortlessly, and where pathos builds up rather quickly.

Narratively speaking, *Ettore Fieramosca* is narrated in the third person, apart from a flashback in the first person singular about the past of the hero. The narrator in D'Azeglio's novel plays a prominent role in the story as his presence is known and very perceptible to the reader. The narrator does not base his tale on any found document or manuscript as is the case of other novels of the time, and he often intervenes during the course of the narration. D'Azeglio's omniscient narrator, who often refers to himself in the first-person plural pronoun 'noi,' embodies the role of the guide, who creates and maintains a strong relationship with the reader. Throughout the novel, the narrator takes time to interpolate, to explain, to add and comment, to disperse the tension of the action by means of jokes or by reminders that the story is set in a distant past (as opposed to the present of the reader). The narrator wants to educate the reader, and he does so in a very controlled, sometimes pedantic, fashion.

Because of the numerous characters and subplots it contains, the story quickly becomes complex. To clarify, the narrator introduces explanations and descriptions intended to simplify forthcoming topics. When such digressions become lengthy, steering away from the main focus of the narration, the narrator addresses the reader in apologetic terms: 'Di questa economica speriamo che il lettore ce ne sappia buon grado.'<sup>334</sup> Sometimes the narrator helps readers make connections between topics already mentioned: 'Don Michele poi che, se si ricorda il lettore, aveva ascoltate nella prigione

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<sup>333</sup> My investigation has highlighted the fact that authors of novels in the canon always refer to their readers in the masculine, singular or plural, but never in the feminine. This is why passages I have quoted from the texts of the canon presented in the analysis below only indicate 'lettore' or 'lettori'.

<sup>334</sup> D'Azeglio, *Ettore Fieramosca*, p. 113.

di Sant'Orsola le ultime parole dell'assassino.<sup>335</sup> In chapter 12, during a bullfight held in the square of Barletta, a scuffle takes place between two individuals for reasons unknown. At this point, the narrator adds: 'Per farla [*la ragione*] nota al lettore ci conviene tornare alle donne di Santa Orsola per un momento' thus introducing a new sub-story.<sup>336</sup>

Another example of the ideal conversation that the narrator entertains with readers in the novel is found in chapter 11. The account of the adversities endured by bandit Pietraccio, who had tried to interfere with Ginevra's abduction by Duke Valentino, occupy the first half of this chapter. The passage, which sounds more like a frantic soliloquy than anything else, seems to slowly build up to a point where the narrator must quickly tie up all loose ends and return to the main focus of the novel. This is where the narrator inserts the following admonition:

Il lettore forse dirà: Ma insomma non la finiamo mai con queste malinconie di assassini, traditori, prigionieri, morti, diavoli e peggio? Se noi abbiamo indovinato la sua mente, egli con buona licenza non ha indovinato la nostra che era appunto in questo momento di finirla, mandar al diavolo don Michele e Pietraccio e Martino (che a dirla in confidenza cominciavano a divenir fastidiosi anche a noi), e pregarlo a saltar nel bel mezzo della rocca di Barletta, che troveremo assai mutata da quando ci siamo venuti l'altra volta con don Michele.<sup>337</sup>

In these few lines, the author, disguised as narrator, firmly reclaims his role as all-knowing creator of the story and at the same time seems to anticipate reasonable criticism over the abundance of subplots as well as of the tendency, typical in historical novels, to Gothicise the action. Most importantly, in this passage the voice of the author/narrator is powerfully audible. He speaks in a down-to-earth way, using conversational language and mannerisms, and showing his bold, possibly insolent, attitude. Readers are left with

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<sup>335</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 215.

<sup>336</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 144.

<sup>337</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 138.

no choice but follow his indications and stay focused, thus mitigating their own passions and desire to know the rest of the story.

In an attempt to make the story appealing to and understood by a general public, the narrator in *Ettore Fieramosca* needs not justify his narrative choices, which often include interruptions, integrations of unfinished stories, prolepsis or anticipations, as well as an upfront defense of why a narrator does what he does. For example, in chapter 15 the main storyline is momentarily and rapidly set aside so as to insert a digression: ‘Prima di veder l’esito del viaggio di costoro ci conviene per poco ritornare nella sala da ballo.’<sup>338</sup> Similarly, in chapter 18 the narrator resumes a previous subplot in order to conclude it: ‘Ripigliamo ora il filo di ciò che accadde la sera innanzi a Brancaleone dopo lasciato Inigo per tornar presso Fieramosca.’<sup>339</sup> And again, in chapter 13 the narrator anticipates that the logical explanation of his narration will come at the right time: ‘aveva un fine, e d’importanza, come si vedrà a suo luogo.’<sup>340</sup>

Finally, chapter 16 begins with the following statement:

Per condurre di pari il racconto de’ molti accidenti che accaddero separatamente in quella sera ai varj attori di questa storia, ci è convenuto lasciar il lettore sospeso sul conto di ciascuno; e quantunque sia questo il costume di molti narratori, non crediamo che riesca gradito quando il libro che si ha fra le mani è da tanto d’inspirar il desiderio di conoscere il fine. Non ci scuseremo presso il lettore d’aver seguito un tal metodo, che del resto era indispensabile nel caso nostro: questa scusa sarebbe un atto di vanità che potrebbe far ridere alle nostre spalle; e la modestia, che in alcuni è una virtù, in molti è un tornaconto. Comunque stia la cosa, dobbiamo abbandonar per poco anche Fieramosca; tornar alla rocca, e trovar il Valenza che vi lasciammo nelle camerette basse guardanti la marina.<sup>341</sup>

The use of verbs conjugated to the subject pronoun ‘noi’ identifying the narrator, as well as the explicit reference to the typical way narrators tell stories (‘il costume di molti narratori’), evoke the idea of a collective of storytellers engaged in the task of educating

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<sup>338</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 194.

<sup>339</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 236.

<sup>340</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 161.

<sup>341</sup> D’Azeglio, pp. 202-203.

the readers. In addition, more than ever before in the novel, the stern tone of voice of the author/narrator sounds like an admonition to pay attention to his instructions. The narrator tells readers to be patient throughout the whole storytelling process, and in so doing the figure of the author/narrator embodies the qualities and characteristics of a schoolmaster trying to coordinate a classroom of eager pupils.

Beside the specific narrative functions of the narrator, who determines how the story is being told and assists the reader in making sense of the tangled web of storylines, his presence is important because the entire narrative process originates in him. In this sense, the roles of author and narrator overlap completely to create a figure whose knowledge of the facts, storytelling skills, and ability to engage the reader's interest are all combined into one. From beginning to end of the novel, the author/narrator not only keeps the wheel of the narration in motion, but he also acts as an authoritative reminder of the distance between then and now, between the remote past of sixteenth-century Barletta and the reality of the reader's present. In spite of his being an extradiegetic narrator, the author/narrator is deeply implicated in the narrative process. As readers, we fully depend on the author/narrator and our own opinions about the veracity of the facts of the story and of what the comparison between past and present may produce, is meticulously controlled and ultimately coincides with his.

The novel is disseminated with various reminders of how things have changed since the time of the story, or even how they have not changed at all. Readers are invited not to rush to quick judgements about the behaviour of sixteenth-century characters and are cautioned about how modern civilization has changed the way people interact with one another.<sup>342</sup> Conversely, readers also discover that sixteenth-century people behaved

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<sup>342</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 184.

in similar ways to them.<sup>343</sup> Readers are sometimes advised that history cannot always be fully understood, in which cases the narrator tries to convey a general sense of the past. This is the case of a long description of a knight's suit of armour inserted in *Ettore Fieramosca*'s last chapter in (the 19<sup>th</sup>). This passage presenting details of the knight's layers of clothing, weapons, trappings, as well as posture on the horse is provided by the author/narrator to the benefit of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century reader's knowledge about the past.<sup>344</sup> The author/narrator emphasises this cultural gap saying that it would be difficult 'ai giorni nostri formarsi un'idea dell'aspetto marziale d'un uomo d'arme di quel tempo, coperto tutto di ferro esso e 'l cavallo.'<sup>345</sup>

Grossi's *Marco Visconti* presents another example of extradiegetic and omniscient narrator who is a crucial figure in the novel, as he entertains an ongoing ideal dialogue with the readers. It is for the readers that authors in the medieval canon create their complex narrative structures and it is they whom the authors ultimately seek to educate. In so doing, the characteristics of author and narrator are often combined as they both speak in unison. Grossi's narrator is much more than a storyteller because he makes specific narrative choices and unapologetically but respectfully demands that the readers accept them. This is the case of a passage from in chapter 9, where Grossi's narrator justifies the inclusion of cruel and brutal scenes, sometimes excessively so – he says – by emphasising that his choice is made for the sole good of the reader:

Ci duole d'aver dovuto intrattenere a lungo i lettori di pazze e scellerate profanazioni [...] Nel porre per saggio in azione uno, e certo non dei più scandalosi eccessi fra i tanti che accadevano alla giornata in quel tempi infelici, ci siamo ingegnati di farlo in modo che chi legge potesse cavarne un concetto più vicino al vero che si potesse: abbiam voluto a bello studio lasciargliene un'impressione cruda, fastidiosa, quale la si trae dalla lettura delle cronache dei contemporanei; impressione che per esser tale non

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<sup>343</sup> For example, how people devise banal excuses such as a headache to get away from an unwanted situation. See D'Azeglio, p. 192.

<sup>344</sup> D'Azeglio, pp. 255-256.

<sup>345</sup> D'Azeglio, pp. 255.

dovea esser temperata da nessun rispetto, nè consolata da alcuna moralità:  
la moralità vien dopo da sè stessa, chi ne la vuol cavare.<sup>346</sup>

Such pedantic admonition, through which the narrator lectures readers and reminds them to look past the momentary sense of disgust and repulsion caused by the description of violence, defines a very explicit authorial voice and role, which is a distinctive trait of nineteenth-century historical novels.

Because of the unique nationalistic motivations that underlie the novels included in the medieval canon, the assertiveness of the voice of the author, who speaks through the narrator, is amplified and acquires very specific connotations. In novels of the medieval canon authors are much less preoccupied with entertaining their readers than they are with providing them with information about their past and, by contrast, their present. The act of researching, writing, and reading of historical novels defines an educational process that connects authors and readers and that guarantees the transmission of historical material and political culture needed to inspire awareness about the distinctiveness of the national community. The literary pact between the author and the reader that lays the foundation for the credibility of the story is transformed into an authentic pedagogical relationship, which promotes the reappropriation of human values ‘come validi sostegni della moralità borghese su cui andare a costruire l’edificio sociale, e come fondamentali requisiti di dignità morale e civile per la redenzione della patria.’<sup>347</sup>

At the same time, historical novels do provide elements of distraction and amusement for the readers. The unique and versatile roles and functions of the figure of the narrator sometimes operate to channel the voice of the author and other times to depict the atmosphere of the times past. In Grossi’s novel entertainment is conveyed through the picturesque quality of descriptive passages that fuel the readers’ imagination and

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<sup>346</sup> Tommaso Grossi, *Marco Visconti*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>347</sup> De Donato, *Gli archivi del silenzio*, p. 18.

stimulate their senses. Significant, from this point of view, is chapter 16 that is entirely dedicated to the description of town festivities, opulent banqueting, and jousting traditions organised in celebration of the Visconti family. In this chapter, the narrator comments on the figures of minstrels and jesters, disparagingly categorising them as a dirty and rowdy gang of slackers (*'scioperata genia'*) accustomed to squandering money or spending others' in courts around Europe.<sup>348</sup> Unrelated to the plot as it is, the narrator's interpolation is still valuable because it draws attention to the forms of communication in Medieval times, which are primitive by nineteenth-century standards. In so doing, the narrator recreates the atmosphere of times past for the benefit of the readers.<sup>349</sup> In light of this depiction of the role of troubadours as messengers and vehicles of news and information in the Middle Ages, the reader can appreciate the end of the novel, which is composed of two parts: a short section titled *'Conclusione'* preceded by a *'sirvente,'* a Provençal form of verse of heroic or satirical subject, sung by a minstrel from Lucca to commemorate Marco Visconti's death.

The poem marks the end of the thirty-second chapter and is introduced by the narrator's words exposing his desire to validate the story that he has just concluded:

Noi, per far conoscere quello che se ne pensasse a Lucca a quel tempo, o per dirlo con più esattezza quel che ne pensasse un menestrello di Lucca, riporteremo qui una *Serventese* che fu cantata a un banchetto di cavalieri il giorno che giunse colà quella nuova.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> 'nel tempo in cui ci troviamo col nostro racconto, i trovatori, i menestrelli e i giullari, di cui brulicava tutta Europa, erano una scioperata genia che girando di paese in paese con un liuto o con una mandóla in collo, se la scialava a tutte le corti bandite, a tutte le feste, per tutti i palazzi e i castelli, eccitando e tenendo in onore la pazza prodigalità dei signori e dei principi. In secoli nei quali le comunicazioni tra paese e paese, tra provincia e provincia, erano scarse, lente e malagevoli, essi portavano attorno le novelle degli avvenimenti pubblici e dei casi privati; pettegoleggiavano dappertutto sfringuellavano d'ogni cosa, novellavano d'armi, di maneggi e d'amori, cantavano le glorie, o rivelavano le turpitudini dei grandi; spesso ne mettevano in cielo i delitti, o ne strascinavano le virtù pel fango, secondo che dava loro l'umore, o secondo che piacesse a chi li pagava: vili e spregiati strumenti di fama e d'infamia, per lo più si grattavano le orecchie, s'ugnevano, si lisciavano fra loro, qualche volta venivano anche a' capegli e a' denti, e davansi morsicchiare da levarne i brani; facevano presso a poco quello che fanno ai nostri giorni alcuni... non voglio dirvelo; e viveano come i cani, ai quali uno dà un tozzo di pane, un altro dà un calcio.' (Grossi, pp. 207-208).

<sup>349</sup> See Uzielli's opinion about the use of history in literary works of fiction, which 'serve a farci conoscere tutti gli uomini in massa, la società, nel suo aspetto generale ed esterno' (section 1.1 above).

<sup>350</sup> Grossi, p. 403.

Such effort at sustaining the narrative fabrications of a novel combining history and fiction by means of a piece of documentation that is alien to the story is not unusual in Risorgimento historical novels and was directly inspired by Walter Scott's works. Although Grossi does not invoke the discovery of any manuscript on the life of Marco Visconti like Alessandro Manzoni does for his *I promessi sposi*, the author's intention to present readers with a historically accurate rendition of the sequence of events is manifest from the title page of the novel. The subtitle to the novel indicates that Grossi's literary endeavour is drawn from the chronicles of the fourteenth century.<sup>351</sup>

In general, it is possible to identify moments in Grossi's storytelling where the narrator reminds the reader of the solid archaeological or archival foundation of the novel. This stratagem solidifies the trust relationship between narrator and readers and upholds the edifying value of the literary work. In a couple of instances, the narrator cites and includes bibliographical references to texts written by historian and chronicler Giovanni Villani (Florence, 1275-1348) in which Marco Visconti is discussed.<sup>352</sup> In a few other cases, the narrator refers to texts external to the narration that are not based on historiographical research, but are well-known works of Italian literature. This is the case of Dante's *De monarchia* and *Divina Commedia*, but also Petrarch, whose verses immortalising Laura are evoked.<sup>353</sup> Bringing Italian literary culture of the Middle Ages into the novels via these references aims to enhance the realist framework of the story.

In spite of references to external sources, Grossi's narrator is ultimately in charge of historical truthfulness. For example, in chapter 21 the narrator describes the composition of the city planning of Milan in the fourteenth century:

In quel tempo Milano era compresa entro il giro d'una fossa stata già scavata più d'un secolo e mezzo prima, per fortificar la città contra

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<sup>351</sup> *Storia del Trecento cavata dalle cronache di quel tempo.*

<sup>352</sup> See Grossi, pp. 357-358 (chapter 29) and p. 403 (chapter 32).

<sup>353</sup> Dante, Grossi, p. 50 (chapter 5) and p. 78 (chapter 6). Petrarca, Grossi, p. 33.

Federico Barbarossa, che è la fossa medesima nella quale, molto tempo dopo quello in cui ci troviamo colla nostra storia, vennero introdotte delle acque navigabili, e prese il nome di Naviglio. Dove al dì d'oggi sono i ponti, allora, voglio dire nel 1329, erano le porte principali e le postierle della città.<sup>354</sup>

Interestingly, the narrative pose that the narrator assumes in passages like this one exposes the inherent contradiction of a text in which history and fiction are meant to coexist. By acting as guarantor of historical information, the narrator poses as a witness and draws attention to the fundamental dichotomy between the *now* of the narration and the *then* of the facts the narrator knows everything about.

The voice of the narrator is predominantly heard whenever he addresses the reader (or readers) directly. This happens especially when new pieces of information, explanations, or descriptions are introduced in the text to help readers keep up with the development of the plot and all its numerous characters. The narrator graciously asks readers for permission to deviate from the main storyline, or declares that the time has come to share important facts with them:

Non incresca al lettore che spendiamo qualche parola, dovendo egli [*un cavaliere*] aver una gran parte negli avvenimenti che ci apparecchiamo a narrare.<sup>355</sup>

Perocchè, è qui il luogo di farlo sapere ai nostri lettori.<sup>356</sup>

Non incresca ora ai lettori di tornar un passo indietro per andare fino a Limonta, dove abbiamo lasciato alcuni nostri amici.<sup>357</sup>

Sometimes, the narrator empathises with the readers' desire to move on swiftly in the narration and spares them from unnecessary descriptions:

Il viaggio da Lucca a Firenze è piuttosto lunghetto, e non sembra che i miei lettori abbiano una voglia tanto spasimata di tenergli compagnia, e però lo lasceremo camminar solo a suo agio, e noi, cambiando scena, ci trasmuteremo addirittura sull'Arno.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Grossi, p. 266.

<sup>355</sup> Grossi, p. 28 (chapter 3).

<sup>356</sup> Grossi, p. 130 (chapter 11).

<sup>357</sup> Grossi, p. 134 (chapter 11).

<sup>358</sup> Grossi, p. 355 (chapter 28).

Other times, the narrator bonds with readers and lets them in on a secret: ‘Bisogna che in tutta fidanza, e a quattr’occhi, mettiamo a parte il lettore d’un altro segreto.’<sup>359</sup>

As a consequence of his confidence in his readers, the narrator does not underestimate their ability to understand the abundance of information and facts contained in the novel, and often recognizes this quality when he addresses them: ‘Il lettore si ricorda di certe parole troncate a mezzo’; ‘I miei lettori l’hanno già indovinato da un pezzo’; ‘Le accoglienze fatte a Lupo, il lettore se le immagina’; ‘Il lettore ben intende come ei fosse aspettato.’<sup>360</sup> Finally, when the protagonist of the eponymous novel is introduced in details in chapter 7, the narrator inserts a digression that is not strictly essential to the development of the plot, but is provided for the benefit of the readers. Almost sensing the readers’ inquisitive spirit demanding more information on this character, the narrator puts the narration on hold to interject with a biographical digression:

Giunti ora al punto che questo Marco, di cui abbiamo fatto parola tante volte, comincia a comparire sulla scena, a mischiarsi coi nostri personaggi, a prender parte agli avvenimenti che ci prepariamo a raccontare, è necessario che ne presentiamo, dirò così, un po’ di biografia, un po’ di ritratto ai nostri lettori.<sup>361</sup>

Grossi does not hide the fact that his work is essentially a work of fiction, where characters walk on and off stage as he sees fit within the broader narrative framework that he has devised. These characters are puppets whose strings the author pulls in theatrical fashion; by means of swift changes of settings, by moving back and forth in the narrative space of the story, but always ensuring that the reader can follow.

In Cesare Cantù’s *Margherita Pusterla* (1838), composed of twenty-two chapters plus a conclusion, the figure of the narrator does not deviate significantly from the models

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<sup>359</sup> Grossi, p. 130 (chapter 11).

<sup>360</sup> In order: Grossi, p. 79 (chapter 7); p. 148 (chapter 12); p. 192 (chapter 15); p. 401 (chapter 32).

<sup>361</sup> Grossi, p. 90.

previously analysed. Cantù's work opens on an invocation to the 'lettore' and to his ability to yearn for love and tolerate its anguish.<sup>362</sup> The same exhortation recurs at the beginning of chapter 11, significantly in the centre of the novel:

Fortunati del mondo, se tutto questo racconto non fa per voi, meno ancora questo capitolo, che versa tutto fra solitari patimenti, che voi non potreste capire. Ma chi soffre, chi ha sofferto, mi intenderà, li compatirà.<sup>363</sup>

It is also reiterated in the conclusion to the novel before the author/narrator bids his farewell to the reader: 'io ho troppo presunto col darmi a creder che, con patimenti così usuali, potessi tanto tempo occupare il lettore senza annojarlo. Ma l'ho detto, e lo ripeto, non ho scritto per tutti, anzi, non ho scritto pei più, sibbene per quelli che davvero soffrono o hanno sofferto.'<sup>364</sup> The confidentiality with which the narrator addresses his readers is striking, and momentarily blurs the line of separation between the author, his literary work, and the reader. Compared to the two novels by D'Azeglio and Grossi, the emphasis that Cantù puts on the concepts of suffering and sacrifice and the very fact that he makes a tragic female figure the heroine of his narrative reveals an innovation.

Differently from D'Azeglio and Grossi, Cantù, a fervent Catholic, considered the novel as a medium to divulge his own religious beliefs and to popularise a notion of justice. The narrator in *Margherita Pusterla* uses the tone of a priest delivering a sermon and prompting faithful devotees to follow the true path in life, that is God, through suffering and penitence. Cantù's narrator is a "predicatore" di virtù individuali e civili, [...] apostolo della non violenza e della sottomissione.'<sup>365</sup> This unique role emerges in chapter 4, where the narrator, describing Margherita's virtues, connects with his readers

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<sup>362</sup> See footnote 313 above.

<sup>363</sup> Cantù, p. 211 (chapter 11).

<sup>364</sup> Cantù, pp. 596 (chapter 22).

<sup>365</sup> Claudio Milanini, 'La contraddizione nei romanzi di Cesare Cantù', in *Da Porta a Calvino: saggi e ritratti critici* (Milano: LED, 2014), p. 71.

over the idealised figure of a woman who inspires devotion and is source of comfort in men:

Come Margherita fosse opportuna a ispirar amore in chiunque le si accostasse, già deve il lettore averlo compreso; e deve il lettore, per poca esperienza che abbia del mondo, avere osservato come coloro che poco hanno a lodarsi degli uomini, si volgono con entusiasmo di devozione alle donne, in cui trovano la compassione, il disinteresse, l'affettuosità, per così dire, che negli uomini rimangono o spente o soffocate dai calcoli dell'amor proprio e dal tumulto delle faccende.<sup>366</sup>

Similarly to the way narrators in D'Azeglio and Grossi address their readers, in Cantù's novel the narrator enters into a close rapport with the readers and, for example, alludes to the reader's sagacity and ability to follow an intricate plot.<sup>367</sup> By the same token, the narrator apologises to the readers or avoids pointless descriptions. Examples of this kind are the following: 'Dovrò io al lettore italiano domandare perdono se, qui sulle prime, svio dal soggetto per rammentare con compiacenza gli antichi vanti della patria nostra?' and 'Accorriamo ai lettori l'ansietà di quel colloquio, più facile a immaginare che onesto a riferirsi, e basti il concludere che la Margherita trionfò.'<sup>368</sup>

Apart from these examples that are in line with the other two novels of the canon discussed above, the narrator in Cantù's novel stands out for one main reason: his ability to contextualise the story within a broader cultural and historical framework by means of referencing, directly and indirectly, other historical novels in the canon and their authors

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<sup>366</sup> Cantù, p. 90. Similar examples are: 'fenomeno che alcuno de' miei lettori avrà potuto osservare in san Paolo di Londra', p. 125 (chapter 6); 'Già il lettore ha compreso come l'animo di esso fosse tutt'altro che di tempra robusta', p. 186 (chapter 9); 'il lettore può essersi accorto ch'erano quel Maso e quella Nena', p. 249 (chapter 13); 'Quali dovessero sonare a Ramengo tali discorsi, lo immagini il lettore', p. 254 (chapter 13); 'Facilmente il lettore potrà immaginarsi come passassero il tempo fra loro, come lo passassero dopo che si abbandonarono la prima giornata', p. 400 (chapter 21).

<sup>367</sup> Other examples of this kind are: 'fenomeno che alcuno de' miei lettori avrà potuto osservare in san Paolo di Londra', p. 125 (chapter 6); 'Già il lettore ha compreso come l'animo di esso fosse tutt'altro che di tempra robusta', p. 186 (chapter 9); 'il lettore può essersi accorto ch'erano quel Maso e quella Nena', p. 249 (chapter 13); 'Quali dovessero sonare a Ramengo tali discorsi, lo immagini il lettore', p. 254 (chapter 13); 'Facilmente il lettore potrà immaginarsi come passassero il tempo fra loro, come lo passassero dopo che si abbandonarono la prima giornata', p. 400 (chapter 21).

<sup>368</sup> Cantù, p. 38 (chapter 1) and p. 234 (chapter 12). Other similar examples are: 'Ma Ramengo, ristuoco di tante digressioni quanto n'è il nostro lettore, — Facciamola un po' corta, gridava risoluto', p. 250 (chapter 13); 'Lo zio arciprete [...] esponeva a Francesco le ragioni, con cui il monaco confutava questa specie di quietisti: ma dall'addurle ci dispenseranno facilmente i lettori', p. 302 (chapter 16).

or by constantly reiterating the role of the readers' present in opposition to the past of the story. This approach expands the ongoing dialogue between narrator and reader both synchronically and diachronically and heightens the meta-fictional nature of the novel.<sup>369</sup>

In chapter 4, a tribute is paid to *Marco Visconti* by Grossi, whom Cantù calls a friend of his:

Ottorino Visconte, fratello della nostra Margherita (quel desso sulle cui avventure vi ha fatto piangere un amico mio), avea nel 1329 dall'imperatore Lodovico il Bavaro ottenuto in feudo, Castelletto sul Ticino e le giurisdizioni del Novarese, dominj restati poi nei Visconti d'Aragona, discendenti da quella famiglia.<sup>370</sup>

And again in chapter 6: 'a Trezzo stava quel Marco Visconte di cui un amico mio sì bene vi espose le bravure e i patimenti.'<sup>371</sup> In the Conclusion to the novel, the description of the imprisonment and death of Bernabò by the hand of his nephew Gian Galeazzo Visconti contains an allusion to the novel *Il castello di Trezzo* by Bazzoni.<sup>372</sup>

The intertextuality these references create add layers of depth to the novel, which rely on a reader's prior knowledge. The repeated use of this technique also validates the existence of an implicit idea of readership that is familiar with the novels being mentioned and knows how to properly contextualise them. In citing other historical novels of the time, Cantù indirectly provides a confirmation about the popularity of those texts and of their wide circulation. Also, in identifying the authors whose novels he cites as friends, Cantù reaffirms the presence of strong connections between these intellectuals and reinforces the concept of a cultural movement, which, albeit informal, shares common principles and similar artistic expressions. The concept of a cultural movement

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<sup>369</sup> Interestingly, Claudio Milanini has called this novel a 'iper-romanzo', See Milanini, 'La contraddizione nei romanzi di Cesare Cantù', p. 76.

<sup>370</sup> Cantù, p. 91.

<sup>371</sup> Cantù, p. 152.

<sup>372</sup> Cantù, pp. 603-605.

further extends from the authors to the readers in a circular process of creating and shaping of a nationalistic consciousness.

The complex interrelation between historical novels and the readers' world is amplified by means of references to real locations, particularly urban ones, which are reminders of the historical and cultural uniqueness of a given place.<sup>373</sup> They represent the continuity between past and present and they contribute to defining one's historical identity. Descriptions of landscape and of urban settings are rather conspicuous in Risorgimento historical novels, which suggests that authors of these novels are attempting to situate their narrative creations within the lives of the readers. In so doing, they also expose the possible limitations of a narrative that can only be fully understood by readers who are familiar with the topographical environment of the novels; however, it further validates the idea that authors of historical novels wrote for a specific readership.

The narrator in Cantù's novel is not only a storyteller, but also a social commentator and historian whose goal is to bring the past into the present of the readers, to help them relive and imagine the past using historical anecdotes, lengthy descriptions of life, mores and values, and by clarifying how toponyms as well as the stratification of architectural spaces have changed during the centuries that separate readers from the time of the story. Using the same direct approach we have previously seen, the narrator invites readers to follow his suggestions and use their imaginations to fill the historical and cultural vacuum that is inevitably created by progress and the passing of time: 'Colà presso può vedersi ancora uno di quei torrazzi che aiutano l'immaginazione a ricostruire il Milano antico.'<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Scarano, 'Riscrivere la storia: storiografia e romanzo storico', p. 43.

<sup>374</sup> Cantù, p. 18 (chapter 1).

Instances of this kind in which the past is investigated and reinterpreted through a contemporary lens are found throughout the whole novel.<sup>375</sup> Another example from chapter 11 is worth quoting extensively because it highlights the multi-layered identity of the narrator in the novel:

Nessuno forse de' miei lettori (giacché non posso sperare che queste pagine mie varchino di molto il recinto di Milano) nessuno forse sarà passato sul ponte di porta Romana senza voltare un'occhiata alla casa sulla destra di chi esce, alla cui facciata servono di fregio certi bassorilievi che rappresentano Milano riedificata dai collegati lombardi. Queste sculture, testimonio della rozzezza, di esecuzione e della rettitudine di concetto nelle arti belle del secolo duodecimo, ornavano la porta delle mura che quivi, in due archi, era stata fabbricata al tempo appunto della Lega Lombarda; dove poi sta ora quella casa, Luchino edificava una fortezza, la quale di molto allungavasi fra la via del terraggio e la fossa. Nell'anno in cui ci troviamo col nostro racconto, quella fortezza non era peranco terminata: le reliquie poi di essa, e singolarmente un'alta torre, durarono sinchè, mezzo secolo fa, non fu demolita da quella or savia or pazza foga di riedificare, che non sa far di nuovo senza cancellare le traccie degli avi.<sup>376</sup>

This passage illustrates the complexity and the undefined nature of the main narrative voice of the novel. Firstly, the roles of author and narrator are clearly overlapping here. The initial address to some or none of the readers who may or may not be familiar with the Porta Romana bridge presumes the notion that it is the writer who is speaking.

Later in the passage, the indication 'nostro racconto' brings us back to the diegetic level, where the use of the demonstrative adjective further complicates the situation as it seems to equate the author/narrator with the readers. Secondly, the use of the word 'lettori' together with the message of the parenthetical statement ('giacché non posso sperare che queste pagine mie varchino di molto il recinto di Milano') communicates the awareness of the author/narrator about the identity as well as the location of his readers. This second factor, which is often reiterated in the novel, must not be underestimated

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<sup>375</sup> There are several other examples of this kind in the novel, some quite longwinded and others anecdotal. For practical reasons, I will only reference a few of them: p. 5 (chapter 1), p. 19 (1), pp. 56-57 (3), p. 129 (5), p. 134 (6), pp. 177-178 (7), p. 230 (9), p. 287 (11), p. 386 (16), p. 401 (16), p. 436 (17), p. 524 (20).

<sup>376</sup> Cantù, p. 271 (Chapter 11).

because it contributes to establishing the tone of familiarity and confidentiality typical of Risorgimento historical novels. It also clearly identifies the author as one of the readers, all individuals who inhabit the same territory and have a strong connection with their land. Local identity, then, is construed as the basis for the creation of a national identity.

The above passage also provides information about how specific urban landmarks have changed between the time of the story and the present time of the readers. Upon reading similar descriptions, one wonders what the author/narrator's judgment about modern times is as opposed to the old one. The above passage does not seem to answer this question as it contains a very mild or at least neutral opinion about what the author/narrator calls the wise or insane tendency to demolish old constructions in order to build anew. A less unbiased expression of the narrator's point of view is, instead, found in other passages. For example, in chapter 1 the narrator invites readers to envision the way people lived in the Middle Ages and urges them to imagine a social and urban context different from their present one:

non dovete collocar loro dattorno queste fabbriche d'oggi, le vie larghe, allineate, selciate, che sasso non eccede, fiancheggiate da case a tre o quattro solai, colle finestre simmetriche protette da gelosie, con botteghe d'ogni lusso, con tutta quella bellezza che ha per carattere il gentile, e che rivela tempi quieti, e gente educata a non pensare gran fatto all'avvenire.<sup>377</sup>

Readers live in times of civility and comfort. Similarly in chapter 9, habits, customs and practices of the time of the readers are described as civil and restrained: 'non può essere adeguatamente compreso da chi non esca affatto dalle costumanze d'oggi, tutte quiete, tutte regolate, coperte, personali.'<sup>378</sup> The strong emphasis on the rigorous, orderly structure and methodical layout of modern cities reveals a certain uneasiness with a world excessively regulated, where rules impede personal freedom of expression. In this sense,

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<sup>377</sup> Cantù, pp. 17.

<sup>378</sup> Cantù, p. 228.

the passage is vaguely nostalgic of bygone times, but it is also a subtle commentary on the state of political and cultural siege imposed by the foreign administration.

The figure of the narrator in the fourth novel of the canon displays some different traits than the ones seen above. *Il castello di Trezzo* presents a third-person narration where the focalisation of the omniscient narrator is panoramic and scenic, as the attention to detail in descriptions of nature as well as of architecture and clothing is obsessive and superior to the other authors. As Roberto Paolo Ciardi explains:

nei romanzi del Bazzoni [...] i riferimenti alle arti figurative, invocate come testimonianza della credibilità delle descrizioni, e come garanti dell'esattezza delle notazioni ambientali, acquistano concretezza. Non soltanto la ricostruzione urbanistica o paesistica e dei singoli edifici è condotta con aderenza alle testimonianze superstiti, ma talvolta i particolari che individuano personaggi, abbigliamenti, ambienti vengono precisati attraverso il rimando alle tipologie ed alle caratteristiche generali rintracciabili nelle opere di pittori famosi.<sup>379</sup>

In the novel, which comprises twelve chapters, the role of the narrator is less emphasised and his poise is considerably more reserved than the other narrating figures analysed above. This is denoted by the absence of the general tone of companionship between narrator and readers that is characteristic of the three previous novels. In Bazzoni's novel, the narrator does not address his readers directly and does not refer to them with the epithets 'lettore' and 'lettori.' Compared to the other novels, Bazzoni's restrained narrative voice conveys the general impression of a less forceful attitude on the part of the author/narrator, who need not convince his readers. The absence of complicity with the readers bestows greater authority to Bazzoni's voice because the author/narrator does not engage in any pedantic narrative rituals aimed at captivating the readers' attention.

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<sup>379</sup> Roberto Paolo Ciardi, 'Descrivere la storia: alcuni modi di impiego delle arti figurative', pp. 95-96. Examples of this kind are: '[le] tele di Leonardo da Vinci, che seppero ritrarre o crear volti in cui la verginità, il sentimento o il sapore squisito delle forme vanno congiunte ad una nota caratteristica dei tempi di cui non havvi modello ai nostri giorni', Bazzoni, *Il castello di Trezzo*, p. 164 (Chapter 10).

Bazzoni's narrator is, however, no less of an educator than all other narrators in the canon. If anything, deprived of the moralising overtones we have seen in D'Azeglio, Grossi, and Cantù, *Il castello di Trezzo* reveals an extraordinary attention to the portrayal and characterisation of the spirit of the time. For instance, Bazzoni's rendition of the locations where the action of the novel is set is thorough and aims at reproducing on paper an exact idea of the way those locations might have looked to a person of the time. As seen for Cantù, the author wrote for an audience that was familiar with the geography and topography of the novel. As a result, the attention to the minutiae of the various places, buildings, and how they came to be in fourteenth-century Lombardy is an act through which the author delineates the cultural and historical identity of his readers.

Bazzoni understands the role of the readers' past in the formation process of their identity. In the novel, the use of expressions such as 'a quei tempi' is recurrent and, beyond the author's desire to document the passing of time, it accentuates the concept that progress cannot be halted. From beginning to end, examples of this kind are numerous in the novel. For instance:

Né a que' tempi era agevole cosa attraversar le acque: i torrenti si passavano a secco od a guado.<sup>380</sup>

E dove scorgi attualmente il maestoso ponte sull'Adda tra Canonica e Vaprio, allora non t'abbattevi che in due altissime ripe, entro cui quasi avvallate correivano le acque inette a guadarsi.<sup>381</sup>

a que' tempi le notizie si propagavano con somma difficoltà e lentezza, perché si potessero conoscere i dettagli del fatto.<sup>382</sup>

quella rocca passò in possesso di varii signori; uno dei quali, e vuolsi fosse Guazzone da San-Gervaso, costrussevi un ponte, opera arditissima per que' tempi, siccome quegli che con un sol arco attraversasse l'Adda dalla sponda milanese a quella del Bergamasco.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Bazzoni, p. 2 (Chapter 1).

<sup>381</sup> Bazzoni, p. 2 (Chapter 1).

<sup>382</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 6-7 (Chapter 1).

<sup>383</sup> Bazzoni, p. 20 (Chapter 2). Other examples of this kind in the novel are found at these pages and chapters (in parenthesis): p. 22 (2), p. 25 (2), p. 52 (3), p. 58 (4), p. 60 (4), p. 69 (5), p. 74 (5), twice on p.

Differently from all other authors in the canon, this is where Bazzoni as author and narrator reveals his presence and engages in an understated and less intrusive conversation with his readers.

Although the greater part of the action of the story is set far from Milan, this important city of the north of Italy still exercises its influence as a centre of power and culture within the framework of the plot as well as on the readers. It could be argued that Milan is the main character in Bazzoni's novel, the underlying element of connection between the past of the story and the present of the author. As seen in previous novels and particularly in Cantù's, local and geographical identity encourages the readers' participation in the plot and makes the most of their cultural identification. This is even more relevant in Bazzoni's work considering, for example, that the title of the novel contains a toponymic reference to the town of Trezzo and its castle. Therefore, from its title page, the novel sets out to illustrate the story of a place, and not of single individuals as it is the case for the other three novels. Not surprisingly, then, the descriptions of places hold an essential function in Bazzoni's work.

The novel opens with a historical and landscape description of this kind. The passage is tinged with dark tones that are reminiscent of atmospheres typical of the Gothic novel. The gaze of the narrator is here highly perceptible. Such gaze is very much concerned with comparing the past to the present, not with the intention to cast a moral judgement on the former and exalt the superiority of the latter, but in order to help readers understand the past by means of a comparative approach.

Nell'età di mezzo, età d'armi e di fanatismo, in cui rade volte i principi s'avevano di mira il pubblico bene, l'Italia non offriva quell'aspetto florido e ridente che attualmente presenta. Non vedevansi allora comode ed ampie strade, non sodi ponti sui suoi fiumi e torrenti, non villaggi ben

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91 (6), p. 95 (6), p. 98 (6), p. 102 (7), p. 109 (7), p. 110 (7), p. 114 (7), p. 115 (7), p. 130 (8), p. 137 (9), p. 143 (9), p. 157 (10), p. 158 (10), p. 161 (10), p. 164 (10).

costruiti e popolosi. Ma nell'Alta Lombardia specialmente a piè de' colli e a dilungo de' fiumi erano vaste foreste e boschi antichissimi; il suolo in molte parti non appariva che nuda brughiera o incolta landa; le strade erano torti viottoli, impraticabili la maggior parte ne' di piovosi; ne' villaggi stavano ammicchiati gli abituri dei contadini, fabbricati parte di legno e parte di sassi e creta, che mal valevano a proteggerli dalle intemperie delle stagioni. Surgevano all'incontro pel contado castelli di massicce mura, cerchiati da profonda fossa e chiusi da porte ferrate: quivi o nobile, o feudatario, o guerriero stava difeso per esercitare prepotenze sui vassalli, per tendere agguati a' vicini, o per sottrarsi alle pene meritatesi coi delitti e co' tradimenti.<sup>384</sup>

The author introduces digressions and overuses qualifying adjectives or terminology to convey not only a precise idea of the place where the action is set, but also of a specific mood and atmosphere.

Bazzoni based his reconstruction of the history of Milan on a work by Bernardino Corio (1459-1519), *Storia di Milano* (circa 1500), which is mentioned in passing in a footnote to document the fact that Bernabò Visconti liked beans.<sup>385</sup> The fact that Bazzoni does not openly acknowledge one of the primary sources for his novel, at least not as much as other authors in the canon did, cannot be considered an act of dishonesty, but rather as an indication of how Bazzoni practiced his role as writer. He acts as a true mentor and educator to his readers, who need not use any other source of information to learn facts about the history of Milan, because the author has already carried out all essential research for them. The historical novel is a summa of all readers should know, according to the author. What seems to me rather remarkable in the way Bazzoni, author and narrator, presents himself to readers is not the information the novel communicates directly, but what it obliquely implies. The archival research that precedes the composition of the novel, together with the construction of a literary work that is by definition multi-layered, targets a specific audience of readers, and where the narrator

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<sup>384</sup> Bazzoni, p. 1.

<sup>385</sup> 'Essi erano a Bernabò favorita vivanda. *Bernard. Corio.*', Bazzoni, p. 184 (chapter 12).

takes on several responsibilities, some of which are inherent to the storytelling process and others of which are external, helps define the function of the novel as a vehicle of communication whose potentialities are far more complex and effective than historical novels of the Risorgimento have received credit for.

Chapter 6 contains a lengthy description of the birth and growth of Milan from the ancient Etruscan settlement through Roman times and the hardship of the Barbarian dominations.<sup>386</sup> This evolutionary trajectory serves to establish a connection with the present of the reader and to bestow an accolade to nineteenth-century Milan. Bazzoni writes:

Non era allora Milano compreso entro lo spazioso giro di mura in cui ai nostri giorni si trova. Quest'ampia e ricca città, regina d'una fra le più belle parti d'Italia, la Lombardia, in mezzo alle cui feconde pianure s'innalza maestosa, antichissimamente villaggio degli Etruschi, andò d'età in età ampliandosi a cerchi concentrici, ed ai nostri tempi la vediamo ogni giorno ripulirsi dalla ruggine de' barbari secoli, e gareggiare colle più cospicue d'Europa per l'eleganza delle sue vie, de' suoi palagi, de' templi, de' teatri, dei pubblici monumenti.<sup>387</sup>

The word choice in this description is quite pompous and rhetorical, as Milan is defined the queen of Lombardy, imposingly dominating over the fertile plains of the north of Italy. Yet, it is in line with the portrayal of the city as the focal point of the narrative, as the element that informs readers' pride for the territories they inhabit.

In his praise of Milan as the most European, that is modern, city at the time, with its palaces, places of worship, monuments, and particularly theatres, Bazzoni's words are reminiscent of the criticism Giacomo Leopardi had expressed in his 1824 pamphlet about the grave condition of Italian society, mostly because it did not have a proper centre of cultural production.<sup>388</sup> Milan, presented by Bazzoni, appears to be exactly what Italy is

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<sup>386</sup> Overall, the description occupies four pages and is quite dense with names of historical figures and references to events: Bazzoni, pp. 95-98.

<sup>387</sup> Bazzoni, p. 95.

<sup>388</sup> 'la nazione non avendo centro, non havvi veramente un pubblico italiano; lascio stare la mancanza di teatro nazionale, e quella della letteratura veramente nazionale moderna, la quale presso l'altre nazioni,

not in Leopardi's argument. Milan was and is 'una seconda Roma' and can easily be regarded as an example to emulate for the regeneration of the whole country.<sup>389</sup> Besides, the words used to describe modern Milan and its unique character are significantly in contrast with those used to describe the people who inhabited the city and the adjacent region in the past. Bazzoni emphasises 'l'innocenza e la bontà dei costumi degli abitanti' and 'la semplicità del loro vitto, delle vesti e di ogni abitudine della vita.'<sup>390</sup> High and low, greatness and modesty, abundance and frugality, the characterisation of Milan and its people is polarised just as much as the protagonists in Bazzoni's novel. The polarisation of human qualities and attributes is a distinctive trait of historical novels of the canon and, as I will discuss in depth in the next chapter, the educational path delineated in Risorgimento historical novels through the models exemplified by the characters has a markedly religious connotation.

The meticulous reconstruction of the archaeological stratification of the city of Milan carried out by Bazzoni is directly connected to the construction of the readers' cultural identity, whose roots readers find in the novel. Not only does Bazzoni describe Milan as it appeared at the time of the novel, in the fourteenth century, but he also provides a historical perspective about how the region had changed since the ancient times. The following description from chapter 6 reconstructs the dense web of streets in Roman Milan in a way that can only be understood by those who are acquainted with the topography of the city:

Sul finire del terzo secolo [...] nuove fortissime mura, erette con grossi massi, e munite di distanza in distanza di quadrate torri, cinsero Milano con un giro assai più vasto del primo. Nove furono le porte aperte in quelle mura; ed a ciascuna di esse corrispondeva un quadrivio, cioè uno spazio in

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massime in questi ultimi tempi è un grandissimo mezzo e fonte di conformità di opinioni, gusti, costumi, maniere, caratteri individuali, non solo dentro i limiti della nazione stessa, ma tra più nazioni eziandio rispettivamente.' Giacomo Leopardi, *Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi italiani*, ed. by Mario Andrea Rigoni (Milano: Rizzoli, 2006), p. 56.

<sup>389</sup> Bazzoni, p. 96.

<sup>390</sup> Bazzoni, p. 96.

cui concorrevano molte strade, un solo dei quali ritenne fino a' di nostri quel nome sotto il corrotto vocabolo di Carobbio, che è ora ove aprivasi in allora la Porta Ticinese. Le altre si erano la Porta Erculea, che trovavasi al terminare dell'ora Contrada degli Amedei; la Romana, che era al cominciare del Corso presso la Contrada della Maddalena; la Tonsa, al finir di San-Zeno; l'Argentea, detta Renza od Orientale, al Leone; la Nuova, presso San-Francesco di Paola; la Comasina, a San-Marcellino presso la Contrada del Lauro; la Giovia, al terminare di San-Vincenzino; e la Vercellina, detta, come si vuole, di Venere, a Santa-Maria-alla-Porta. Oltre queste mura, Milano fu in que' tempi decorata d'un circo, d'un teatro, di varii palazzi imperiali, di molti templi, fra i quali magnifico era quello di Ercole fuori della Porta Ticinese, la cui grandezza ci è ancora attestata da un avanzo delle colonne del peristilio, che stanno presso San-Lorenzo.<sup>391</sup>

It seems to me that this is perfectly in line with modern theories of national identity and the process of nation-building formation, particularly with theories developed by Anthony Smith who investigated the origins of nations and traced their genealogy to pre-modern ethnic foundations in his *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.<sup>392</sup> Smith singles out two mythic moments in the history of a community that are used to create the background of a national consciousness. Firstly, there is the phase of the founding fathers, the mythical tale of the birth of the community, that no one recalls any longer. These fathers presided over the origins of the community and 'communed with the gods themselves.'<sup>393</sup> After the foundation of a community comes its prosperity, a time when the community functions like a perfect mechanism in which everyone has a role and works to sustain public development. This is an Eden-like picture of one's community past and, in fact, Smith refers to it as to a golden age, a time of 'communal splendour, with its sages, saints and heroes, the era in which the community achieved its classical form, and which bequeathed a legacy of glorious memories and cultural achievements.'<sup>394</sup> Smith suggests that individuals need to recognise these phases in their history in order to nourish an

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<sup>391</sup> Bazzoni, p. 96.

<sup>392</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>393</sup> Smith, p. 191.

<sup>394</sup> Smith, p. 191.

attachment to their community. It is not a simple commemoration of past glories but a living example that is to inspire and stimulate the present. This is the originality of the figure of the narrator in Bazzoni's novel.

### **Conclusion**

The intense publication of historical novels after 1827 was driven by a high demand for this literary product which testifies to the readers' fascination with the historical genre in spite of and independently from debates on its literary value as well as the formulaic and prosaic quality of its content. These two aspects have too often been the only concern of mainstream literary criticism. In this light, the present chapter has delineated the selection of four of the most popular historical novels of the time, that is the ones most frequently reprinted between 1827 and 1840, but also in the second half of the century and into the twentieth, and written by authors who operated in the same cultural environment and participated in an unofficial literary movement. The analysis of this selection of novels can help expose the distinctive narrative and thematic construction of a genre that, although short-lived, had strong impact on popular imagination and contributed to the rise of a collective awareness around national unity.

In an attempt to reevaluate the role of nineteenth-century Italian historical novels in creating a movement of ideas and in promoting the rise of a nationalist consciousness, this chapter has explored the way authors of novels in the canon embraced political commitment as an artistic duty. Authoring a novel based on historical facts from the Italian medieval period was a means to engage readers' interest and passion on themes and ethical values such as loyalty, courage, self-sacrifice, dedication to a cause, and was not perceived as an individualistic endeavour, but, to a degree, as a collective mission.

The four authors in the canon attended the same cultural circles and were close friends. They were highly aware of the others' interests and writing projects and, in most cases, they read each other's novels and provided feedback on them. Intertextual connections between these novels further validate the methodological approach employed in this thesis to consider Risorgimento historical novels as a well-defined literary corpus.

The special bond existing among authors in the medieval canon also extended to their readers via historical novels and by means of the figure of the narrator, whose role and function were quite innovative. The agreement implicitly stipulated between narrators and readers in the novels guarantees the realism of the story, elevates the status of the narrator from modest storyteller to omniscient narrative voice, and establishes a singular rapport between narrator and reader that resembles an educational exchange.

Narrators are certainly responsible for the progress and development of the narration, but they also recurrently align with the author's or the reader's identity, thus producing the effect of a narrative structure in which readers are not only observers, but also participants. This aspect emerges from the number of instances in which narrators call on readers to attract their attention and remind them that they are the ultimate consumers of their novels. Narrators also implement the authors' mission to educate readers on a variety of subjects: historical events, facts, and prominent figures, local history and geography, as well as the transformation of urban spaces across time. Through detailed descriptions of time and place, the authors of these novels reminded readers, who were also budding citizens in the new Italian nation, of their proud history and local identity. In so doing, authors informed and shaped readers' historical perception of themselves as they situated their identity at the heart of the evolutionary process of a community in which readers participated. In its embryonic state, national identity is local

identity, and the rise of a nationalistic culture in the early *Ottocento* finds a justification in the way historical novels promoted historical awareness.

In the next chapter, I analyse another aspect of the educational message in historical novels, that is the designation of a specific moral and behavioural code emphasising qualities and values necessary to the characterisation of the identity of new Italians. The examination of the way the three main characters (knight, damsels, and villains) are constructed in the four novels of the medieval canon will unveil their formulaic qualities, but also their powerful symbolic connotation and appeal for the readers.

## **5 NARRATING THE NATION: HISTORICAL NOVELS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will focus on how historical novels impacted the development of national identity by sustaining the rise of a nationalistic nostalgia for the Middle Ages. They glorified and reproduced that period for nineteenth-century readers by ways of medieval narratives with the customary medievalised trappings, and by popularising a perceived code of values derived from the tradition of chivalry. I will analyse how these aspects emerge in the construction and representation of characters in my main corpus.

Historical novels display a conventional range of literary personae whose physical and behavioural traits are reiterated in the works of the medieval canon. Good and Evil, Love and Hate, Authority and Subordination are all defining traits of these characters as they communicate the idea of a human macrocosm swept by opposing forces. Characters are at the centre of an intricate web of situations emphasising themes such as reaction against a common enemy; the destructive consequences of political disunity; the lack of pride for one's place of origin; and the subjugation of the weak. In typical Romantic style, the novels also expose a vast range of human emotions, underscoring the ephemeral nature of human existence and highlighting the notion of suffering as a noble virtue. In the crucial years of the Italian Risorgimento these novels had a strong emotional impact on readers.<sup>395</sup>

The most frequently recurring figures displayed in the novels are knights, damsels, and evil characters. The three main sections in this chapter are dedicated to the analysis of these figures in historical novels of the medieval canon thereby unveiling the

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<sup>395</sup> See sections 2.2, 4.1, and 4.2 above.

creation and construction of a medieval imagery in the nineteenth century. I will discuss how the figure of the knight gained strong symbolic meaning, providing a moral paradigm that bred specific nationalistic values. Subsequently, I will focus on the figure of the damsel. Female characters are typically passive figures not just from the point of view of their behaviour, but also because their narrative development is driven by others' decisions, for instance by wicked individuals, the third type of character analysed in this chapter.

Understanding how such figures and values resonated with nineteenth-century readership is key to understanding how this type of medievalism informed the rise of an Italian cultural nationalist movement. To this end, the present chapter will also clarify how nineteenth-century culture was highly receptive of ideas and sentiments disseminated through historical narrative. For instance, to contextualise the impact and reception of knightly figures, I consider the circulation of Walter Scott's novels in Italy in the early 1820s, and his revival of the medieval chivalric code of conduct. As the first writer who recognized the potential of historical romance as a 'dramatic narration of national history,' Scott's model impacted the development of national identity.<sup>396</sup> Given the relevance of the chivalric discourse in the nineteenth century and the higher role of knightly characters above all others in the novels, the analysis will constitute the very first section in this chapter. Similarly, the representation of female characters will be examined in connection with allegorical national personifications typical of the international political climate of the time. Nations were, in fact, often represented as female entities in order to glorify state power, but also to nurture the rhetoric of motherhood and attachment to one's country. Finally, the representation of the figure of

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<sup>396</sup> Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pg. 151.

the villain, through a process of demonisation and dehumanisation, served as a propaganda technique to mobilise a cohesive sentiment of repulsion against the enemy.

In historical novels, the juxtaposition of opposing elements such as good-evil, love-hate (in the binomial damsels-villain, but especially knight-villain) defines a pattern that, albeit predictable and prosaic, is needed in order to accentuate the emotional connotation of the narrative. It is inserted in a framework where authors describe larger-than-life individuals, whose physical and behavioural characteristics are antithetical, so as to create friction and attain a certain degree of passion and pathos. In fact, pathos is often too easy to detect, and it results in sentimental descriptions of suffering and longing or detailed picturesque reconstructions of the environment. It is through the emotional hyperbole of the narrative that the authors aim to appeal to their readers.

### **5.1 Chivalric heroism as foundation for the new nation**

The system of values that sustained the codification of the medieval ideal in nineteenth-century European culture was anchored in the revival of the figure of the knight and in the reinterpretation of the chivalric code as a set of noble ideas and practices. The chivalric ethos constituted a powerful discourse whereby the historical figure of the medieval knight was transformed into an influential social symbol. Whereas chivalry, as medieval knights experienced it, was a violent, often grisly, phenomenon, in the nineteenth century it came to encompass normative qualities and related behaviours such as courage and courtesy, loyalty, a sense of honour, and a profound religious devotion, as well as an obligation to defend the weaker members of society. The figure of the knight

was purged of the violent and rude attributes typical of a warrior and was shaped into a role model for members of the burgeoning nineteenth-century society.<sup>397</sup>

The representation of knights and their distinctive ethos played an important role in constituting new societal norms. On the wave of the progressive reappraisal of the medieval period that began in the eighteenth century, the image of the knight acquired new meaning and helped shape an emerging class of gentlemen.<sup>398</sup> Chivalry provided a vocabulary for manufacturing the gentleman as masculine, integrating national identity with notions of progress and civilization.<sup>399</sup> As part of this progress and a distinctive mark of a civilised and refined nation was the definition of gender roles and the role of women in relation to chivalrous gentlemen. Therefore, as the knight-symbol-of-civilisation rose to prominence, so did the knight's female counterpart in the chivalric narrative, the damsel. In Italian culture, this transformation can be traced back to the moment Scott's historical novels began circulating in translation in the early 1820s.<sup>400</sup> They proved instrumental in refashioning the concept of chivalry into the nineteenth century and their influence was felt in Italian culture, as well as on the European continent as a whole.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> See Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), p. 67.

<sup>398</sup> See Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>399</sup> Michèle Cohen, "Manners" Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830." *Journal of British Studies*, 2 (2005), pp. 312–329. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/427127](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/427127) [accessed 15 July 2019] (p. 315).

<sup>400</sup> The relations between Scott and Italy are extensive and have been well documented. Apart from the already-mentioned *Walter Scott in Italia 1821-1971*, by Franca Ruggirei Punzo see: Maria Dotti, *Delle derivazioni dei Promessi Sposi di Alessandro Manzoni dai romanzi di Walter Scott* (Pisa: Tip. Mariotti, 1900); Anna Benedetti, *Le traduzioni italiane di Walter Scott e i loro anglicismi* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1974).

<sup>401</sup> See Enrica Villari, 'Introduzione', *Cavalleria (di) Walter Scott* (Torino: Bollati-Boringhieri, 1991), pp. vii-xxi. It must be said that whereas Scott's novels had a strong influence on European culture at the time, the chivalric ideal was not entirely foreign-born since it had a long-standing tradition in Italian epic. In fact, Renaissance poets such as Luigi Pulci, Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto has already revived the themes of knightly sagas. In their respective works (*Morgante*, *Orlando Innamorato*, and *Orlando Furioso*) centred around the story of Orlando, who is a knight in Charlemagne's court. See, Marco Villoresi, *La letteratura cavalleresca. Dai cicli medievali all'Ariosto* (Roma: Carocci, 2000).

Scott, whose ‘Essay on Chivalry’ was published in the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1824, believed that the code of honour developed as part of the institution of knighthood in the Middle Ages could continue to be beneficial in the modern world.<sup>402</sup> During the Middle Ages, the chivalric system ‘had a strong influence on public opinion; and we cannot doubt that its institutions, virtuous as they were in principle, and honourable and generous in their ends, must have done much good and prevented much evil.’ Scott claimed that the medieval institution of chivalry had brought a deep sense of urbanity, decency, and courtesy to the European society of the past and could continue to do so in his own time.

The chivalric code of honour could still offer valuable role models for the modern man, and, in regulating social life and personal relationships, it could also help eradicate human degeneration and criminal behaviour.<sup>403</sup> The ultimate legacy of chivalry was to be found:

in the general feeling of respect to the female sex; in the rules of forbearance and decorum in society; in the duties of speaking truth and observing courtesy; and in the general conviction and assurance, that, as no man can encroach upon the property of another without accounting to the laws, so none can infringe on his personal honour, be the difference of rank what it may, without subjecting himself to personal responsibility.

The chivalric code of knighthood combined military prowess with human passion; feelings of devotion to a cause or to a person, and courtly love for women.<sup>404</sup> The figure of the knight is defined into a precise behavioural typology, as he has to abide by the rules dictated by the chivalric code.

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<sup>402</sup> An abridged version of Scott’s essay, originally 30-pages long, is still available on the Encyclopaedia Britannica website: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sir-Walter-Scott-on-chivalry-1987278>> (accessed on 15 August 2019). All subsequent references to Scott’s essay are taken from this website.

<sup>403</sup> Villari, p. xvii.

<sup>404</sup> ‘I greci e i romani combattevano per la libert a o per la conquista, i cavalieri medievali per Dio e per le loro dame’ (Villari, p. xi).

At the same time, through the process of narrativization, that is the process through which the chivalric discourse was turned into narrative, in the early 1800s the knight was transformed into a proper symbol and imbued with idealised values that, before being codified as typically chivalric, are basic human values (love, truth, honesty, loyalty).<sup>405</sup> As such, the knight, as the quintessential example of a human being, was inserted ‘nella sfera della simbologia morale e culturale,’ which resulted in a ‘moralizzazione-sacralizzazione della [sua] figura e della funzione.’<sup>406</sup> The knight became the bearer of profound ontological significance and the emblem of human existence lived for a greater cause, all aspects that contributed to creating a Christian subtext and also a nationalistic subtext, as will become evident in the next section.

### **5.1.1 Noble and holy warriors**

Drawing from the above considerations, we can look at the way novels in the medieval canon construct the character of the knight. This study will expose how the moral portrayal of these figures merges with their physical constitution in a way that transforms the entire human being and projects them onto the level of divinity. These figures are constructed in a way that makes them highly human and vulnerable, and at the same time endowed with such qualities that are to be found only in a superior being, which is also underscored by their religious devotion and saintly attributes.

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<sup>405</sup> The symbolic charge of the figure of the knight resonates with the description of the hero given by Margery Hourihan in *Deconstructing the Hero*. Borrowing de Saussure’s linguistic theorisation of language as a system of differences and composed of a signifier and a signified, she claims that the hero – or the knight, in our context – has to be interpreted as a signifier, because it ‘does not relate to anything in the physical world [...] it relates to a mental concept which may involve any number of emotional associations.’ See Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero. Literary Theory and Children’s Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 12.

<sup>406</sup> Marco Olivieri, *Il destino del cavaliere: aspetti dell’ideologia cavalleresca* (Perugia: Guerra Editore, 1990) p. 7 and p. 10.

The eponymous character in D'Azeglio's novel is the personification of frank heroism and of timeless virtue. Ettore Fieramosca is a gallant knight, 'il fiore della gioventù italiana.'<sup>407</sup> He is also known for his 'spiriti bollenti' and for his 'sete di gloria ed amor di patria.'<sup>408</sup> Fieramosca is also a thoughtful and mature figure, whose personal concerns leave him no ability to enjoy the gaiety typical of his young age. This is exactly the first image the writer offers of the valorous knight:

Sempre era malinconico e [...] menava una vita tanto da sè e diversa da quella dei giovani pari suoi. Tutti però d'accordo lodavano la sua buona natura, il suo valore, la sua cortesia; dal che si poteva conoscere quanto fosse amato e tenuto in pregio.<sup>409</sup>

His good-natured behaviour is in contrast with his being at the same time preoccupied and solitary. Indications about Ettore's conflicting nature are introduced in the text well before the protagonist appears, so that we see the figure of Fieramosca approaching the scene from the distance. Fieramosca enters the story in chapter II in the memory of his friends and companions, at first as an unknown figure, that is 'uno del quale per la verità non mi sovviene il nome, ma che mi ricordo benissimo d'aver incontrato più volte' as one of the soldiers says. The protagonist is then identified by his name, which most soldiers are familiar with thanks to his chivalrous endeavours, as well as for his characteristic sombre demeanour.<sup>410</sup>

Gathered in a local inn, French and Spanish soldiers share opinions, memories, and anecdotes about the protagonist because 'il favore che Fieramosca godeva nell'esercito fece sì che ognuno volle dir la sua mostrando premura per questi suoi casi' and they paint the profile of a man who is a stranger to his own peers.<sup>411</sup> Whereas one of the soldiers remarks that 'a vederlo sempre tristo, con quel viso sbattuto, mi muove un certo

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<sup>407</sup> D'Azeglio, *Ettore Fieramosca*, p. 235.

<sup>408</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 74.

<sup>409</sup> D'Azeglio, pp. 45-46.

<sup>410</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 44.

<sup>411</sup> D'Azeglio, pp. 47-48.

sentimento che nemmeno io so ben capire' another soldier defends Ettore saying that 'un cuore buono ed amorevole può star nel petto d'un uomo ardito in faccia al nemico, e [...] in questo s'ha a render giustizia a Fieramosca.'<sup>412</sup> The protagonist finally enters the scene in chapter III, which is where 'Fieramosca' becomes 'Ettore Fieramosca'.

Through a slow movement that asks the reader to focus on one detail in a broader context, D'Azeglio describes the young man in a pictorial way that owes greatly to the Romantic paintings of his time. Right from the beginning, Fieramosca appears as the best example of everything that is good and noble in a young person; he is a natural born hero and Nature has given him incomparable qualities:

La Natura gli aveva concesso il prezioso dono d'esser per indole propria spinto a quanto v'ha di bello, di buono e di grande. Un solo difetto si poteva apporgli, se difetto si può chiamare: una soverchia bontà.<sup>413</sup>

Ettore Fieramosca is an extraordinary individual. He combines profound wisdom with a good nature, unusual for his young age. Life has taught him 'qual limite si debba porre alla bontà stessa onde non degeneri in debolezza.'<sup>414</sup> He is loved and respected. He is cultivated and excels in everything he does, since he has the gift 'di far sempre la prima figura in ogni cosa e fra tutti ovunque si trovasse.'<sup>415</sup> More than handsome in a physical sense, Fieramosca is a prodigy of nature at whom people marvel and in whose presence others live an ecstatic experience. For example, while attending one of the many parades described in the novel, Fieramosca appears as follows:

Perfetto nelle forme del corpo ne mostrava la gentile struttura con un vestire stretto alla carne, che in ispecie alle gambe ed alle coscie non gli faceva una piega, tutto di raso bianco; ed era tanta la sua bellezza, la grazia nell'atteggiarsi, che, passando la cavalcata per le strade, le turbe guardavano lui solo e di lui solo si mearavigliavano.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 48.

<sup>413</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 59.

<sup>414</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 59.

<sup>415</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 235.

<sup>416</sup> D'Azeglio, pp. 235-236.

The description of Ettore's sensual beauty enhanced by his satin-clad legs and tight-fitting clothing, but also his elegant riding style and composure, portray him as an out-of-the-ordinary creature. Ettore Fieramosca is not like all other mortal beings, but rather, a chosen one. Although not as strongly as in D'Azeglio's novel, the aura of predestination is typical of all other knightly figures in novels of the canon, which is what sets them apart from other characters.

In spite of all the incomparable qualities combined in one single individual, Ettore is fundamentally unhappy because of the impossibility of his love for Ginevra. In truth, the reader senses that Fieramosca's grief is more than just his anguish for love, that he is in the midst of an ontological crisis. To a certain extent Fieramosca is, in fact, a Christ-like figure: he is charismatic, but humble; profoundly kind and just; virtuous and patient; obedient and resigned to his own fate.

This particular aspect of the character is reiterated at various stages, reinforcing the notion of a Christian subtext in the novel. The similarities between Ettore and a biblical figure are rather striking, which validate the interpretation of his behaviour and actions as parables to be read in a civic sense. At one point Ettore Fieramosca is intensely troubled and saddened by seeing two indigent and famished women looking for some food left behind by soldiers after a plunder:

Ettore s'abbattè in certe povere donne, mezzo coperte di cenci, che traendosi dietro per mano, o recandosi in collo i loro bambini cascanti dalla fame, andavano frugando per quelle case abbandonate, se mai fosse sfuggita qualche cosa all'ingorda avarizia de' soldati che le aveàn messe a sacco. Il cuore del giovane faceva sangue a questo spettacolo.<sup>417</sup>

Fieramosca is struck by the presence of these two women whose extreme state of indigence clashes violently with the image of the greedy looters. Fieramosca's sorrowful condition is figuratively designated by a bleeding heart, an image evocative of the symbol

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<sup>417</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 81.

of the sacred heart in Christian imagery. At the end of the novel, like the Christ, whose mortal remains are not found in the cave where he is laid to rest and of which only his teachings survive, Fieramosca is last seen riding his horse into the unknown: ‘gli amici di Fieramosca, nè uomo nessuno di quell’età lo vide mai più d’allora in poi nè vivo nè morto.’<sup>418</sup> Like Christ, Ettore disappears with his white steed leaving behind only the example he has set in his lifetime.

In Tommaso Grossi’s novel the knightly figure who acts in opposition to a malevolent individual is Marco Visconti. Marco is infatuated with the young Bice del Balzo, who is betrothed to marry another man, Ottorino Visconti. Marco Visconti is approximately forty-five years of age, and he is fundamentally a grown-up version of the intrepid, energetic, and tenacious Ettore. In spite of the evident age gap between the two men, they nonetheless share common moral traits as a result of similar challenges and tribulations they have endured in life. Having said that, from the beginning to the end of these novels Marco and Ettore are presented as possessing a morality and personal characteristics that are already fully developed, as if their growth had occurred before the time of the novel. This explains why they automatically enter the realm of deity and myth as soon as they disappear from the world scene: it is because they are already perceived as such in their lifetime. This aspect contributes to emphasise the characterisation of these figures as immutable. Eternity is a quality that applies only to gods and that does not pertain to either one of the two knights, who are mortal beings whose bodies suffer from the deterioration caused by the passing of time. Although their corporeal structure proves perishable, their spiritual and moral substance remains fundamentally the same.

The figure of Marco Visconti echoes Fieramosca’s also in that his moral qualities and attractiveness are dimmed by a tendency to pensiveness and melancholy. The story

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<sup>418</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 502.

is set in Marco's adulthood, but the reader gets a glimpse of his past in chapter VII, where the author digresses from the main plotline to focus on the time, decades earlier, when Marco was in love with Ermelinda, Bice's mother. In this chapter, we learn that in his youth, Marco had intended to marry Ermelinda, defying his father, Matteo The Great, who disapproved of the match. As a matter of fact, Matteo Visconti, head of the powerful dynasty of the Visconti, who ruled Milan for almost two centuries 'non voleva dare a suoi figli altro che gran principesse e figliuole di re di corona' and had forbidden his son's marriage proposals.<sup>419</sup>

It is in this chapter that we learn about young Marco's charisma, well-mannered conduct, and simply unrivalled superiority in everything he puts his mind to, as he is:

d'indole generosa, pronto d'ingegno, atto delle membra, il primo sempre in tutti gli esercizi che s'addicessero a gentiluomo, secondo la ragione del tempo, facevasi fin da giovinetto perdonar dagli emuli la sua incontrastabile superiorità colla modestia delle sue maniere, virtù che veniva in lui più grata per lo splendore dei natali, per la beltà del volto, per la leggiadria della persona.<sup>420</sup>

We also learn about his military prowess and bravery. In his youth, Marco, second-born and Matteo's favourite, was the prototype of the perfect soldier, known for his 'perizia' and 'ostinazione' in battle and known to be a 'condottiere valente e fortunato di eserciti' who made a glorious name for himself 'fra i primi capitani di quel secolo.'<sup>421</sup> Just like Ettore Fieramosca, who can hardly contain his own ardour ('i bollenti spiriti'), young Marco shows some of the traits that will define him in his maturity: 'guai chi gli attraversasse la strada! Chi s'avvisasse di porre contrasto alla sua natura appassionata, impetuosa, indomita così nell'ira come nell'amore!'<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Grossi, *Marco Visconti*, p. 76.

<sup>420</sup> Grossi, p. 84.

<sup>421</sup> Grossi, p. 84.

<sup>422</sup> Grossi, p. 84.

The flashback ends with chapter VII and, in chapter VIII, Marco Visconti, now a man, appears as a transformed individual. Time has moulded his personality, depriving him of his youthful enthusiasm, and hardening his emotional shell:

i disagi d'una vita travagliata e tempestosa, se avevano rapita al suo volto la prima freschezza, il primo fuoco, quel raggio giovanile pieno di gioja e di baldanza, vi avevan sostituita una gravità severa e pur dolce, una fierezza temperata, un non so che di malinconico, che significava lo scontento abituale dell'animo, ma senza amarezza, senza fiele.<sup>423</sup>

The lack of love and happiness has not turned Marco into his own nemesis. His love for Bice, who evidently reminds him of a young Ermelinda, is not motivated by revenge, but rather by nostalgia. In his adult age, Marco is a respectable and stately figure, not one consumed by passion and acrimony as is Pelagrua, the evil character in Grossi's novel. Marco is self-possessed, composed, and at times capable of showing emotions, as his physical appearance communicates:

Su quella faccia alquanto scarna, pallida, forse di soverchio, spiccava il nero d'una barba morbida e folta, di due sopracciglia ben distese, di due occhi sfolgoranti: le guance si tingevano qualche volta del vivo colore della porpora, rendendo testimonianza delle interne commozioni.<sup>424</sup>

Tried by life's travails, Marco is still a respected leader and a brave knight. The portrayal the author paints in chapter VIII shows Marco as a true sovereign: statuesque and sumptuously dressed. Marco wears no headgear, so that 'i capelli neri, divisi sulla fronte ampia e maestosa [si vedevano] discendergli ugualmente dai due lati sino al confine dell'orecchio, segnando i contorni del viso' and he is robed in a long black velvet gown that is 'aperto dinanzi e foderato di vajo, con sotto una veste di seta, stretta in cintura da una fascia, con un ricco fibbiaglio d'oro, e nella cintura un pugnale largo col manico tempestato di rubini.'<sup>425</sup> While gold, rubies, silk, velvet, and vair fur identify Marco as a king, the reader's sensory appreciation is stimulated by the juxtaposition of

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<sup>423</sup> Grossi, p. 88.

<sup>424</sup> Grossi, p. 88.

<sup>425</sup> Grossi, pp. 88-89.

complementary patterns, textures, and colours: smooth and rugged, shiny and opaque, dark and pale.

Another example of an uncommon man is Margherita's husband, Franciscolo Pusterla, one of the knightly figures in Cantù's novel: 'nè del favore abusava a danno altrui, nè se ne prevaleva a proprio vantaggio; onesto, generoso.'<sup>426</sup> Most importantly, Franciscolo is characterised as an exemplary Italian man who is 'ricordevole delle virtù italiane e volenteroso del bene dei suoi concittadini.'<sup>427</sup> He is living proof that an Italian ethnocultural lineage exists. He also has the prosperity of his compatriots ('concittadini') at heart. He embodies the past and future of his community and, as such, he is a role model. In the dual construction of a world where good and evil are constantly in opposition, the construction of Franciscolo's symbolism as representing typical Italian virtues and dedication to the wellbeing of his people is implicitly but naturally set against the representation of the hero's nemesis. In this sense, the villain in the novel represents foreign virtues, where foreign does not necessarily indicate geographical distance, but rather cultural and historical alterity. Foreigners are those who do not participate in and do not share the value system that identifies the Italian hero. Foreigners are, simply put, those who are not Italian.

Furthermore, Franciscolo's qualities are considered worthy of a woman of Margherita's status, seeing that she is a cousin of Luchino Visconti. Filtered through the symbolic interpretation of national iconography, Margherita and Franciscolo's union, that is between the emblem of Italian virtues and the woman-as-nation symbol, perfectly accentuates the nationalistic agenda present in the text. Margherita deeply values Franciscolo and his superior qualities, which have gained him an excellent reputation.

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<sup>426</sup> Cantù, p. 42.

<sup>427</sup> Cantù, p. 42.

She is honoured by her husband's good name, celebrated throughout the Lombardy region, and is proud to be as one with him.<sup>428</sup>

Franciscolo is born to the noble and very wealthy Pusterla family from Milan, whose main residence in the city is a living demonstration of the importance of the chivalric tradition. The imposing stone structure:

non avea che due finestre alte, protette da robuste inginocchiate, siccome chiamavano le ferriate curve sporgenti: grossi anelli impiombati nelle bugne, fornivano comodità di legarvi i cavalli, per salir sui quali erano disposte lungo i muri e alla porta dei dadi di granito; la porta, chiusa con enormi imposte e col suo ponte levatojo, aprivasi sotto una torretta quadrata, posta in fondo alla via mozza, che ancora nominiamo Vicolo Pusterla. Sull'accennato torrione di angolo sventolava lo stendardo della famiglia, coll'aquila nera in campo giallo.<sup>429</sup>

The Pusterlas live in what appears to be a characteristically early Medieval castle furnished with a moat and a drawbridge that seems more suitable for a forsaken Scottish landscape than the most modern city in Italy of the time.<sup>430</sup> Interestingly, the novel is set in 1340, that is the early Renaissance period, which in a way exposes the author's intervention in the plot to achieve a specific purpose. The description of the residence of the Pusterlas is, then, justified not on the basis of historical accuracy, but in order to recreate a specific medieval atmosphere that is essentially Gothic.

This fortress is the location of a scene ('La congiura' in chapter V) that reiterates the tendency observed above to utilise Christian imagery to describe knightly figures. Franciscolo is in his residence with other soldiers to discuss an action plan against the Milanese tyrant Luchino Visconti, who has shown unsolicited attention to Margherita.

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<sup>428</sup>Qual è la donna che, all'udire lodato un uomo, non si compiaccia al poter dire "E mio?" (Cantù, p. 45).

<sup>429</sup> Cantù, p. 18.

<sup>430</sup> Yet, the power of this medieval iconography was still very strongly felt toward the end of nineteenth century, when, for instance, the Castello Sforzesco in Milan was restored by including a moat and a drawbridge. See, Caterina Di Biase, "'La resurrezione del Gran Monumento'. Beltrami e l'invenzione del Castello sforzesco", in *Luca Beltrami 1854–1933. Storia, arte e architettura a Milano*, ed. Silvia Paoli (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana editoriale, 2014), 121–141.

At the end of this congregation, the attendees begin to perform a ritual, which has noticeable religious undertones:

un paggio recava una sottocoppa d'oro cesellato, sulla quale una capacissima tazza del metallo istesso e di fino artificio, entro cui un altro paggio, da una brocca d'argento, versò vino prelibato. Primo Franciscolo, a cui fu offerto in ginocchi, l'accostò alle labbra, indi mandò in giro fra gli amici la coppa, che più volte venne ricolma, talché l'amor di patria fu riscaldato dal generoso liquore.<sup>431</sup>

As often seen in Risorgimento historical novels, the pictorial quality of certain descriptions helps create or reinforce a mental association with a well-known image or concept; in this case the association is between the scene in the novel and any representation of the Last Supper, where the Holy Grail is being passed among Jesus and the Apostles. From the reverence of the page boy, who kneels in front of Franciscolo while offering the chalice, and the fine quality of said chalice, to the act of pouring wine into it and sharing it with the others for the purpose of partaking in the ritual, everything in this scene alludes to the sacredness of the moment.

More importantly, here the emphasis of the author is not so much on the act of drinking and enjoying a cup of wine among friends as it is on the symbolic significance of such wine. The chiseled vessel, which Franciscolo only brings close to his mouth without seemingly taking a sip of the content, is frequently filled up with the result (or else, with the intention, given that 'talché' may be interpreted both as a conjunction expressing consequence and purpose) that the soldiers' sense of patriotism ('amore di patria') becomes reinvigorated. The fluid that is poured and drunk, designated as wine and as liquor, fuels the men's devotion and loyalty to their country, of which Franciscolo, who distributes it to his fellow soldiers, is evidently the emblem.

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<sup>431</sup> Cantù, p. 128.

The analogy with the Last Supper would not be complete without a traitor, or else, in Cantù's novel, an accidental informant. This is Alpinolo, a good friend and assistant of the Pusterlas, who is the first to utter words of support for the desire to defend the freedom of the Milanese community against Visconti's despotism. No sooner has everyone sipped wine from the cup than Alpinolo breaks into the toast 'Un brindisi alla libertà di Milano' to which all other participants respond in a like manner.<sup>432</sup> The political subtext that in novels of the canon is often conveyed by means of symbolism becomes here overt and, as such, potentially revolutionary. The congregation of soldiers headed by Franciscolo performing a well-orchestrated ritual where wine is passed around in a precious cup like during a religious service and where words of sedition are pronounced to incite feelings of rebellion is indeed the representation of the doings of a secret society scheming against the establishment governing the city. In the historical frame of fourteenth-century Visconti-ruled Milan, Alpinolo's words in support of municipal liberty and independence are explicitly directed towards the author's and readers' nineteenth-century Austrian-occupied Milan.

Alpinolo is an adventurous young man, whose exuberant sense of initiative often results in misguided judgement. In this regard, Alpinolo brings to mind Ettore Fieramosca and Marco Visconti's 'bollenti spiriti' although he does not possess their discernment. Alpinolo is, in fact, often described as having 'impeto sconigliato a lui naturale', often expressed in his incredibly expressive eyes ('con occhi sfavillanti', 'divampante negli occhi', 'certi occhi divampanti'), and as being unable to control his emotions ('bastava che uno gli gettasse gli occhi addosso per comprendere come un vivo pensiero l'agitava dentro').<sup>433</sup> In line with these characteristics, Alpinolo is excited to

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<sup>432</sup> Cantù, p. 128.

<sup>433</sup> In order: Cantù, p. 106; p. 15, 103, p. 119; p. 133.

hear Franciscolo Pusterla's speech about freedom and patriotism, to the point that he convinces himself of the fact that a real conspiracy is being prepared to overturn Luchino Visconti. Alpinolo becomes obsessed with such thoughts that:

a furia di rimestarli, e volgerli, e interpretarli, v'ì diede corpo; dove non erano che parole, immaginò fatti; le minacce scambiò per disegni, i desiderj per macchinazioni: [...] si credette depositario del segreto d'una trama, la quale potesse, a veder e non vedere, dare il tracollo ai presenti tiranni.<sup>434</sup>

Chapter VI, significantly named 'Un'imprudenza', is dedicated to the explanation of how Alpinolo exposes Franciscolo's resentment toward the Visconti to others, and in a way betrays him in the attempt to recruit more proselytes to the patriotic cause. This suggests the need for caution when fighting for patriotic causes which of course also applies to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Milanese readers, citizens, and patriots.

Unlike Franciscolo, Alpinolo, who is essentially the bearer of a positive message, is an example of the destructive consequences of excessive passion and zeal when not channelled correctly. Only through prudence and modesty, qualities observed in the figures of knights, can an extreme temper be tamed. By spreading the rumour about the alleged conspiracy among 'fidati amici, con quelli di più nerbo e di più cuore, e che in parole si mostravano sviscerati della libertà, famelici di cose nuove, invogliati di menar le mani,' Alpinolo endangers Franciscolo, who becomes the target of the tyrant's retaliation, and is finally captured, imprisoned, and put to death.<sup>435</sup>

In Gianbattista Bazzoni's novel, the chivalric ideal is sustained from the very title, which establishes the centre of the action in the archetypal element of the medieval castle. Whereas at the beginning of all the other novels the time frame and the characters are introduced, the first six pages of chapter I in *Il castello di Trezzo* are entirely dedicated

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<sup>434</sup> Cantù, pp. 131-132.

<sup>435</sup> Cantù, p. 132.

to the description of the surroundings of the castle. As discussed in chapter 4, the accuracy demonstrated in representing not only the geography, but also the historical development of places in these novels, is symptomatic of how the authors conceived the role and function of their work in educating their readers.

In Bazzoni's novel, the preeminent example of knightly values is Palamede de' Bianchi, who loves Ginevra, daughter of Bernabò Visconti, duke of Milan, imprisoned with his family in the castle of Trezzo (which Bernabò helped rebuild) by his nephew Gian Galeazzo. Palamede de' Bianchi is the personification of the youthful and heroic individual, who combines a kind and amiable disposition with strong determination and expertise in the profession of arms. Palamede is perfectly aligned with other knightly figures as he is among 'i più prodi cavalieri di Milano; [...] stimato de' più leggiadri di volto, e valorosi di braccio: egli dié prove stupende colla spada e la lancia ne' tornei.'<sup>436</sup>

Palamede's most distinctive trait is his elegant and graceful bearing ('leggiadria e prodezza [che] il rendeano stimato fra i più compiti cavalieri che vestissero armatura'), which is often remarked on in the novel and which seems to be a key element of differentiation between an ordinary and an exceptional man.<sup>437</sup> Son to count Alberto de' Bianchi and his wife Gella Pusterla, who both died prematurely, Palamede was raised by Marquis Azzo Liprando, the will executor of the Count's earthly affairs. Liprando took such responsibility to heart and nurtured Palamede's

affettuose maniere, lo svegliato e dolce ingegno, la destrezza e la forza; e fece di lui uno de' più compiti giovani signori di quell'età, che a tutti veniva proposto a modello di bravura nelle armi e di moderatezza e leggiadria di costume.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Bazzoni, p. 62.

<sup>437</sup> Bazzoni, p. 74.

<sup>438</sup> Bazzoni, p. 102.

In spite of his young age and his difficult childhood, Palamede is a role model for generations of young men and leaders. His benevolent and gracious appearance exerts its power on less sophisticated and ordinary individuals.<sup>439</sup>

The last attribute of Palamede's character that adds to the creation of a legendary medieval knight is his religious devotion. Palamede's piousness is a combination of reverence towards God and subordination to the divine authority, that is the unchallenged acceptance of the firmly hierarchical structure of human life and, by extension, of society. In this sense, the knight's submission to the heavenly Lord is also reflected in his tacit acquiescence to the earthly lord, who exerts his authority on the knight. Whereas knighthood is not a sacrament, but a rank and a title bestowed upon a man in recognition of his service, the investiture and the responsibility that comes with it carries many religious overtones. The overlap of these two spheres is quite evident in Bazzoni's novel, where, for instance, Palamede equally worships the crucifix and the sword. In chapter III, Palamede performs what looks like a well-rehearsed ritual before going out on a mission:

Palamede alzò colla destra quel crocifisso, e piegatoglisi innanzi con un ginocchio a terra, mandò alcune fervorose preghiere, invocandone il potente patrocinio nell'impresa che stava per assumere; indi rilevossi, e lo ripose. Staccò poi da un uncino di legno la sua spada che appesa vi avea la sera, baciò tre volte la ciarpa a cui andava rafferma, e, siccome per voto soleva, fecesi il segno della croce colla impugnatura su cui stava effigiata a cesello l'immagine (*sic*) di sant'Ambrogio contornata di pietre preziose, e se la mise a tracolla.<sup>440</sup>

The ceremony that precedes an act of worship is a complex arrangement of gestures, objects, and recitations performed in a fixed sequence. The formalism of all that Palamede does in this scene and the sacral symbolism it carries denote once more the

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<sup>439</sup> At one point his squire declares: 'Chi non cangerebbe il convito del più fastoso principe d'Italia con questo insipido pezzo di lepre, per avere il piacere, mangiando, di fissare lo sguardo né due occhi più belli che il Signore abbia infissi sotto la candida fronte d'una sua creatura?' (Bazzoni, p. 86).

<sup>440</sup> Bazzoni, p. 34.

uniqueness of this young male figure, who is predestined to an existence of service and obedience.

### **5.1.2 Knights in armour**

A knight's appearance is another important characteristic in the construction of this figure. The knight's trappings certainly exercise deep fascination and represent the exterior manifestation of the inner qualities of the man who carries them. They stand as reminders of the achievements of the knight, although they tell us nothing about the motives that prompted that individual to strive for honour.<sup>441</sup> Keen explains that 'virtue is a characteristic of the inner man, of the mind or soul: external marks, such as heraldic devices, cannot be expected to take account of anything more than the virtue's outward manifestation, in life and act.'<sup>442</sup> Both these instances, life and act, actions (battles), and representations (tournaments), revolve around a moment of ostentation of one's valour by means of 'colori [...] gradi [...] insegne [...] ornamenti.'<sup>443</sup> These elements qualify the appearance of a knight and become powerful rhetorical tools, since they conjure up images of strength, self-defence, and courage, turning a common man into an icon.

The deconstruction of the knight into outer and inner components equally important in the manufacture of such a figure places an important emphasis on how the knight presents himself and is seen. A knight's archetypal asset is the suit of armour, as well as the complex assortment of paraphernalia that accompanies it. The suit of armour transforms the man into the knight because it accentuates his moral connotations and it empowers him to behave accordingly. It holds emotional as well as aesthetic implications

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<sup>441</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 163.

<sup>442</sup> Keen, p. 163.

<sup>443</sup> Graziella Buttazzi and Alessandra Mottola Molino, eds., *L'eroe* (Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1992), p. 24.

since ‘la maschera rituale – l’abito militare – consente [...] il privilegio di accostarsi a un modello ideale, di mostrarsi diverso dalla realtà in una somma, quanto fugace, sensazione di potenza.’<sup>444</sup> According to Dorfles it is uniquely by means of this metallic alter-ego that an individual is able to gain ‘quella potenza che non appartiene alla sua costituzione fisica, ma che può appartenere a quella “spirituale”’: del suo ingegno, della sua fantasia.’<sup>445</sup> The suit of armour, continues Dorfles, can be conceived as ‘super-maschera’ that not only conceals someone’s face and appearance, but also confers strength and power, a defiant and belligerent spirit that transforms the individual into a hero.<sup>446</sup>

The suit of armour, originally devised to protect a man’s body in times of danger, acquired meaning independent from its elemental function, and emphasised the aesthetic of the ornament-suit of armour. This visual component is not separate from the moral connotation of the knight symbol. It is, instead, integrated into a powerful discourse where the morally significant goes along with the aesthetically beautiful:

Quest’estetizzazione della propria immagine accompagna la drammatizzazione della vita stessa degli uomini in arme, lo snodarsi e l’interagire di quello che si è e di quello che si vorrebbe essere, vale a dire dalla trasformazione dell’azione in *narrazione*, in evocazione ed idealizzazione.<sup>447</sup>

Action becomes narration: the evocative aura of the knight, made of moral qualities on the one hand, physical strength on the other, and enhanced by ornaments and decorations, creates a rich and very flexible narrative, where the figure serves the purpose of mediating between ‘aspirazione ideale e vita quotidiana’ by allowing symbolic identification with greater human values.<sup>448</sup> Such detailed visual characterisation combined with complex

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<sup>444</sup> Buttazzi and Molino, *L’eroe*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>445</sup> Gillo Dorfles, ‘L’armatura: realtà e mito’, in *Il convitato di ferro*, ed. by Dario Lanzardo (Torino: Il Quadrante Edizioni, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>446</sup> Dorfles, ‘L’armatura: realtà e mito’, p. 13.

<sup>447</sup> Gianluca Trivero, ‘Le narrazioni dell’armatura’, in *Il convitato di ferro*, ed. by Dario Lanzardo (Torino: Il Quadrante Edizioni, 1987), p. 219.

<sup>448</sup> Trivero, ‘Le narrazioni dell’armatura’, p. 220.

symbolic significance also serves the purpose of delineating a set of qualities against its opposites. A knight's valour and symbolism acquire value in opposition to what the knight is not, that is to say to his antagonist, the villain. By virtue of the opposition 'us' (good) versus 'them' (evil), novels in the canon appeal to and buttress basic conceptions of national identity in so far as they echo nationalistic sentiments and contribute to shaping a sense of collective identity. In this scenario, the threatening presence of 'them' serves to unite and identify 'us'.

Fieramosca is the epitome of the Italian hero and he is a role model for other fellow soldiers. Early in the novel, he delivers a programmatic speech, which leaves no doubt about the way the narrative will develop, as well as the true purpose of D'Azeglio's work. Fieramosca addresses his fellow soldiers with the following words:

I nostri avi per le loro virtuose operazioni fecero salir tant'alto la gloria della patria che l'universo ne restò abbagliata; nè poterono le tenebre e le sventure di dieci secoli spegner gli ultimi raggi di tanta luce. Come costoro che d'oltremonti ora vengono a bersi il sangue italiano, e non contenti, aggiungono lo scherno all'offesa, tremavano allora al solo nome romano. Vi direi che tant'oltre è giunta ormai questa loro sfacciata insolenza, che dopo d'aver strappato (e con quali arti sallo Iddio) la gloriosa corona che faceva Italia regina dei popoli ed era stata compra con tanti sudori e tanto sangue, par loro non aver fatto nulla finché ci vedono una spada in mano ed una corazza sul petto, e vorrebbero torci perfino di poter combattere e morire in salvazione dell'onore nostro. Vi direi, su dunque: andiamo, corriamo tutti; si piombi su questi ingordi ladroni sprezzatori d'ogni diritto.<sup>449</sup>

All those in attendance cheer and commend Fieramosca for his inspirational words, powerfully remarking on the opposition between good and evil forces in the world. Fieramosca calls soldiers to action by inspiring them through a sense of pride in their ancestral heritage. The strong emphasis on the Italian soldiers' predecessors, qualified as 'nostri', in opposition to the gang of usurpers, reinforces the concept of a struggle between 'us' (virtuous, illustrious) and 'them' (blood-thirsty, arrogant, greedy). It is a

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<sup>449</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 75.

struggle between the Italians and those who are not ('costoro'), people identified not by their name, but by their criminal and immoral intentions.

Besides, by contrasting the image of a sovereign land ('Italia regina') unjustly taken from its inhabitants, whose sweat and blood were shed to protect it, with the image of distant lands ('d'oltremonti'), the knight suggests the existence of unique ethnic bonds uniting members of the Italian community. This is supported by modern theories of national identity, because, as Stefan Berger has observed, in the absence of a continuity of state traditions ('le tenebre e le sventure di dieci secoli') 'ethnicity came to the fore to claim a long tradition of proud opposition of "the people" to foreign state oppression.'<sup>450</sup> Fieramosca's speech is also in line with Christian tradition, and particularly with the Old Testament. This is D'Azeglio's true mission and Fieramosca's address functions as an act of evangelisation that seeks to proselytize those who are listening.

Fieramosca is so entranced with his role as saviour of the Italian honour that his entire appearance is transformed. His complexion, characteristically pale, 'si tinse d'un bel vermiglio, e nel parlar che faceva ai compagni, i baffi castagni che gli vestivano il labbro tremavano, e facean conoscere quanto fosse forte la commozione interna che provava.'<sup>451</sup> The experience transcends his physical body to the point that Fieramosca is, not surprisingly, willing to die for the cause. The narrator, in fact, indicates that 'se alcuno gli avesse detto allora "vinceranno i tuoi, ma tu vi morrai" si sarebbe chiamato contento mille volte.'<sup>452</sup> Fieramosca is prepared to face the ultimate sacrifice, and to become one of those martyrs he has invoked to fuel patriotic pride. The figure of Ettore Fieramosca is endlessly depicted as embodying these two opposite dimensions: the earthly and the otherworldly, where the otherworld is the universe of civic heroes.

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<sup>450</sup> Stefan Berger, "Introduction: Towards a Global History of National Historiographies" *Writing the Nation. A Global Perspective*, ed., (Basingstoke & New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>451</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 78.

<sup>452</sup> D'Azeglio, pp. 78-79.

Valour and audacity identify Marco Visconti as well, who reaches the apex of his role as exemplary knight in chapter XVIII, where the author indulges in a detailed description of a typical medieval tournament. The event centres around a joust, where Ottorino Visconti, Bice's betrothed, is to challenge a mysterious knight, whose helmet visor is closed shut at all times, thus concealing the man's real identity. His unique fighting style and physique, however, are unmistakable, as he is observed holding a 'posa sicura, con un garbo severo e pieno di natural leggiadria' and admired for the 'decente larghezza delle spalle, la bella proporzione di tutte le membra, l'ardito portar del capo e della persona.'<sup>453</sup> Marco is the masked knight about to confront his own relative Ottorino in a surreptitious love duel.

The description of the duel is accurate and constructed in such a way as to generate a sense of suspense. The action is rapid, and the attention of the narrator is focused on the movements of the mysterious knight, who confuses his opponent by executing an unexpected sequence of tactics. Ottorino misses Marco because 'la lancia che lo colse sdruciolò sul pulito acciaio senza potervi far colpo, e gli passò via rasente il fianco.'<sup>454</sup> Marco, instead, is able to aim for Ottorino's sky-blue 'zendado', a garment made of silk comparable to a cape, which Ottorino is wearing 'ad arma collo' (cross-body), and to tear it off completely.<sup>455</sup> Not only does Marco's move catch Ottorino by surprise, but it also leaves the audience perplexed because of the dexterity and original technique of the masked knight. Marco's technique is simply too advanced for the spectators, who, albeit accustomed to this kind of events, cannot interpret his moves and predict the next ones.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Grossi, p. 214.

<sup>454</sup> Grossi, p. 217.

<sup>455</sup> Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, 'Uomini, vesti e regole. Dall'alto medioevo alla prima età moderna', *Gli inganni delle apparenze. Disciplina di vesti e ornamenti alla fine del Medioevo. Gli alambicchi*, 9 (Torino: Scriptorium, 1996), pp. 23-97.

<sup>456</sup> Grossi, p. 217.

The second attempt is quicker than the first and decisively more aggressive, as the two men target each other ‘furiosamente, a precipizio.’<sup>457</sup> The mysterious knight, as the author continues to designate him, while leaving it to the spectators/readers to identify him as Marco Visconti, channels such unnatural power in his action that his mighty horse is momentarily left breathless. The momentum accumulated while charging in opposite directions is bound to cause destruction and, possibly, death. Instead, Ottorino’s lance snaps against Marco’s shield, he is wounded and catapulted to the ground, while his masked opponent remains firmly in the saddle.<sup>458</sup>

After proving his physical supremacy over Ottorino, Marco, whose head was ‘sempre chiuso nell’elmo’, also proves his human and moral superiority by rejoicing to the announcement that the defeated knight is still alive (‘levò una mano al cielo, e si rizzò sugli arcioni in un atto che significava manifestamente la sua gioia per quell’annunzio’) and by disregarding the accolade to which he would be entitled. The conclusion to this exciting scene is marked by a progression of movements that emphasise Marco’s ambivalence about the victory as well as the dramatic undertone of his unwillingness to reveal himself. The mysterious knight:

levò una mano al cielo, e si rizzò sugli arcioni [...] poscia gittò la lancia, diede di sproni al cavallo, ed uscì di galoppo dallo steccato dileguandosi nel bosco ond’era venuto. [...] Venne poi raccolta da terra la lancia gettata dal cavaliere scomparso, e se ne trovò il ferro spezzato: la maggior parte tenne che si fosse rotto nello scontro, ma vi fu alcuno che avea notato come il cavaliere sconosciuto [...] si fosse avvicinato ad un palco, e cacciato il ferro della lancia fra la connessura di due asse, l’avesse messo a leva e fatto saltare, scavezzandolo pel mezzo.<sup>459</sup>

Marco’s humane attitude towards Ottorino is revealed in the act of self-sabotage before the start of the duel. Marco can only act while protected by his suit of armour, which is an extension of his own power, a projection of his true nature.

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<sup>457</sup> Grossi, p. 217.

<sup>458</sup> Grossi, p. 217.

<sup>459</sup> Grossi, p. 218.

In *Margherita Pusterla*, figures of knights, sometimes referred to as ‘campioni’, hold a unique place in the social hierarchy of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Lombardy, the time when the plot is set. At the opening of the novel, a honorific parade taking place in Mantua in celebration of the Visconti family includes ‘tremila cavalieri concorsi a quella con grande sfoggio d’abiti, colle più belle armadure che uscissero dalle fucine di Milano, con destrieri persino ferrati d’argento.’<sup>460</sup> The colossal display of polished and expensive armours fabricated in the most renowned Milanese forges and the pageant of lavishly-ornate thoroughbred horses is a statement of power. At the same time, such spectacle is a testimonial of a precise ideal that aims at creating a profound sense of admiration in the spectators and reasserts hierarchical roles between those who have power and those who do not. Since power does not descend from above but is obtained through ‘un istinto dominante e pericoloso dell’uomo’ and to his ‘valore fortunato,’ the author suggests that man is ultimately responsible for his own future.<sup>461</sup> In this I detect not only a comment in support of the typically nineteenth-century idea of the self-made man, but also an exhortation to act, to subvert existing power, and to take personal (and national) responsibility.

The perception of Palamede in Bazzoni’s novel varies according to the way he presents himself to others, whether he is wearing his day-to-day clothes or a suit of armour. On the one hand, as a young individual who has received an excellent education, Palamede is the epitome of courteousness and moderation. On the other hand, his character and the way others react to it is transformed by the power of the metal covering, which confers mental and physical strength to the person. In chapter III, caught in the act

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<sup>460</sup> Cantù, *Margherita Pusterla*, p. 3.

<sup>461</sup> Cantù, p. 4.

of putting his armour on, Palamede strips himself of his conventional self and, piece after piece, he shapes himself into a new creature:

Palamede, fattesi recar le armi, si levò l'abito ranciato e la maglia, ed addossò una fina armatura d'acciaio non pesante, ma salda a tutte prove, che avanti la sua partenza aveale donata il marchese Azzo Liprando [...] acconciassi i bracciali ed i guanti; lasciò il berretto, e si coverse il capo con un elmo a celata, ma senza cimiero; ritenne la spada in una catenella che si cinse, v'infisse un pugnale di una forma singolare che acquistato egli aveva a Venezia da un Greco della Corte di Bisanzio, e gittossi alle spalle un bruno mantello.<sup>462</sup>

Clad from head to toe in plates of steel, Palamede acquires a meta-identity that results from the aggregation of each single part of his armour. In this sense, Palamede-the knight (regardless of the fact that he has not formally been designated as such) bears a metaphorical stance. In his suit of armour Palamede's personal qualities are exaggerated and make of him a symbol of perfection.

These qualities are fully expressed in a moment of battle that reaffirms justice and restores order. In chapter IX Palamede intervenes to aid some travellers who are being assaulted by a bunch of brigands. This is a one-against-all type of situation, where Palamede singlehandedly manages to suppress the gang of bandits:

Palamede dié di sprone al cavallo, calò la visiera, sguainò la spada, e in pochi slanci fu sulla strada [...]. Di rapido galoppo il Cavaliere fu in mezzo alla zuffa. [...] Palamede, slanciatosi fra loro [*i ladri*], menando colpi maestri con vigoroso braccio, quanti colpiva, tanti poneva a terra. Gli assassini, sopraffatti da questo inatteso assalto [...] furono colle armi addosso al Cavaliere (*sic*), che roteando la spada rapidamente d'ambo i lati, ribatté una tempesta di colpi.<sup>463</sup>

The fast-paced rhythm of the description that begins with a series of almost robotic actions and turns into a chaotic scene where jabs are thrown and Palamede's sword twirls, wreaking havoc among the thieves, is extremely effective in communicating the character's extraordinary strength and command over the tumultuous

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<sup>462</sup> Bazzoni, p. 36.

<sup>463</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 147-148.

event. These are the doings of a true hero, who is hailed as such by the travellers he just saved: “Vivano i prodi Cavalieri! Viva Palamede”, il che gli altri ripeterono con alto frastuono.’<sup>464</sup>

Knights in armour of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, as well as the characters that interact with the hero in medieval epos (namely, damsels in distress and villains), populated the pages of historical novels and contributed to the dissemination of patriotic values and ideals because they amplified the interplay of opposing forces. In articulating the famous concept of ‘imagined communities,’ Benedict Anderson asserted that ‘Nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love’ and that, as one of the cultural products of nationalism, prose fiction openly communicates this love.<sup>465</sup> The wide influence of historical novels marked the genre as a notable vehicle for such patriotism.

## **5.2 Female personifications of the nation**

In late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century political discourses, allegories were widely employed as a mode of representation to reinforce specific political messages and steer public opinion. Allegories conveyed a fundamental visual narrative as they told the story of political power by means of metaphors, through ‘a figurative correspondence between material things and the discourse of ideas.’<sup>466</sup> Allegorical discourses of citizenship and gender were central to the construction of nations, because through gender roles nations were, and are, able to continuously (re)construct themselves and their collective

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<sup>464</sup> Bazzoni, p. 149.

<sup>465</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 141.

<sup>466</sup> Antoine De Baecque, ‘The Allegorical Image of France, 1750-1800: A Political Crisis of Representation’, *Representations*, 47 (1994), 111–143 (p. 111) <[www.jstor.org/stable/2928788](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928788)> [accessed 15 August 2019].

identities.<sup>467</sup> In particular, the practice of gendering the nation in the form of a woman was ingrained in European tradition, where ideas of femininity, motherhood, virginity, and related marital status were used in pictures and text to represent the body politic and illustrate the concept of sovereignty.<sup>468</sup>

Beyond the inherent value of allegory as a mode of discourse, this feminine emblematisation of national identity carries its own complications and dichotomies. As Madelyn Gutwirth explains, ‘female allegory thrives on the multiplicity of meanings men have attached to the female sex.’<sup>469</sup> As allegories were created for a society that can easily be considered male-dominated, it seems logical that those about women would reflect both male associations with the female gender as well as women’s traditional social role.<sup>470</sup> In this sense, historical novels of the canon construct female characters in relation to male characters (knights and villains) by representing them as a real matter of contention. In so doing, these novels sublimate the categorisation of fixed gender roles and exploit it for a greater – nationalistic – purpose.

Well-known versions of the nation-as-woman theme are the figures of Britannia and Marianne, and also of the Italia Turrata.<sup>471</sup> As Kirsten Stirling indicates, these institutionalised allegorical figures were invented so as to give form to the concept of their respective nations (Great Britain, France, and Italy), but while women are seen as

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<sup>467</sup> Yuval-Davis, Nira, *Gender and Nations* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 66.

<sup>468</sup> See Sylvia Paletschek and Sylvia Schraut, *The Gender of Memory: Cultures of Remembrance in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Europe* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008). . See also Karen Hagemann, Ida Blom, and Catherine Hall. *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

<sup>469</sup> Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 255.

<sup>470</sup> Lynn Hunt affirms this sentiment, describing the condition of women, stating, ‘The proliferation of the female allegory was made possible...by the exclusion of women from public affairs. Women could be representative of abstract qualities and collective dreams because women were not allowed to vote or govern.’ (cited in Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, p. 256).

<sup>471</sup> Italia Turrata is the national personification or allegory of Italy, represented wearing a mural crown headgear typical of Italian civic heraldry of ancient Roman origin, symbolizing Italy’s mostly urban history. She often holds in her hands a bunch of corn ears, a symbol of fertility and referencing the agrarian economy of the country. A recent study on the origins and evolution of this figure is: Nicoletta Bazzano, *Donna Italia. Storia di un'allegoria dall'antichità ai giorni nostri* (Vicenza: Angelo Colla Editore, 2011).

repositories of nationhood, they do not fully participate in that nationhood.<sup>472</sup> The use of the female figure elevates, idealises, and deifies women from a symbolic point of view, but simultaneously deprives them of their role as citizens on a practical level, considering that historically women have been politically powerless.<sup>473</sup> In spite of women's subordinate role in civic and political life, women as personification of nations becomes the context in which the citizens of a nation exist, because female symbolism tends to be perceived as more generic and universal than male symbolism, but also because the trope of the woman can be deconstructed into multiple social roles and functions.<sup>474</sup>

Among the five ways in which women may be involved in ethnic and national processes, the most relevant one to my discussion is that of women as 'signifiers, of ethnic/national differences – as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories.'<sup>475</sup> As imaginary creations, women are employed to signify the nation, whose functions are illustrated through different representations of a woman's identity: as soldier, mother, and as virgin. All these facets highlight a different relationship between the nation and its citizens. As such, nations are protectors and defenders (soldiers), providers of life, love and comfort (mothers), and sacred spaces that must not be dishonoured as well as idealized values to be worshipped (virgins). In novels of the canon, female figures that are central to the narration tend to belong to the second and third of these categories, as they are unsurprisingly not depicted as soldiers, a role exclusive to knights. This strict categorisation helps explaining why, in historical novels of the canon, female figures are the most conventional characters, given that their movements, change of settings and

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<sup>472</sup> Kristen Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), p. 12.

<sup>473</sup> Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p. 23

<sup>474</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 12.

<sup>475</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, *Woman - Nation - State*, eds., (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 7.

actions are continually determined by the decisions of others (men). Although upper-class and privileged, women are subordinate to men in a hyper-masculine martial society.

### **5.2.1 The woman-as-nation paradigm: mothers**

In D'Azeglio's *Ettore Fieramosca* Ginevra is the ill-fated lead female character.<sup>476</sup> She is an amalgamation of romantic love, religious ardour, and passiveness, whose moral integrity is reflected in her physical appearance as a marmoreal figurine.<sup>477</sup> Ginevra di Monreale is at first introduced in the novel by the words of a French soldier, La Motte, who says she was 'la più bella, la più virtuosa, la più amabile donna ch'io m'abbia mai conosciuta.'<sup>478</sup> She is otherwise referred to as 'la povera Ginevra', which is highly symptomatic of her ominous fate. The cliché of the young lady persecuted and haunted by an evil character is evident in the way Ginevra is in love with Fieramosca and opposed by Cesare Borgia. Yet, the cliché according to which love triumphs over all difficulties is at the same time nullified since Ginevra is married to Graiano d'Asti, an Italian knight serving in the French squad, hence a traitor. Ginevra's love for Fieramosca is against social rules and is in line with the tradition of unfaithful Guinevere who falls in love with

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<sup>476</sup> Their conventionality is also evident in the choice of their names. The name Ginevra, for instance, appears to be favoured by many authors of historical novels, and is evocative of a wide classic imagery from the French, the British, and also, in different ways, Italian literary tradition. Well known are, for instance, Lancelot and Guinevere, characters in the Arthurian cycle, who are at the centre of one of the most enduring love stories in western culture, thanks to the representation of their overwhelming affection, which defies the moral and social limitations of their time. The popularity of their story originated particularly in the medieval poem *Chevalier de la Charrete* (*Knight of the cart*, also known as *Lancelot*), composed around 1177 by the French writer Chrétien de Troyes', and in Sir Thomas Malory's *Death of Arthur*, completed around 1469-70. In Italian literature and culture, a notable reference to Ginevra and Lancillotto is made in canto V of the *Inferno* in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, where Paolo and Francesca read the story of the two lovers. The legend experienced a revival of interest in Victorian times by such writers and artists as Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. See: Lori Walters, ed. *Lancelot and Guinevere: a Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>477</sup> See, Guido Mazzoni, *Storia della letteratura italiana. L'Ottocento* (Milano: Casa Editrice Villardi, 1964), p. 136, and also Rodolfo Macchioni Jodi, 'Dal romanzo gotico al romanzo storico in Italia', *Italianistica*, 23 (1994), 407.

<sup>478</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 43.

Lancelot whilst being married to King Arthur. However, in D'Azeglio's novel *Ginevra* repents and promises God to remain faithful to her husband.

Ginevra's figure is to be analysed in relation to the male characters. She does not possess a life of her own, but she is constantly seen as the counterpart to somebody else: she is concurrently Fieramosca's fragile and insecure lover, Cesare Borgia's imploring prisoner, and also Graiano D'Asti's unloved wife. In those few moments when she is alone, Ginevra is seen lost in religious contemplation. Not even her death is personal, because it is too strongly connected to other situations in the story: Ginevra's death shatters Fieramosca's romantic hopes and brings Cesare Borgia's evil machinations to an end. Similarly to the way Ettore Fieramosca is constructed as a character with saint-like qualities, Ginevra is portrayed as an example of holiness and virtue. Her appearance inspires wonder and admiration in whoever is around her: 'la sua giovinezza, il costume e l'angeliche sembianze ogni dì più destavano meraviglia, nè si potevano saziare di magnificarla e lodarla da per tutto.'<sup>479</sup> The figure of Ginevra evokes other famous female characters created by Walter Scott and Manzoni, but in D'Azeglio's novel she undergoes a series of severe vicissitudes, which put the woman through a state of martyrdom and ultimately cause her death.<sup>480</sup>

Emblematic of family values is also Tommaso Grossi's *Bice del Balzo*, the perfect representation of a virtuous, untainted, and Christian young woman that De Sanctis described as a more gentle version of Manzoni's Lucia.<sup>481</sup> A fair-haired damsel, Bice is the true moral protagonist of Grossi's novel, which is titled after the powerful man who is obsessed with the poor young woman and who opposes her union to Ottorino

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<sup>479</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 98.

<sup>480</sup> See the characters of Rowena in Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820) and the one of Lucia in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1827).

<sup>481</sup> Francesco De Sanctis, *La letteratura italiana nel secolo XIX* (Napoli: Ditta A. Morano e Figlio, 1902), p. 334.

Visconti. Unlike Manzoni's Lucia, but similarly to D'Azeglio's and Bazzoni's Ginevras, Bice does not come from a poor and working-class background. She is rather a member of the nobility of the Lecco province, daughter of countess Beatrice del Balzo. The aristocratic lineage of these women is a further validation of the social order which chivalry has at its core. They reaffirm the moral and political categories that underpin the creation of an orderly, but also conservative society. The interplay between ladies, knights, and villains provides exempla of nobility and chivalry, pervaded by a constant struggle between virtue and vice. In keeping with medieval romances that inspired the creation of their characters, authors of Risorgimento historical novels sought to present a variety of moral examples, positive and negative, to their contemporaries.<sup>482</sup>

Bice is endowed with uncommon elegance and rare beauty. She is introduced in the novel through the encomiastic words of Tremacoldo the jester, who not only employs biblically-inspired references to describe Bice's grace, but also makes use of literary sources (i.e. Petrarch) which, in the context of the plot, are assumed to be contemporary to the characters and to the events narrated. Bice acquires the unique status that in medieval lyrical poems was reserved for the unattainable and awe-inspiring woman loved by the poet. Nineteenth-century readers, who were likely educated on medieval poetry, would be able to appreciate the symbolic value of Bice's character. Tremacoldo sings her praises with the following words:

Dopo d'aver assomigliata la fanciulla al giglio delle convalli, alla rosa di Gerico, al cedro del Libano, dopo averla posta al di sopra di quante belle sultane erano in quei dì l'ornamento degli Harem d'Egitto e di Persia, di quante nobili donne e principesse eran più lodate nelle canzoni dei trovatori provenzali, la agguagliò a Madonna Laura, alla quale i versi del Petrarca venivano allora preparando una fama che dopo cinque secoli si mantien verde e fiorita più che mai.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> See, Paul R. Rovang, *Malory's Anatomy of Chivalry. Characterization in the "Morte Darthur"* (Lanham, Maryland, USA: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), p. xiii.

<sup>483</sup> Grossi, p. 32.

Firstly, Bice is likened to natural elements in the Bible: the lily of the valley, the rose of Jericho, and the cedar of Lebanon. These flowers and plants have a rich religious symbolism: the lily symbolises all virtues, the rose symbolises resurrection, whereas the cedar tree was known for its spiritual significance, having been employed in ancient times in the construction of temples.

Secondly, Bice is also defined by her unusual exoticism, and is compared to the women in an ancient harem, which is to be interpreted, I believe, not in actual terms, as indicating Bice's specific physical traits (colour of skin and hair, etc.), but rather as an additional indication of her uniqueness. Besides, the orientalist discourse is important in accentuating ideas of the position of women in the imaginary. The way Bice is eroticised by the comparison with the Orient is strangely at odds with another association with Laura, Petrarch's idealised woman, and with her immortality as a literary figure. Tremacoldo seems to predict Bice's fate, who, like Laura, is taken from her earthly life too soon, but who becomes a model for future generations. The parallelism between the young life of an exemplary soul, her death, and the process of lay canonization she undergoes on the one hand and the figure of a chaste young woman on the other hand is all too obvious here. Bice is exquisite and rare like a precious stone as emphasised by Tremacoldo at the end of his speech: 'la donzella s'addiceva a lui [il cavaliere] come una gemma ad un anello.'<sup>484</sup>

The language of nationalism is often not univocal, and messages expressed through female allegories of the nation are not an exception. Nationalist rhetoric generally constructs women-as-nation as individuals to be defended, but at the same time they exemplify the role of defenders of family values, particularly motherly love and devotion. The double identity of women as defenders and defended emerges clearly in

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<sup>484</sup> Grossi, p. 32.

the figure of the mother, as the one who manages the safe space of home and protects her children, while at the same time being in need of personal protection, namely by a male figure. The parental metaphor of motherland is powerful because it strengthens the belief in the nation as something to which citizens are naturally tied.<sup>485</sup> The association between nations and the progenitrix symbol is crucial to the nationalist discourse because it constructs the nation as something ancestral, something that lays the foundations of and the justification for the legitimacy of one's national identity. However, the metaphor only works if the child of the woman-as-nation symbol is male.<sup>486</sup>

The figure of Margherita Pusterla epitomises the maternal figure paradigm as she is totally devoted to her family. It is her mission as a woman to protect the sacred space of home and nourish her family members.<sup>487</sup> Her entire existence finds its meaning in the role as mother to her young son Venturino and in her troubles she finds comfort in his innocence.<sup>488</sup> Her whole identity as a woman is informed by the presence of her son, whom she constantly needs by her side.<sup>489</sup> Margherita is the guarantor of family values also because is entrusted with the responsibility of passing them on to her son. When teaching Venturino how to pray, Margherita becomes 'l'immagine più sublime insieme ed affettuosa che possa figurarsi. Allora la donna, elevata sopra le cose terrene, somiglia agli angeli.'<sup>490</sup> Margherita is aware of her unique status and patiently lives in obedience to her mission. On Venturino's seventh birthday, Margherita is naturally joyful, but not

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<sup>485</sup> Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p. 22.

<sup>486</sup> Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p. 23.

<sup>487</sup> 'C'è sito migliore della propria casa, compagnia più dolce che quella de' suoi domestici, missione più onorevole che quella di beare chi ci vuol bene?' (Cantù, p. 27).

<sup>488</sup> 'Una madre, nei pericoli del cuore, a qual asilo più sicuro può riparare, che all'innocenza dei suoi bambini?' (Cantù, p. 63).

<sup>489</sup> 'traevasi continuamente a mano il suo Venturino'; 'contemplando Venturino e blandendolo con melanconiche carezze' (Cantù, p. 90; p. 97).

<sup>490</sup> Cantù, p. 114.

for the celebrations that usually surround this event. She rejoices at remembering the pain of giving birth as the ultimate sign of being one of God's chosen.<sup>491</sup>

Margherita is explicitly presented as a holy being. This is further confirmed in the first chapter, dedicated to the description of a parade of noblemen paying their respects to the Visconti family, when Margherita, who is observing the procession, is described in such a pictorial way that it cannot but evoke the statuary figure of a Madonna carrying the infant Jesus.<sup>492</sup> For instance, Margherita, whose right hand is 'candida e morbida come di cera' carries 'un caro fanciullo di forse cinque anni [...] fra il seno e le braccia materne.'<sup>493</sup> Margherita's motherly love is expressed through her posture and her classical beauty is emphasised by the marble-white tone of her complexion. In spite of the chaotic events taking place in front of her, Margherita is completely absorbed in her own 'episodio di famiglia che per lei era tutto' and pays no attention 'nè agli applausi del volgo, nè alla pompa del corteo, nè agli occhi che ammiravano la sua bellezza.'<sup>494</sup> She is unperturbed and stoic. The singularity of the prodigious effect that her appearance produces on the onlookers is also, and quite bizarrely, reiterated when not a human being, but a horse catches a glimpse of the woman and becomes agitated: 'il superbo stallone bianco [era] bramoso d'attirarsi uno sguardo della bella.'<sup>495</sup>

Women in historical novels are representative of family values also in their capacity as daughters, as observed in *Marco Visconti*. Bice is a young woman in love,

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<sup>491</sup> 'Le doglie del parto sollevate dalla consolazione di vedere, di toccare, di baciare una tenera creatura, un esser vivente, frutto delle proprie viscere, pegno d'un amore benedetto, illibato [...] e col proprio latte di sostenergli la vita ch'essa medesima gli diede, sono gioje di che il Cielo privilegiò le madri per ristoro ai travagli ed alle fatiche del loro sacro stato' (Cantù, p. 509).

<sup>492</sup> In line with what has been observed in chapter 4, the way in which Margherita is introduced in the novel in the first chapter is self-referential for the author, who, by way of the narrator, alludes and comments upon his own occupation as creator of a historical narrative that aims at providing entertainment to the readers. Presenting Margherita Pusterla as 'la dama, la quale era tutto il bello che dev'essere l'eroina d'un racconto' the author is able to catch the readers' attention and to set very specific expectations for them (Cantù, p. 13).

<sup>493</sup> Cantù, p. 13.

<sup>494</sup> Cantù, p. 13.

<sup>495</sup> Cantù, p. 13.

and as such she exhibits the characteristics of a person her age. In chapter VI, Grossi describes Bice as a ‘testolina alquanto capriccioletta, come tutti i figliuoli viziosi’ but a good-natured and amiable creature, nonetheless, or, as Grossi puts it, ‘una pasta di mele.’<sup>496</sup> Regardless of the infantilization of the character who resembles a capricious child, Bice is a perfect example of daughterly respect and obedience to her parents. Upon considering whether to move to the Holy Land with Ottorino to escape Marco Visconti’s vexations, Bice cannot tolerate the prospect of a life without her parents, and particularly her mother. As courageous and tenacious as she is, such a separation from her family would cause unbearable suffering. This is a turning point for Bice, a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood. Bice becomes aware that life as she knows it would be altered forever as a result of her moving far away from her family. Grossi illustrates this moment with the following words:

La poveretta non poteva sostenere l’angoscia di sì acerbo pensiero! Ella non era mai stata così tenera, così carezzevole come in quei giorni; le tornava dinanzi con un senso profondo di carità tutto quello che la madre aveva fatto, aveva patito per lei in tanti anni, rilevandola da bambina fino a quel termine. Provava un acuto rimordimento nel rammentare, ora le sue sdegnosaggini infantili con che soleva amareggiarla, prendendo rigoglio dalla cieca condiscendenza del padre ad ogni suo capriccio.<sup>497</sup>

Seen in this light, the evolution of Bice’s character, from exuberant but subservient daughter to an adult who embraces and reflects upon her future and the consequences her choices may bring, serves as a prelude to the imminent resolution of her short-lived existence. The sense of compassion for her mother and the sweet memory of her father’s indulgent behaviour towards her whims are one step away from Bice’s acceptance of the fact that she has no control over her destiny. As such, the figure of Bice exhibits characteristics typical of religious figures symbolising human acceptance of a godly plan.

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<sup>496</sup> Grossi, p. 65.

<sup>497</sup> Grossi, p. 257.

The depiction of Bice's figure is often filtered through the description of Ermelinda's character or of Marco Visconti's reminiscing about Ermelinda. Not only do mother and daughter share a very similar lifestyle and deep and sincere religious devotion, but the physical resemblance between the two women is also uncanny.<sup>498</sup> This is confirmed and reiterated at various points in the novel and it validates the fact that Marco's passion for Ermelinda is rekindled through Bice. The young woman has indeed the same gracious physical features of her mother, as much as the same gestures and mannerism. However, whereas Ermelinda's appearance 'era pallido e smunto, gli occhi abbattuti', Bice's is 'aggentilito dal fiore, dal sorriso della prima età, tutto rallegrato da quell'aura di pace e di contento, da quel molle e misterioso profumo che esula da un'anima ignara delle tempeste della vita.'<sup>499</sup> Bice is what Ermelinda used to be, she is a portal to Marco's past, who cannot contain his emotions and feels disoriented at catching a glimpse of Bice, but also at hearing others talk about her. In chapter VIII, during a conversation with his cousin Ottorino, who is talking about his betrothed Bice and her family, Marco Visconti furtively asks about Ermelinda and he can barely hide his excitement when Ottorino mentions her good qualities. Ermelinda is, in fact, 'un angelo, un vero angelo di bontà' and Bice is 'tutta sua madre che non ne scatta un capello.'<sup>500</sup> Upon hearing these words, Marco jumps up and begins walking restlessly around the room.

Love, as a force of creation and of destruction, is behind the deeds of all characters in Grossi's work. Once the catastrophic connection between Marco, Ermelinda, and Bice is clarified, it also becomes clear that Marco's fixation with the young woman and opposition to her marriage is nothing more than the capricious impulse of a powerful

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<sup>498</sup> Grossi, p. 22

<sup>499</sup> Grossi, p. 22.

<sup>500</sup> Grossi, p. 92.

man. In fact, Marco's power-hungry attitude originated in his own emasculation as Ermelinda's lover. In chapter XIII, Grossi indicates that Marco Visconti never stopped loving Ermelinda, but that his affection wilted with time and with lack of hope.<sup>501</sup> Marco is a changed man not because love has transformed him, but because the absence of love has altered his existence. When he sees Bice for the first time in Milan, he finds her 'tanto somigliante all'idea che gli era rimasta della madre [che] fu affascinato da una potenza irresistibile, il cuore l'accorse come cosa già sua; quel cuore rattiepidito, affreddato da tanto tempo, si ravvivò della prima fiamma, palpito de' palpiti antichi, riconobbe il giogo usato.'<sup>502</sup> As vital and optimistic as Bice is portrayed at the beginning of the novel, she is not more than the agent of other characters' emotions, passions, frustration and anger. She is irreparably passive, and she becomes progressively deprived of her livelihood.

### **5.2.2 The woman-as-nation paradigm: virgins**

Mother symbols fortify national feeling, because the 'cognate-metaphors of soil, earth, home and family buttress the process of making national claims, or invoking the modern nation into being.'<sup>503</sup> The concept of motherhood naturally emphasises the notion of the fertility of the female body, which leads to even more layers of interpretation and uses of the female allegory for nationalistic purposes. In addition to being symbols of national identity for their motherly qualities, women are also biological, cultural, and ethnic reproducers of the nation.<sup>504</sup> Women-as-nations can be construed as mother-lands, a

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<sup>501</sup> Grossi, pp. 140-141.

<sup>502</sup> Grossi, p. 141.

<sup>503</sup> Elleke Boehmer, 'Motherlands, Mothers and Nationalist Sons: Theorising the En-Gendered Nation', in *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 22-41 (p. 26).

<sup>504</sup> See Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, 'Introduction' in Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Woman - Nation - State*, pp. 6-11.

process that not only highlights the biological function of the female body (as opposed to her maternal qualities), but also defines it as a space and an entity. A woman's body becomes a site of social and cultural discourses that is 'fictionalized and positioned within those myths that form a culture's social narratives and self-representations.'<sup>505</sup> As representative of the political collective, female bodies are subjected to nationalist concern and can be read as contested terrain, as sites where power is played out.<sup>506</sup> Metaphorically speaking, any act of power against the female body becomes an act against the space of a nation's land. The representation of an act of subjugation, abuse, and control of the woman and her body can be appropriated by the nationalist discourse so as to signify a land's loss of freedom and independence.

A threat to the national body may not simply be that of foreign invasions, but also of corruption coming from the inside, and within the allegorical framework of the female-body-as-nation, corruption may be that which is caused by a disease or by the loss of willpower to continue living. In both instances, what is at stake is the integrity of the woman's body, and by extension, her purity. The use of the image of a chaste woman whose virtue is threatened by a man is extremely important because it is the idea of the violation, and not simply the violation itself, that gives the allegory political significance. The woman representing the nation is expected to be whole, and her wholeness reproduces the impermeability of the borders of the nation. The valorisation of female chastity is directly connected to the fear of invasion of national territory, because if the "wholeness" of the national body is penetrated, the nation loses integrity and is open to exploration and/or domination by external forces.'<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, 'Inscriptions and Body Maps: Representations and the Corporeal', in *Space, Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 236-45 (p. 239).

<sup>506</sup> Thembisa Waetjen, 'The Limits of Gender Rhetoric for Nationalism', *Theory and Society*, 30.1 (2001), 121-152 (122).

<sup>507</sup> Stirling, *Bella Caledonia*, p. 66.

The lead female character in Bazzoni's novel, once again named Ginevra, exemplifies religious devotion and family values. She is also an example of how the limitations imposed on her freedom can be read as an act of abuse depriving the woman of her humanity. Ginevra is, in fact, kept hostage in the castle of Trezzo with her sister and father, Bernabò Visconti, by Gian Galeazzo, Bernabò's nephew. This is where Ginevra is first introduced and described in the novel. She is depicted gazing out of the window of a castle room in a meditative state, where she appears as an evanescent and ethereal creature. The juxtaposition between the pale complexion of the young woman, the pink quality of the sky and the opacity of the glass pane produce a peculiar effect on Ginevra's face, since 'le dava un non so che di trasparente.'<sup>508</sup> The portrait is further enriched by details about her physical qualities, but also her emotional state, as well as what she is wearing:

Ne' suoi grandi occhi azzurri, entro cui la melanconia e le lontane memorie spremevano una lagrima, si leggeva il bisogno di teneri sentimenti; una reticella formata d'un filo misto d'oro e verde le annodava le biondissime trecchie, di cui alcune ciocche ricadevanle sulla fronte; un corpetto ricamato a neri fiori sopra fondo scuro, il quale era aperto e rannodato sul seno da una cordicella d'argento, ed una veste color di cielo, tale era la foggia del di lei abbigliamento.<sup>509</sup>

The descriptive nature of this scene is purely pictorial: not only it is framed in such a way as to evoke the idea of a work of history painting, but the chromatic combination of physical features and clothes (blond hair/green ribbon, dark bustier/white skin/silver string/sky-blue dress) identifies Ginevra as no ordinary woman.

Ginevra is also a fragile individual, who is burdened by the memories of her short young life, and who cannot even find consolation in her own spirituality. For example, in a scene describing Ginevra and others in the act of attending vespers during her

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<sup>508</sup> Bazzoni, p. 28.

<sup>509</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 29-30.

captivity, Bazzoni writes: ‘nessun cuore fra tutti quelli che palpitavano in seno a que’ preganti, era commosso ed agitato siccome quello della bella Ginevra.’<sup>510</sup> She is in a perpetual state of desolation and her incurable sadness accompanies her throughout the entire novel. Differently from other female characters in novels of the canon (namely, Bice del Balzo in Grossi’s novel) who reveal positive qualities, Bazzoni’s Ginevra is a profoundly unhappy young woman. She is essentially a woman deprived of her own life; she is ultimately the prey of her persecutor’s predatory obsession and despondently surrenders herself to a life with no hope.

Of the four female figures described in this section, Bazzoni’s Ginevra is certainly the one who best exemplifies martyrdom. Interestingly, the way in which Bazzoni portrays this character as being at one with nature, and therefore with its Creator, is also indicative of the unique literary function Ginevra fulfils in the novel. Ginevra communes with the natural elements more than with human beings, and it is through such intimate rapport with the universe that she is able to find momentary solace from her sorrows. Upon leaving the church of the castle where Ginevra just attended the evening prayers, her afflictions are lifted as soon as she senses the crispy evening air:

La freschezza dell’aere, e il bel color d’argento di cui la rivestiva la luna nascente, che già si rifletteva sui merli delle mura e delle torri, e il brillar di varie stelle che scintillavano nell’azzurro del firmamento, sollevarono quel peso di terrore e di affanno che si era concentrato nel cuore di Ginevra. Più liberamente ella respirò; e il pallore quasi mortale che si era diffuso sulle sue guancie divenne debilmente animato da un lievissimo color di rosa.<sup>511</sup>

Here again, the author is particularly accurate in recording the quality of the colours and the effect they produce. In this last description, the scene is permeated with the hues of silver, light blue and the milky white of Ginevra’s complexion that turns to a soft shade

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<sup>510</sup> Bazzoni, p. 30.

<sup>511</sup> Bazzoni, p. 31.

of pink. The exposure to fresh air and to the beauty of the evening firmament transform Ginevra's deathly pallor, characteristic of when she is confined within the castle walls, into a rosier, albeit feeble, appearance.

The pattern analysed here is symptomatic of the way the character of Ginevra is constructed, that is to say based on the opposition between internal and external spaces, which is emblematic of her role as prisoner. Ginevra's troubles, whether her family's safety or the impossibility of communicating with her betrothed Palamede de' Bianchi, are aggravated by the confinement within the castle.<sup>512</sup> It must be said that Ginevra is not locked up in a dingy and dark prison cell, but rather in an elegantly furnished castle that her own father helped rebuild, hence a place likely familiar to her. In this gilded cage Ginevra's autonomy is nonetheless restricted. As conveyed in the description of her nightly walk after the evening prayers, Ginevra only feels liberated from these impositions when she is in direct contact with nature, which indicates that what she is being deprived of is the ability to be in the open, literally representing freedom from imposed restrictions and figuratively representing free will. In the allegorical construction of women as national symbols, the act of limiting and regulating Ginevra's freedom suggests an act of colonization of the motherland. Gian Galeazzo, the colonizer, provides services and a certain standard of living for Ginevra, but without allowing her the ability to choose or control her actions.

This dichotomy is extremely evident when the interior of the castle is described, since Ginevra's persistent sense of sorrow and apprehension appears in stark contrast with the representation of the opulent decorations of the space. An example is found in chapter IV:

Era sull'ora del declinar del sole, ed una luce viva e serena penetrava dal verone, le cui colorite vetriate stavano aperte, entro una camera ornata

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<sup>512</sup> See Bazzoni, p. 74.

nella vòlta da arabeschi dorati; un ricco drappo cremisino a fiori d'argento ne vestiva le pareti [...] Nel mezzo della camera un liuto, che pareva coperto da una sottilissima rete di madreperle ed oro, era appeso per un verde nastro ad un leggio di legno prezioso, intagliato elegantemente a fogliami, sul quale vedevasi stesa una pergamena coperta di caratteri musicali, e sulla cui sommità giacevansi libri a ricche coperte ed aurei fermagli.<sup>513</sup>

Nothing in this room communicates danger, suffering, and imminent disaster. Quite the contrary: from the vibrant and serene dusk light flowing in through the balcony door with its multi-coloured stained glasses, to the gilded trimmings of the ceiling and the tasteful objects made in precious materials, this space is ideal for peaceful rest and concentration. However, this is where Ginevra is found inertly seated in a bizarre-looking chair curiously shaped as a dragon 'sola, mesta, e tutta in un pensiero raccolta, [...] adagiata sopra un sedile, sul cui bracciuolo, che serbava le forme d'un drago d'oro alato, pesava il destro braccio, tutta su quello colla persona abbandonandosi.'<sup>514</sup> Indifferent to what surrounds her, Ginevra is melancholic and lost in her own thoughts, her whole body leaning heavily on her right arm. Imprisonment has deprived Ginevra of her liveliness and the only consolation comes from knowing that Palamede is with her in spirit.<sup>515</sup>

In the end, the way female characters are constructed reveals two main femininity tropes, which offer various allegorical interpretations. Women in the four novels of the canon are either shown as protective motherly figures or as innately helpless and virginal creatures. In both cases, they share a common destiny and a paradigmatic way of ending their sufferings, that is through death, whether natural, but resulting from strenuous persecutions, or induced by means of execution. For instance, D'Azeglio's Ginevra is caught by her oppressor, Duke Valentino, whom she begs for her life by saying: 'Chi sa che non venga un momento in cui la memoria d'avermi usata mercede non vi sia balsamo

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<sup>513</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 64-65.

<sup>514</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 64-65.

<sup>515</sup> 'Sapea che egli le era vicino, e a questo solo pensiero, come se la luce divenuta più viva e il cielo reso più sereno avessero dissipate spaventose tenebre, tutto si era fatto ridente a lei dintorno', Bazzoni, p. 74.

al cuore.’<sup>516</sup> In vain, Ginevra tries to move Cesare Borgia to compassion and appeals to his humanity. She remains his prisoner until the moment when, extremely fatigued and resigned, she lets go of her life: ‘il suo volto prese in un momento l’atto e il colore della morte.’<sup>517</sup>

Religion is the only consolation in the moment of highest tragedy. Seconds before her execution, Margherita Pusterla is heard bidding farewell to her earthly life with the prospect of being reunited with her loved ones in the afterlife: ‘Addio! Addio! Ci ritroveremo in cielo.’<sup>518</sup> In *Marco Visconti*, Bice exhales her last breath while deep in prayer for Marco. On her deathbed, Bice is comforted by the forgiveness she has received from her parents and the forgiveness she dispenses to her persecutor. This is the priest’s last request to Bice, that she pray for Marco: ‘La pia chinò soavemente il capo ad accennare che già lo faceva, e non fu più vista rilevarlo: era spirata.’<sup>519</sup>

As for Bazzoni’s Ginevra, although she marries Palamede in spite of the deeply ill-fated trajectory of her existence, the ending of the novel is far from happy. The wedding scene is condensed in the last three lines of the last chapter (XII). After the lengthy description of Bernabò’s agonizing death and burial in a monumental mausoleum adorned with columns and an equestrian statue of the deceased duke, the circumstances of Ginevra and Palamede’s wedding appear strikingly insignificant, seen that ‘furono compite le nozze: nè essi più apparvero alla Corte del Visconte.’<sup>520</sup> Instead of the beginning of a new life together, marriage seems to put an end to it.

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<sup>516</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 378.

<sup>517</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 415.

<sup>518</sup> Cantù, p. 564.

<sup>519</sup> Grossi, p. 364.

<sup>520</sup> Bazzoni, p. 196.

### **5.3 Demonisation and dehumanisation of the enemy**

In wartime propaganda, the practice of demonising the enemy is employed to marginalise potential threats to the national unity and to mobilise consensus against such threats.<sup>521</sup> An integral component of the nationalising project of historical novels, which celebrates the past to give shape to present national identity, is that of giving form to the idea of the enemy by opposition: ‘us’ and ‘them’, those who fight for their honour and those who threaten it. The characterisation of the enemy is a critical element in the nationalistic discourse of these novels because of its intensely practical political value. It is also a crucial element of the sense-making system of the novels as it contributes to the creation of identifiable narrative tropes, themes, and categories. In the imaginative and polarised chivalrous world crafted in historical novels, figures of villains are just as equally meaningful as those of knights, but in a reversed sense.

Whereas only in *Ettore Fieramosca* one of the enemies is identifiable as non-Italian (the French army), thus accentuating the identification process with one ethnic group and not with the other, in the rest of the canon the practice of demonising and dehumanising the villain is aimed at creating a sense of hostility towards the enemy, while the main focus remains to encourage readers to identify with the values and aspirations of the knights. To this end, villains are portrayed as a knight’s opposite, both aesthetically and morally. Where knights are described as highly humane individuals, villains are vulgar and vicious; where knights are angelic figures, villains are diabolic ones. Hostility toward the enemy is also demonstrated by characterising villains as less-than-human beings, as either feral and venomous animals or as carriers of infectious illnesses. Not only does the process of demonisation and dehumanisation of the villain offer a simplistic and

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<sup>521</sup> Mario Isnenghi, Giorgio Rochat, *La Grande Guerra 1914-1918* (Milano: La Nuova Italia – RCS Libri, 2000), p. 28.

pragmatic schematisation of the characters' value system, but it also invites readers to interrogate the moral hierarchies presented in the narratives and in the world they live in.

Additionally, this dualism between the concepts of good and evil has clear Christian undertones. In the Manichaean framework of the historical novels, the hero embodies the superior terms of this dualism as he sets off on a journey during which his fortitude is tested by encounters with malign individuals whose intentions are inevitably against the status quo personified by the hero.<sup>522</sup> The four novels in the canon abide by these criteria in presenting evil characters whose function is to create conflict in the life of the hero and those around him.

### **5.3.1 Villains as dark versions of the knights**

The way Cesare Borgia, the villain in D'Azeglio's novel, appears on the scene echoes the slow movement through which Ettore Fieramosca is introduced in the novel, first in the words of other knights (chapter I) and then as an actual character (chapter III).<sup>523</sup> Borgia is in fact initially presented through the speeches of a few people gathered to discuss recent events (chapter II), but in a way that differs considerably from Fieramosca's, because he is immediately described as a wretched individual whose criminal actions are legendary: 'Tutto il mondo sa che ha ammazzato il fratello per averne gli onori e la roba; tutto il mondo sa come ha fatto per diventare padrone della Romagna; tutto il mondo sa che ha ucciso il cognato, avvelenato cardinali, vescovi e tanti altri che

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<sup>522</sup> See Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero*, p. 2.

<sup>523</sup> Borgia was a Renaissance captain, nobleman, and cardinal, natural son of Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503). Also known as Duca Valentino (Duke of Valentinois, a title received from the French King Louis XII in 1498), he was the holder of the offices of duke of the Romagna and captain general of the armies of the Church. As such he enhanced the political power of his father's papacy and tried to establish his own principality in central Italy.

gli davano ombra.’<sup>524</sup> Both Fieramosca and Borgia enjoy extensive recognition and notoriety, but for opposite reasons.<sup>525</sup>

Cesare Borgia is the incarnation of the archetypal tyrant, one who is able to conceal his boundless ambitions under the surface of communal benefit. He is a master of deceit, a manipulative and cunning individual ‘[che] sapea finger benissimo, [e] dar di sé opinione migliore della sua fama.’<sup>526</sup> At the same time, Duke Valentino is consistently wary of others and must trust no one. At one point in the novel, the characterisation of Cesare Borgia and of his clothing while in his own studio reveals his profound mistrust for everything and everyone even in a moment of domestic inactivity. Borgia is dressed in a:

cappa riunita davanti da una fila di piccoli bottoni, col busto e le maniche di raso nero piuttosto strette, e sovr’esse molte striscie di velluto bianco volanti e solo riunite al braccio in quattro luoghi da cerchi del medesimo panno; presso il collarino della cappa tre o quattro bottoni aperti lasciavan vedere un giaco di finissima maglia d’acciajo che portava sempre disotto.<sup>527</sup>

Under his severe cape, Borgia wears a hauberk, that is a shirt made of small metal rings used by medieval knights to protect themselves from sharp weapons and typically worn underneath a suit of armour. Borgia must always protect himself. He lives in a state of perpetual circumspection, and he needs to be alert at all times, even at night. As a matter of fact, Borgia ‘aveva di quei temperamenti ferrei ai quali non è quasi necessario il riposo.’<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 43.

<sup>525</sup> Borgia’s policies led Niccolò Machiavelli to cite him as an example of the new Prince. ‘Io voglio all’uno et all’altro di questi modi detti, circa el diventare principe per virtù o per fortuna, addurre dua esempli stati ne’ di della memoria nostra: e questi sono Francesco Sforza e Cesare Borgia. [...] Cesare Borgia, chiamato dal vulgo duca Valentino, acquistò lo stato con la fortuna del padre, e con quella lo perdé; non ostante che per lui si usassi ogni opera e facessi tutte quelle cose che per uno prudente e virtuoso uomo si doveva fare, per mettere le barbe sua in quelli stati che l’arme e fortuna di altri li aveva concessi.’ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. by Luigi Firpo (Torino: Einaudi, 1972), p. 35.

<sup>526</sup> D’Azeglio, pp. 153-154.

<sup>527</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 362.

<sup>528</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 140.

In Cesare Cantù's novel, *Margherita Pusterla*, there are two villains, complementary to each other: Luchino Visconti and Ramengo. They are the perfect representation of reason versus force, and how they complement each other. Where Luchino is ruthless, but poised and willing to eschew conventional morality to preserve his power, Ramengo acts according to his instincts or intuitions, and is moved by immediate and basic feelings and needs without a logical rationale. Luchino is in his own way an emblem of the chivalric code, but reversed. Whereas knightly figures in these historical novels are often painted as Christ-like figures, Luchino is portrayed as the fallen angel, the knight who has rebelled against the rules and values of the institution of knighthood and has favoured personal over communal interest. In chapter 1, Luchino Visconti is described as:

ricchissimo di quel valor militare che può associarsi con tutti i vizi e sino colla viltà, austero men di atti che di fatti, scarso nel promettere, saldo nel mantenere, spedito nel prendere una risoluzione e nell'effettuarla, molto paese acquistò [sic], nulla perdetto: non sentì benevolenza per altri che pe' suoi bastardi; non perdonò mai, mai non si fidò in chi una volta avesse offeso; ma per dissimulare o l'odio o la vendetta, per seguitare con lunghi giri una preda, per consumare un'iniquità col più ipocrito aspetto di giustizia, pochi l'eguagliarono fra i signori di sua casa, che pur sapete se ve ne fu di tristi.<sup>529</sup>

The range of adjectives employed to qualify Luchino's character and spirit is not dissimilar from the one associated with knights or heroic individuals in the same novels. On the one hand, Luchino possesses military courage and merit, he is stern and a man of his word, he is purposeful and strong. On the other hand, as the second half of the last citation reveals, such qualities and skills are not used for the benefit of the community, but rather to its detriment. Luchino acts independently and wayward from the world he lives in.

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<sup>529</sup> Cantù, p. 7.

Luchino is a leader. As *Signore* of Milan, he is hailed as such by his subjects. Or else, as Cantù indicates, he is so feared by all that no one dares to contradict or oppose him. Two Great Danes are his only comfort, always by his side maybe for companionship, or possibly for protection. In line with the behaviour of Cesare Borgia in D'Azeglio's novel, Luchino must protect himself at all times and wears a hauberk ('giaco di maglia') even when he is inside his own residence, watched by multiple guards and shielded by the two dogs.<sup>530</sup> Furthermore, just like Borgia, Luchino Visconti has a high-functioning personality that affects his regular physiologic functions ('Il signor Luchino dorme soltanto finchè vuole').<sup>531</sup>

As a leader, Luchino sets an example for the people and his greedy personality is emulated by others. This is when the author adds an annotation that is noticeably directed to his readers and that is intended to comment on the plight of Italy and on the state of a nation torn apart by internal conflict and desire for personal power. Cantù explains that the nobles:

erano impazzati nel tempo che regolavano il pubblico interesse: ciascuno amò sè più che la patria, più la propria agiatezza che le comuni franchigie, più il comodo che la gloria, più la vita che la virtù: ora mangiavano di quel che s'erano preparato.<sup>532</sup>

The analogy with the act of eating one's own food, and not sharing it, is symptomatic of the conditions of the territories over which Luchino Visconti rules, as well as the one of Italy at the time the author wrote his novels. This is an unruly situation in which survival is at stake, where one's life, not one's soul, must be preserved. The historical context presented in this novel is probably the bleakest of all among the novels of the medieval canon, because it represents a community of people profoundly divided between two opposites (the rich, the noble, and the powerful on the one hand, and the poor, the inept,

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<sup>530</sup> Cantù, p. 9.

<sup>531</sup> Cantù, p. 160.

<sup>532</sup> Cantù, p. 10.

and gullible on the other) and in a state of acute degeneration and corruption. Luchino Visconti is the mastermind behind that and he intends to maintain such *status quo*.

Not surprisingly, the *Signore* of Milan is Ramengo's role model. This character, whom the author calls 'adulatore di Luchino', is antithetical to the one of Visconti's, yet it complements it in such a way as to suggest a perfect symbiosis between the two villains.<sup>533</sup> They are portrayed and they act in a way that accentuates, once again, the duality of the human nature and psyche. In spite of their different upbringing, the two have something in common: they are ambitious and venal. Ramengo originally followed in his father's footsteps to become a mercenary as the only way he could make a decent living and a name for himself:

Il padre di lui, soldato di fortuna, senz'altra ricchezza che la spada, era venuto a Milano a procacciare sua ventura al soldo dei Visconti. Morto poi nelle battaglie, sulla stessa via lo avea seguito Ramengo, siccome l'unica nella quale sperasse acquistare nome e ricchezze, e contentare l'avara ambizione che lo struggeva.<sup>534</sup>

Ramengo is indebted to the Pusterla family who took him and his father under their wing and helped them become established as soldiers. However, Ramengo, who is blinded by envy for the good fortunes of others, harbours ill feelings for his benefactors, although he does not openly oppose them in case he may still obtain some advantages. Ramengo was born with a wretched heart ('cuor tristo'), one that can only be inhabited by hatred ('con uno di quei cuori per cui è necessità l'odiare'). As such, Ramengo:

abborriva svisceratamente la famiglia Pusterla perchè n'era stato beneficiato: ma avendone tratti molti vantaggi e molti altri sperandone, dissimulava e fattasi una fronte inesplorabile, mostravasi coi Pusterla sino alla viltà devoto e piaggiatore, mentre con inquieta scontentezza procurava sulle loro rovine alzarsi sublime.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> Cantù, p. 86.

<sup>534</sup> Cantù, p. 150.

<sup>535</sup> Cantù, p. 151.

The concept of Ramengo's heart as a place where only extreme emotional dislike for human life can grow is reaffirmed soon after when he is compared to his own peers. These are moved by 'affetti, piaceri, illusioni', whereas Ramengo's own preoccupation is to escape from his 'nativa bassezza ed avanzare negli impieghi ed alla Corte, fossero qualunque le vie.'<sup>536</sup> To this end, romantic love is also nothing else than one of many means to obtain social advancement and achieve prestige. For Ramengo a woman is nothing more than 'uno stromento opportuno od inutile a' suoi disegni d'inalzamento.'<sup>537</sup> The aspiration to a higher social standing, the thirst for power, and emphasis on a man's possessions, in opposition to and in disdain of human and spiritual life (epitomised in the female character), are defining traits of the two villains in Cantù's novel.

It is interesting to note that the duality of the two characters exposes the ambivalence between rationality and irrationality and between men and animals, another important aspect of the constructions of villains that is analysed below. The separation of these two components (which Cesare Borgia assembles in one single character) also raises issues of class. Luchino is an emblem of the patriarchy, and not simply because of his descent, but also because of his intellectual superiority and moral complexity. This pattern of binary oppositions in which reason is privileged over impulses (Luchino is powerful, Ramengo is not) is indicative of the fact that, although promoting social change and political progress, nineteenth-century historical novels do not question the hierarchical class structure of their time, which is seen as a natural condition of social existence. This is not surprising considering that authors as well as their intended readers were all educated members of the upper class. In reiterating images of class separation and limited social mobility, but in the context of a renewed value system intensely

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<sup>536</sup> Cantù, p. 154.

<sup>537</sup> Cantù, p. 158.

underscoring the power of good over evil, historical novels conservatively reimagine nineteenth-century society and authorise upper-class members to become the bearer of these new values. In this sense, when the villain is the representative of an elite, there is no distinction between evil characters and those of knights, as they both support the dominant system.

The notion of class as well as the pursuit of self-interest observed in *Margherita Pusterla* is considerably amplified in the fourth novel in the medieval canon, *Il castello di Trezzo*, that focuses on one powerful family, the Viscontis, and the conflict between its members. The villain is embodied in the character of Gian Galeazzo Visconti (in Bazzoni's novel named 'Giovan Galeazzo'), who is the bearer of evil symbolism, but not necessarily in his capacity as oppressor and incarcerator of Prince Bernabò, for whom Gian Galeazzo's hostility is dictated primarily by reasons of state and power.<sup>538</sup> Bernabò Visconti is not the antagonist to Gian Galeazzo and he is not his nemesis. On the contrary, Bernabò is himself a model of an unjust and cruel ruler, and after he is captured, Gian Galeazzo is hailed as 'oppressore di un duca che per le sue crudeltà era abborrito da tutti.'<sup>539</sup> With that said, in the novel Bernabò is a prisoner, and, during his captivity, he and his family are treated with the honour worthy of his status as head of state. In the family feud, Gian Galeazzo stands out as an exceptionally skilled and intellectually gifted man, whose 'mente profonda e intellettiva' has received unparalleled education from 'uomini saggi, con una educazione per que' tempi raffinatissima' among whom is none

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<sup>538</sup> Known under the appellation Count Of Valour (Conte Di Virtù), Gian Galeazzo (1351-1402) was a Milanese leader who brought the Visconti dynasty to the height of its power and almost succeeded in becoming the ruler of all northern Italy. He was the son of Galeazzo II Visconti, who shared the rule of Milan with his brother Bernabò (1323-1385). After his father's death in 1378, Gian Galeazzo succeeded as ruler of the western half of Milan and its territory, with headquarters in Pavia. Bernabò secured a military alliance with the French prince Louis of Anjou in 1382 and agreed to have his daughter Lucia marry Louis's son. With this agreement Gian Galeazzo feared that the marriage would make Bernabò more powerful and that he would constitute a threat to his own position. The 1385 ambush and capture of Gian Galeazzo's uncle Bernabò is at the centre of Bazzoni's novel *Il castello di Trezzo*.

<sup>539</sup> Bazzoni, p. 7.

other than ‘quel meraviglioso ingegno di Francesco Petrarca.’<sup>540</sup> These formative years in Gian Galeazzo’s life have shaped him and made his intellect (‘mente’) ‘adorna, acuta, calcolatrice e ripiena di vastissime idee.’<sup>541</sup>

In spite of the education he has received and the exposure to the greatest minds of his time, Gian Galeazzo’s conniving nature is exposed when he manages to put his hands on his uncle Bernabò’s possessions. At that moment, Gian Galeazzo:

più non necessitando a suoi scopi il farsi credere un ignorante pinzocchero, stupidamente dato ai soli atti d’una superstiziosa devozione, coi quali ingannando sul proprio carattere non il solo Bernabò lontano, ma ben anco i suoi più intimi famigliari, era giunto a far cessare nello zio ogni pensiero d’invigilanza sovra di lui, a segno di trarlo nell’agguato che gli aveva disposto sotto le mura della stessa Milano.<sup>542</sup>

Gian Galeazzo is exceptional both in his being a man of high intellect and in having built his life around one single purpose, that is to amass all the dominions of the Viscontis into his own power. The above citation draws attention to a troubling aspect of Gian Galeazzo’s personality: an innate ability to lie and deceive everyone, including his own family, in order to achieve his goals.

Gian Galeazzo is a cold schemer, who is willing to compromise the integrity of all the members of his immediate and extended family for his own good. He has his uncle Bernabò’s entire family locked up in the castle of Trezzo for no other reason than ‘farla languire disperatamente, onde accrescere per tal barbaro modo il dolore ed accelerare la morte [di Bernabò] di cui si voleva spenta nella mente di tutti la memoria.’<sup>543</sup> He wants to rebuild the name of the Viscontis, and to do so he has to eradicate the memory of everything that has come before him.

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<sup>540</sup> Bazzoni, p. 114.

<sup>541</sup> Bazzoni, p. 114.

<sup>542</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 114-115.

<sup>543</sup> Bazzoni, p. 154.

He wants to rewrite the history of the Viscontis by erasing the past. Gian Galeazzo does not only aim to become the sole sovereign of the entire Ducato of Milan, which, at the time of Gian Galeazzo's death in 1402, comprised the whole of today's Lombardy, the western part of Veneto, and Tuscany (not including the Republic of Florence). Gian Galeazzo also aims to become the only sovereign worth remembering and leaving an undying trace of his magnificence to posterity. He hopes to inspire awe in the Milanese people and be known to posterity 'innalzando monumenti di sorprendente grandezza e maestà. Era perciò anche oggetto di sua meditazione l'idea di fare erigere presso il proprio palazzo un tempio di cui un simile non si vedesse al mondo.'<sup>544</sup> The temple Gian Galeazzo intends to have built next to his residence in Milan is the very symbol of the city, the Duomo, which promises to be 'la più vasta chiesa di tutta Cristianità,' still admired and praised at the time of the author for the 'immensità dei lavori, a perfezione condotto, è soggetto di meraviglia ai riguardanti per la colossale sua mole e gli innumerevoli ornamenti.'<sup>545</sup> In so doing Gian Galeazzo wants to tie his image indelibly to the city of Milan and inaugurate a new era.

Gian Galeazzo's plans are, however, tainted by his knowing that his uncle is still alive, albeit restrained in a castle away from the city. This awareness permeates his mind, blurs the line between reality and imagination, and impairs his judgement. His dreams of power and glory ('immagini di potenza e di gloria') are often:

offuscate e tronche da un terribile pensiero. Nel castello di Trezzo, egli rammentavasi, esisteva ancora Bernabò. Per quanto fosse certo che da quelle mura non potesse sottrarsi, pure la fantasia spesso glielo rappresentava trionfante e libero in atto d'entrare in Milano a strappargli il potere e la vita.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Bazzoni, pp. 160-161.

<sup>545</sup> Bazzoni, p. 161.

<sup>546</sup> Bazzoni, p. 161.

Gian Galeazzo cannot control the overwhelming sensation that an unexpected turn of events will deprive him of his position. He is ‘di frequente dolorosamente angosciato’ by such ominous thoughts, which ‘durante il giorno gli incatenavano la mente in profonde meditazioni.’<sup>547</sup> The impulse to put an end to his uncle’s life is only restrained ‘dal pensiero della divina vendetta, che combattendogli in cuore coll’avidità del potere, il teneva.’<sup>548</sup> In the end, Bernabò’s health deteriorates and his death occurs while surrounded by his family, leaving Gian Galeazzo in power, but inescapably alone and estranged from his own family.

### **5.3.2 Villains through animal and disease metaphors**

Through the process of demonising the figure of the villain to accentuate the moral duality of the value system in historical novels, a narrative pattern emerges that is to attribute human characteristics of the villains to an abstract quality derived either from the realm of animals or from disease. The expediency of this kind of practice is both to enhance the effectiveness of descriptive passages and to elicit a reaction. Through association with animals or diseases the characters of villains are caricatured so as to express and communicate effectively an author’s opinion. In nineteenth-century Europe, caricatures were widely used in the printed press and especially feared by the ruling orders as potentially critical and hostile, and, as a result, in most major European cities caricatures were subject to prior censorship for part or most of the 1815-1914 period.<sup>549</sup> This technique impacted strongly on readers and their imagination because ‘facendo

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<sup>547</sup> Bazzoni, p. 162.

<sup>548</sup> Bazzoni, p. 162

<sup>549</sup> An excellent, although dated, survey of nineteenth-century Europe caricature is: Ronald Searle, Claude Roy, and Bernd Bornemann, *La Caricature: Art et Manifeste* (Geneva: Skira, 1974). For Italy, see; Rosanna Maggio-Serra, “La Naissance de la Caricature de Presse en Italie et le Journal Turinois *Il fischietto*”, *Histoire et Critique des Arts*, 13/14 (1980), 135-58.

perno su un meccanismo d'identificazione, o quanto meno di empatia [...] consente all'immagine satirica di configurarsi come un efficace dispositivo di mobilitazione.<sup>550</sup> The parallel between evil characters and wild animals or infectious diseases is very strong in historical novels of the canon and it is quite striking to observe how these techniques were widely employed.

Chapter XVI in *Ettore Fieramosca* contains a quick flashback into Borgia's past, which provides details about his criminal activities. During a close encounter between the Duke and Ginevra, he is depicted as a wild animal on the hunt to catch its prey. Borgia is holding Ginevra captive, who looks at her jailer 'tutta tremante come avrebbe guardato una tigre che la tenesse fra gli artigli.'<sup>551</sup> This is the moment when Borgia reveals his identity to Ginevra, who falls into a state of shock and is unable to react. The young damsel sees the true nature of her incarcerator, as he not only discloses his name, but also his ferocious and aggressive disposition. Later in the same chapter, the animal metaphor is used again to describe a moment of high tension between the Duke and a common criminal, Pietraccio, a gang leader and a murderer whose plans had interfered with those of Borgia. When Pietraccio, earlier described as a 'giovane feroce, di membra e d'aspetto come un selvaggio', is brought in, he cannot contain his wild instincts and attacks the Duke.<sup>552</sup> Unrestrained by Borgia's bandits, Pietraccio 'si scagliò addosso al Valentino come una bestia arrabbiata, pensando valersi dell'ugne e dei denti per isbrannarlo' but he is instantly surrounded and killed by the Duke's thugs, who act like a pack of wolves.<sup>553</sup>

Whereas animal metaphors confer an aura of authority, respect, danger, and fear to the villain, disease metaphors produce a sickening effect. The connotation of Duke

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<sup>550</sup> Sandro Morachioli, "Il volto del giornale. Usi e funzioni della personificazione nella stampa satirica risorgimentale", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, 130-1, 2018, 55-69.

<sup>551</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 376.

<sup>552</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 218.

<sup>553</sup> D'Azeglio, p. 383.

Valentino as a grotesque human figure is powerfully rendered in the following description where physical attributes blend with moral traits to form a strong unity:

Era travagliato di tempo in tempo da un umore acre della stessa specie degli erpeti, che ora gli serpeggiava latente pel sangue, ora si scopriva alla cute e sulla faccia specialmente, ed allora la livida pallidezza del suo volto si cangiava in un rosso spugnoso pieno di bolle, dalle quali stillava umore, e la schifosa deformità del suo viso era tale da metter ribrezzo anche nelle persone che di continuo gli stavano vicino [...] deturpandogli più che mai i lineamenti, ed inducendo in tutto il suo essere una inesplicabile ed irrequieta rabbia, conseguenza ordinaria di tali malanni.<sup>554</sup>

Through expressions such as ‘umore acre’, ‘erpeti’ (skin irritations), ‘livida pallidezza’, ‘rosso spugnoso’, ‘bolle’, ‘schifosa deformità’, ‘umori infetti’ D’Azeglio constructs the figure of Cesare Borgia as a decomposing corpse. The range of verbs used also reveals a certain degree of moral corruption (‘serpeggiava’, ‘travagliato’, ‘deturpandogli’) as they convey the idea of a snake taking possession of Borgia’s body. In the biblical tradition the snake represents corruption and vice, and, in the character of Cesare Borgia, these traits are combined to incite a feeling of physical and spiritual repulsion in the observer and in the reader. In political terms, the way the character is constructed communicates the physical danger of conniving with the enemy and posits a reverse of the classical paradigm we have seen at play above; that is the Greek ideal of beauty as expression of moral goodness (*kalos kai agathos*). Corruption, decay, and vice are underlined once more later in the same chapter when the author adds: ‘la faccia di quell’uomo, mettendo insieme la deformità fisica con quella che induce nei lineamenti l’espressione del delitto, non s’era mostrata mai sotto un aspetto più orrendo.’<sup>555</sup> The sense of progressive self-destruction defines the figure of Cesare Borgia whose nauseating appearance communicates the idea of death.

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<sup>554</sup> D’Azeglio, pp. 362-363.

<sup>555</sup> D’Azeglio, p. 395.

Death and animal behaviour are factors typifying the characters of villains in historical novels of the canon, by way of which their humanity is transformed into something abominable. The figure of Pelagrua, Marco Visconti's watchdog in Tommaso Grossi's novel, who incarnates Marco's evil side, is in keeping with this characterisation. Marco Visconti, Lord of Milan, is in love with Beatrice, the daughter of Oldrado Conte del Balzo. Bice loves Mark's cousin, Ottorino Visconti, whom Marco, disguised as a mysterious knight, challenges in a tournament and almost kills. Instead, Marco decides to prevent the marriage between the two and to separate them. He entrusts the wicked Pelagrua, who avails himself of the complicity of Lodrisio Visconti, also Marco's cousin, to kidnap Bice and lock her up in his castle.

At the beginning of the novel, Pelagrua is portrayed as a scoundrel, a mischief-maker, convicted as counterfeiter, who would extort indigent people 'succiendo, pelando, scorticando senza pietà, faceva loro mille angherie, mille soprusi.'<sup>556</sup> The idea of discipline and moderation that we have seen above for knights and damsels is reversed here, which is a clear indication of the way these novels relay the underlying messages of the chivalric code. The reverse of the self-effacing damsel and self-restraining knight is played out in evil figures like Pelagrua, whose senseless cruelty is that of a wild animal driven not by morality but by base instincts, as revealed in this passage where Pelagrua is caught looking at Bice:

Non avete mai visto un uccellatore, che spiccata una cinciallegra dai panioni, tien l'occhio per un momento sulla stizzosa bestiola, al quale si rivolta a dar di becco alla mano che con una lieve stretta può stritolarle gli ossicini, farne una schiacciatina? Bene, col debito agguaglio, era la stessa cosa.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Grossi, p. 7.

<sup>557</sup> Grossi, p. 273.

Pelagrua's dominance is described by association to the dexterity of movements and strength of a bird catcher, who has life or death power over the bird. Pelagrua's animal qualities are not revealed by comparison to an actual animal, but to a human being who has complete disregard for life.

Malice and wickedness are constructed in opposition to good nature. The portrait of evil characters is therefore very closely connected to the one of positive figures in that it constitutes its negative, both in terms of physical appearance and moral connotation.

In *Marco Visconti*, Pelagrua

era un uomo di cinquant'anni, di mezzana statura, asciutto e scarso delle membra; le guancie, d'uno smorto livido, non si colorivano, non si alteravano mai per cosa al mondo. Due lunghe sopracciglia folte e grigie gli adombravano due occhi neri e fulminanti, che non c'era verso si potessero accordare coll'umiltà della fronte in cui erano piantati; due occhi indomabili, ineducabili, con una significazione crudele di malignità e di superbia; due occhi diabolici, che avrebbero sbugiardato il viso di un santo anacoreta. Entrando, li portava onestamente volti a terra in atto rimesso, ma li rilevava qualche volta gettandoli a dritta e a manca colla rapidità e collo sfolgorare del baleno, e pareva che scappassero dall'incontrarsi negli sguardi altrui, come il ladro che ha paura d'esser colto sul furto.<sup>558</sup>

The evil man is portrayed as physically not equal to the figure of the hero analysed earlier in this chapter. Pelagrua is described here as a short individual, whose limbs are frail and whose complexion is pale. He is explicitly portrayed as Marco's evil self. Although opposing the love romance between Bice and Ottorino, Marco is essentially a positive character in the novel, the only one who incarnates the qualities, the values, and the symbolic connotation of a medieval knight. He is a respectable man, whom life and particularly his father's opposition to his own romance with Bice's mother Ermelinda, have made a more resolute and austere individual. On the contrary, Pelagrua embodies all that Marco is not. The inequality between the two is emphasised not only in terms of

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<sup>558</sup> Grossi, p. 273.

their very different social statuses, but also in terms of their cognitive abilities. Pelagrua is merely an executor of Marco's orders. He accomplishes what Marco cannot do either for reasons of unsuitability to his social status or because he lacks the ability to do so. Therefore, it is with Pelagrua that the realisation of evil deeds such as kidnappings and murders is associated. Pelagrua is a silent presence who carries with him a dreadful history of vice. He is the product of his past decadence and as a result he is relegated to the margins of society.

Figures of villains in historical novels of the canon are constructed in such a way as to highlight two aspects of a man's personality and character. Therefore, two categories can be identified. Some villains exhibit physical traits described in terms of their resemblance to animal creatures and a psyche that is often driven by instinctual needs (i.e. not informed by culture, tradition, and morals). Others are characterised as highly educated and skilled individuals, whose ambitions and megalomania push them to the edge of society to the point of becoming outcasts and prisoners of their own lives.

Although characters in novels of the canon do not uniquely conform to one single category, but show features from both, broadly speaking it is possible to classify them into one typology or the other. For instance, Don Michele in *Ettore Fieramosca*, Pelagrua in *Marco Visconti*, and Ramengo in *Margherita Pusterla* belong in the first category, whereas Cesare Borgia in *Ettore Fieramosca*, Luchino Visconti in *Margherita Pusterla*, and Gian Galeazzo in *Il castello di Trezzo* are representative of the second category. In both cases, the despicable, vicious, and immoral nature of the villains is figuratively exemplified in the metaphor of the corrupting action of disease. In some cases, the metaphor is used explicitly and described in detail as a corroding agent that operates from the inside of a man, but is also revealed on the outside (for example, Cesare Borgia and Don Michele in *Ettore Fieramosca*). In other cases, the image of the disease is suggested

by way of the recurring theme of an undefined malaise affecting the villain, whose trust in others and ability to discern between reality and imagination is debilitated (for example, Luchino Visconti in *Margherita Pusterla* and Gian Galeazzo in *Il castello di Trezzo*).

### **Conclusion**

In the early nineteenth century, the ethical implications of patriotism and nationalism implicit in the appropriation of specific medieval figures were conveyed in a rich body of literature of which the four novels analysed in this chapter offer an exemplary selection. The attraction of the historical context, the flexibility of the chivalric myths, and the values conveyed by the characters were ideal elements through which a commentary on the political situation of authors and readers could be provided. Medieval-inspired historical novels functioned as modern cautionary tales, whose educational mission primarily relied on the role of a hero, that is a knight, and the set of rather formulaic characters (damsels and villains) that interact with him in a typically chivalric fashion.

The political subtext perceptible in the historical novels analysed has to be understood as part of a larger European tradition of political propaganda conveyed through caricatures, symbols and allegories, and through the use of the imaginary and anthropomorphic. The analysis of the construction of the three main characters in historical novels of the Risorgimento and their interaction reveals a significant attempt to advance the nationalistic culture of the time thanks to the powerful socio-political potential of the allegorical language employed. The novels display a range of conventional and highly symbolic figures such as the virginal damsel representing the

motherland, the villain embodying foreign (that is, un-Italian and un-chivalric) usurpers, and the knight, possessor of all traditional Italian virtues, rescuer of the damsel/motherland from the villain/oppressor and role model to readers/fellow citizen. At the same time, they reveal the authors' participation in the creation of a shared iconography and political imagery, and in the formation of public opinion, which mirrors the top-down nationalistic and propagandistic project of the authors.

At a time when the existing social order in Italy was one of impositions and limitations, the new medievalism of Risorgimento historical novels tended to assert a moral code based on ancient models. By idealising the history of the Middle Ages as a period typified by the struggle between local influential families, and by romanticising the portrayal of characters, historical novels in the canon reduced complex medieval poems to tales of knights in armours and damsels in distress persecuted by villains. In so doing, these novels made use of medieval models to posit alternatives to the existing social order, and provided strong, if highly stereotyped, role models for burgeoning Italian patriots whilst projecting contemporary tensions and political struggles onto the medieval past.

## CONCLUSION

Research from the last four decades has demonstrated that nations and nationalism are essentially modern creations, arguably dating from after 1780. Research has also refuted the concept of national identity in purely existential terms, and has instead reaffirmed it as a cultural construct.<sup>559</sup> In this light, the present thesis focused on the discursive and symbolic representation of the Italian character in works of historical literature of the first half of the nineteenth century. During the Risorgimento, literature was one of the main contexts, although not the exclusive one, where images of national character were produced, used, and reiterated. This research has sought to locate the turning point of the creation and development of a nationalist culture in the production of Italian historical novels between 1827 and 1848, but more specifically up until 1840, a crucial year in the process of transformation of the burgeoning Italian literary industry.

This thesis has also sought to present Risorgimento intellectuals, not necessarily writers by profession, as eclectic individuals who contributed to the advancement of the Italian nationalist movement. These authors conceived their novels as a means to incite and stimulate civic participation in political events and social struggles in similar ways as other forms of nationalist propaganda did, not through elaborate theories of political revolution or by supporting violent revolts to destabilise the *status quo*, but rather through civic engagement and activism. This is demonstrated in the acute awareness authors of historical novels possessed about the need to inspire Italians in their role as agents of social change, and in the power of the literary medium.

In his memoirs, for instance, D'Azeglio commented on the relationship between republican ideals and political activism on the one hand and nationalism as constructed

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<sup>559</sup> See, Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm and Anderson (1991).

and conveyed through literature on the other. The author, who was not a sympathizer of Giuseppe Mazzini, whose strategies appeared mysterious and impractical to him, described his personal mission in comparison to that of the Genoese political agitator. In fact, given the aristocratic and bourgeois milieu to which he belonged, D'Azeglio was highly critical of Mazzini and of his politics. Mazzinian followers were risk-takers and amateurish young individuals preoccupied with 'far correre lettere, carte, giornali, passaporti; a trafugare emissari, aiutar compromessi, comunicare avvisi a prigionieri.' D'Azeglio, instead declared: 'Io che non dividevo le opinioni della *Giovine Italia*, che riconoscevo perfettamente inutile tutto il moto che si davano i suoi fidi [...] M'ero di conseguenza formato un piano d'agire sugli animi per mezzo d'una letteratura nazionale.'<sup>560</sup> Literature acquired national status and historical novels became a vehicle of nationalistic propaganda.

To this end, the central concern of this thesis has been to determine the framework and characteristics of the debate about nationalism in these literary outputs, to investigate the ways in which authors created it, and to ascertain whether any specific and common narrative trends exist. This concern stemmed from a lack of sufficient and systematic analysis of historical novels of the early Risorgimento period, and also from the substantial cultural impact, yet still largely ignored, that these novels produced within the time frame of my analysis. Such impact resulted from the popularity of the novel as a new literary genre, and also from the particular medieval context of the novels. Authors exploited the ample stock of themes, characters, and events provided by the history of the Middle Ages, which recent historiography had rediscovered and reexamined. Indeed, historical novels of the early Risorgimento period were expressions of the popularity of nineteenth-century Italian medievalism.

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<sup>560</sup> D'Azeglio, *I miei ricordi*, p. 456.

The concept of medievalism does not only denote the consumption of the medieval past in a post-medieval context, but also the way in which the medieval era was and is characterised in various cultural forms. Since medievalism ‘prompts scholars to ask how the Middle Ages are invoked in their myriad incarnations and for what purpose in relation to the historical context of any given expression of them,’ it naturally engages questions on the interpretation of historically-contingent issues such as power, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and identity construction.<sup>561</sup> Medievalism signifies the reception and imaginative process of recreating the Middle Ages in modern times and, as such, it has played a significant role in popular representations of various national cultures, even though today’s studies in medievalism are focusing more and more on the examination of cultural practices independently from concepts of geographical and historical boundaries.<sup>562</sup>

Emerging out of nineteenth-century nationalist agendas, as the present thesis has attempted to demonstrate in regard to the formation of a nationalist culture in Italy, the popular reception of the Middle Ages has evolved and distanced itself from such origins. Medievalism is today a domain where national, postcolonial, transnational, international, and even eco-criticism have all become terms commonly employed. Medievalism is by now accepted as a rich field where the core understanding of what national cultures are is problematised, that is where the assumptions that underlie the formation process of national cultures and national identities are brought into question.

The interaction and exchange between Medieval Studies and Cultural Studies is an area of critical inquiry that, in the English-speaking world, has received attention and

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<sup>561</sup> Marshall, *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture*, p. 2.

<sup>562</sup> See for example, Louise D’Arcens and Andrew Lynch, eds., *International Medievalism and Popular Culture* (New York: Cambria, 2014).

produced significant research and publications only in the last decade. The publication of *Postmedieval. A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* began in spring 2010, with the aim of developing a new approach to the critical investigation of the Middle Ages within the framework of contemporary texts, events, and ideas.<sup>563</sup> In the words of one of the editors of the journal, the scope of medieval cultural studies is to ask ‘not only what longer historical perspectives can provide to contemporary cultural theories, but also how the Middle Ages—its mentalities, social forms, culture, theology, political and legal structures, ethical values, and the like—infect contemporary life and thought.’<sup>564</sup>

The historical narratives that generated widespread interest in the second quarter of the nineteenth century in Italy engaged similar questions and issues. Medieval-inspired historical novels of the Risorgimento period, whose production and circulation reached levels never observed in Italy before, were responsible for popularising a new nationalistic vocabulary and code of behaviour emphasising values such as loyalty, courage, devotion, and independence. These behaviours were broadly aligned with the conservative agenda that can be detected in the novels of the medieval canon. The values underpinned by this code of behaviour, as we have seen, were embodied in the portrayal of an idealised, nostalgic past of gallant heroes protecting irreproachable young women by fighting against evil individuals, who, although not completely defeated by the end of the novels, were ostensibly portrayed as inhuman and outcasts, and, therefore, not as models to be emulated.

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<sup>563</sup> Myra Seaman, Eileen Joy, Lara Farinabegan, eds., *Postmedieval. A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>564</sup> Eileen Joy, *The Spaceship Has Landed: Announcing Postmedieval, a New Journal in Medieval Cultural Studies*, <<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2009/04/spaceship-has-landed-announcing.html>> (accessed 17 October 2017).

In the thesis, I analysed the three main character types in historical novels of the medieval canon and how they are portrayed in order to establish similarities and identify patterns in the novels. In this examination I looked at the figure of the knight, which clarified the double connotation of the knight as man and as symbol. The figure of the medieval knight was codified in such a way as to comprise a powerful symbolic significance and serve as a behavioural model. The evil characters, instead, are firstly presented as the negative alter egos to the heroes of the stories. Differences between the two types of characters mainly rely on two aspects: morality and physical capacity. Evil individuals reverse a knight's valour: they pursue their own intentions regardless of others' lives. This contrast is effectively expressed through the representation of the villains' dark and repulsive facial features, which often have an animal insinuation. Villains not only mirror negatively the moral qualities of heroes, but they also appear as their physical opposites. Whereas knights are capable of enduring physical hardship, in some cases villains cannot, which is interestingly compensated for by the presence of a second evil character, subordinate to the first, who plays the role of his assistant.

The knight's and the evil individual's interest is directed toward a young lady, who is a highly conventional character and whose depiction appears to present almost identical physical and moral features across the novels. The young woman plays an essentially passive role in the stories as not only does her destiny seem predetermined right from the beginning of the narration, but also her evolution is closely dependent upon the choices made by the other main characters. She is the target of both good and evil intentions: love and unbridled ambition. Caught between such opposing forces, the figure of the victimised young woman may easily be interpreted as the implicit embodiment of the new Italian nation. By the mid-1800s the use of female figures as allegorical vehicles and symbols of nations was fairly established in literature and political propaganda. The

use of the feminine to refer to countries was not uncommon, and some ‘lent themselves to being semantically gendered female.’<sup>565</sup>

The reiteration of fixed behavioural models through a range of codified literary personae in novels of the canon promoted chivalric values such as courage, loyalty, self-sacrifice, faith, devotion and obedience. In historical novels of the canon the presence of oppressed young women placed in perilous situations from which they cannot escape on their own and who must be liberated by valorous male characters raises questions about the political-patriotic implicit reading of the novels. Clearly, they were intended to inspire readers and to provide models for social activism. In so doing, historical novels made use of medieval models and narrative archetypes to postulate alternative outcomes in the process of transformation of Italian culture and of the existing social order.

It is interesting to note that the new nationalistic vocabulary and code of behaviour channelled through the powerful symbol of the medieval knight publicised a very specific vision of the medieval past. The figure of the medieval knight and the institution of chivalry it stood for were perceived as inherently medieval because, in a way, they had always been constructed as such. From as early as the late Middle Ages, chivalric ethos and the ways in which it was put into the service of a state and a community were exploited to investigate the values of a given society. Chivalry was used as ‘a lens through which ideas of history, national narratives, politics, and social customs and values’ could be explored.<sup>566</sup> By depicting chivalry as an ideal ethos and by offering its code of behaviour as a model for emulation, the medieval past was used to popularise the idea of social cohesion in a national context. The formulaic characterisation of

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<sup>565</sup> Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler, eds., *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 129.

<sup>566</sup> Katie Stevenson and Barbara Gribling, *Chivalry and the Medieval Past* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), p. 3.

knightly figures in historical novels of the Risorgimento with its strong emphasis on core values and on a very specific code of conduct provided the sense of a collective medieval heritage that could serve to express ideas of national character and nationhood.

Not only does every plot in these novels rest on the formulaic portrayal of the characters and their actions, but it also placed them in a clearly identifiable physical setting in which the story unfolds and with which characters interact. The representation of space is another essential vehicle of meaning in historical narration of the nineteenth century, as it strongly accentuates the relationship between place and characters in the construction of one's social identity. As Anthony Smith's study of ethnic myths has demonstrated, the construction of national identities relies on the process of self-identification with images (concepts, visual illustrations, etc.) that bear existential symbolism. As part of this identification process are ideas of genealogy and territoriality, the biological descent, and the geographical space inhabited by an ethnic community.<sup>567</sup>

By way of a process that Smith defines as 'territorialisation of memory', historical narratives of the Risorgimento celebrate the uniqueness of a community of individuals who share common traditions and inhabit a precise geographical area that carries with it the stratified memory of how that community evolved, and they present the perpetuation of local identity from one generation to another.<sup>568</sup> The spatial dimension of the creation of a national mythology in nineteenth-century historical novels was based on territoriality not purely from a geographic point of view, but also in terms of reconfiguring the urban context in which the action of the narratives took place. The territory functions firstly as a physical background, as a stage for events, but also as the space framing the struggle, the conflict through which the people secure control over that territory. Details of

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<sup>567</sup> See, Anthony Smith, *Myth and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>568</sup> Smith, *Myth and Memories of the Nation*, p. 152.

territoriality not only provide precise geographic references that help localise the story of a novel, but also foster strong consciousness about the moral profile of all those who live in such area.

The choice of events and figures borrowed from the medieval history of a defined geographical area constituted suitable content for historical narratives. Not only were those medieval heroes, their deeds, and especially the setting (natural or urban) familiar to the educated nineteenth-century middle class, the main consumers of historical novels, but the flexibility of the myths, the attraction of the historical context, and the values characters conveyed were ideal elements through which to provide a commentary on the political situation of authors and readers.

Although recurring narrative patterns exist among Italian historical novels, and although the genre of the novel was used in similar ways by authors in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to create a privileged channel of communication with readers, such intense literary production has not previously been analysed as a cohesive cultural phenomenon. The publication of historical novels of the early Risorgimento period is still today an area of study largely unexplored, and this can be explained in two ways. One of the distinctive traits of these novels that the present thesis has tried to interpret in a different light, that is the repetition of similar narrative elements, has presented an impediment to their appreciation. Consequentially, because of their formulaic nature, historical novels of the Risorgimento have been consistently classified as inferior to the more significant literary examples of the period.

Moreover, although these novels enjoyed extraordinary popularity, which, as we have seen, belies their critical neglect, the attraction they held for readers did not last much beyond the decades of intense production of this genre. The novels were conceived in response to a contingent socio-political situation, but also reflected the specific

aesthetic tendencies of the time. As such, the sense of urgency as well as the sentiments with which authors created their literary works have been lost or at best underestimated. With that said, the present research, rather than highlighting the role of political thinkers and activists/patriots, focused instead on a largely forgotten and critically dismissed body of texts, which I have argued were an important facet of the multi-layered process of national identity construction in the Risorgimento period because they reached ordinary citizens. This thesis sought to reconstruct the unique cultural climate of the second quarter of the nineteenth century in Italy in order to suggest a new consideration of the role of historical novels in popularising the core values of nationalism.

The research presented in this thesis illustrated the neglected and complex interaction between historical literature and popular culture in nineteenth-century Italy. Further study is needed to unveil the ramifications of the phenomenon of the Risorgimento historical novel genre in order to understand its far-reaching impact on the formation of national identity in Italy. Research of this kind is also necessary to gain a more historically accurate and culturally balanced perspective on the process of Italian independence not simply as a passive revolution, as Gramsci described the ‘historical fact of the absence of popular initiative in the development of Italian history.’<sup>569</sup> In addition, Italian medievalism, whether in its nineteenth-century or post nineteenth-century manifestations, is still an under-researched area of study, which offers numerous opportunities for interdisciplinary work thanks to the eclectic nature and the versatility of this cultural phenomenon.

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<sup>569</sup> Cited in Peter Thomas, ‘Modernity as “passive revolution”’: Gramsci and the Fundamental Concepts of Historical Materialism’, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 172 (2006), 61-78.

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## Appendix

### **Complete bibliography of historical novels in the medieval canon.**

#### **Massimo D'Azeglio, *Ettore Fieramosca*.**

Information on all publications is given only for authorized versions: *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta. Racconto* (Torino: G. Pomba, 1833), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta. Racconto* 2° ed. riveduta e corretta dall'autore (Torino: G. Pomba, 1833), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Sisfida di Barletta: Racconto* (Torino: per Giuseppe Pomba, s. a.), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta di Massimo d'Azeglio*, edizione ornata di 200 disegni originali di I. de Moraine intercalati nel testo (Torino: Stabilimento tipografico Fontana, 1842), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta: Racconto di Massimo D'Azeglio*, 4° ed. milanese riveduta e ritoccata dall'autore (Milano: coi tipi Borroni e Scotti, 1847), *Ettore Fieramosca ossia la Disfida di Barletta di Massimo D'Azeglio* (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1850), *Ettore Fieramosca ossia la Disfida di Barletta* (Milano: Carrara, 1874), *Ettore Fieramosca ossia la Disfida di Barletta* (Roma: Tip. editr. fratelli Centenari, 1885), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta: Racconto Storico* (Firenze: A. Salani, 1885), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta. Racconto di Massimo D'Azeglio* (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1885), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta. Racconto Storico* (Milano: Cesare Cioffi Edit., Tip. Natale Tommasi, 1892), *Ettore Fieramosca* (Firenze: Tip. Adriano Salani, 1894), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta: Racconto di Massimo d'Azeglio* (Milano-Buenos Aires: Bietti, 1897), *Ettore Fieramosca ossia la Disfida di Barletta di Massimo D'Azeglio* (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1899), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta: Racconto di Massimo D'Azeglio* (Milano: Bietti, 1903), *Ettore Fieramosca: ossia la Disfida di Barletta*, 13° edizione (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, Soc. Tip. Fiorentina, 1913), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta* (Firenze: Salani, 1914), *Ettore Fieramosca* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1914), *Ettore Fieramosca, ossia la Disfida di Barletta* (Sesto S. Giovanni: Casa Ed. Madella, 1917), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta* (Firenze: Salani, 1923), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta. Racconto di Massimo D'Azeglio*, prefazione di Ettore Romagnoli, nuova edizione con introduzione e commento critico di Aldo Andreoli (Milano: Unitas, 1926), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta. Con Illustrazioni Dazegliane e con gli Episodi di Fanfulla, del Romanzo Niccolò de' Lapi*, Edizione per le scuole, a cura di Carlo Calcaterra (Torino: Soc. Edit. Internazionale, Sten Grafica, 1927), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta*, ed. riveduta con breve biografia e introduzione a cura del Cav. Silvio Marino, (Alba: Società San Paolo, 1927), *Ettore Fieramosca, ossia la Disfida di Barletta* (Milano: A. Vallardi, 1927), *Ettore Fieramosca, ovvero la Disfida di Barletta*, riduzione, introduzione e commento ad uso degli alunni del Ginnasio Inferiore, a cura del prof. Renzo Cristiani (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1928), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta*, ed. ridotta per le scuole, a cura di Dino Provenzal, con 40 disegni di Giuseppe Rivolo (Milano-Verona: A. Mondadori Edit. Tip., 1928), *Ettore Fieramosca, o la Disfida di Barletta, con Illustrazioni Dazegliane e con Episodi di Fanfulla del Romanzo Niccolò De' Lapi* a cura di Carlo Calcaterra (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1928); *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta*, ridotto per uso delle scuole, con introduzione e commento da L. P. Coli e E. Fabbrovich, 2° edizione (Napoli: Società Anomina editrice F. Perella. s. a.), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta*, ridotto per uso delle scuole, con introduzione e commento, da L. P. Coli e E. Fabbrovich, 3° edizione (Roma: Albrighi, Segati e C., 1930), *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta* (Firenze: Salani, 1931), *Ettore*

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*Massimiliano Pellegrinotti* (Torino: Aiace, 196.?), *Marco Visconti: Storia del Trecento Cavata dalle Cronache di Quel Secolo e Raccontata da Tommaso Grossi* (Pescara: Edizioni Paoline, stampa 1962), *Marco Visconti: Storia del Trecento Cavata dalle Cronache di Quel Tempo e Raccontata da Tommaso Grossi*. 2° edizione (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1963), *Marco Visconti: Romanzo Storico*. 4° edizione (Vicenza: Paoline, stampa 1964), *Marco Visconti: Storia del Trecento Cavata dalle Cronache di quel Secolo e Raccontata da Tommaso Grossi*. 3° edizione (Francavilla al mare: Edizioni Paoline, 1964), *Marco Visconti: Storia del Trecento Cavata dalle Cronache di Quel Tempo e Raccontata da Tommaso Grossi*. 4° edizione (Francavilla (CH): Edizioni Paoline, c1966), *Marco Visconti* (Milano: Fabbri, 1968), *Marco Visconti: Romanzo Storico*. 5° edizione (Vicenza: Edizioni Paoline, 1968), *Marco Visconti* (Milano: F. Fabbri Editori, 1969), *Marco Visconti* (Milano: F.lli Fabbri, 1972), *Marco Visconti*, introduzione e note di Mario Barenghi (Milano: Arcipelago, 1994!), *Marco Visconti*, introduzione e note di Mario Barenghi (Milano: Fabbri, 2001).

### **G. B. Bazzoni, *Il Castello di Trezzo***

Bazzoni's novel was initially published in installments on the Milanese periodical *Il Nuovo Raccoglitore* (printed by A. F. Stella). The first chapter appeared in the May issue of year II (1826) and the last chapter in the April issue of year III (1827). The success of this novel was instantaneous after the publication of the first chapter. The novel was immediately published as a whole and subsequently reprinted several times as follows: *Il Castello di Trezzo. Novella Storica di G.B.B* (Milano: presso Ant. Fort. Stella e figli, colle stampe di Gio. Pirotta, 1827), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Novella Storica di G. B. B* (Milano: Ant. Fort. Stella e figli, 1828), *Il Castello di Trezzo Novella Storica di Giambattista Bazzoni* (Milano: presso A. F. Stella e figli, Tipografia de' classici italiani, 1830), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo Storico di G. B. Bazzoni* (Torino: presso Giuseppe Vaccarino, 1833), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Novella Storica di Giambattista Bazzoni* (Milano: A. F. Stella, 1835), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Novella Storica di Giambattista Bazzoni* (Parigi: Baudry, Libreria Europea, 1838), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Racconto Storico di Giambattista Bazzoni* (Milano: per Borroni e Scotti, 1853), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo Storico di Giambattista Bazzoni* (Milano: libreria di Francesco Sanvito, 1857), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo Storico di Giambattista Bazzoni*, 7th edition (Milano: Amalia Bettoni, 1868), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo Storico di Giambattista Bazzoni* (Milano: Sonzogno, 1886), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo Storico / Giambattista Bazzoni* (Milano: Sonzogno, 19..), *Il Castello di Trezzo* (Torino: A. B. C., Tip. F.lli Pozzo, 1935), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo Storico*. Illustrazioni di Dario Cella (Milano: Regisole, Unione Tipografica, 1939), *Il Castello di Trezzo: Romanzo* (Milano: Ed. Ultra, Tip. E. Ponti e C., 1944), *Il Castello di Trezzo / Giovanni Battista Bazzoni*; introduzione e commento prof. Paolo Paolini (Missaglia: Bellavite, 2000), *Il Castello di Trezzo / Giambattista Bazzoni*, presentazione di Giovanni Tesio (Novara: Interlinea, 2005).

## List of historical novels published between 1827 and 1848.<sup>570</sup>

### 1827

1. Giovan Battista Bazzoni, *Il Castello di Trezzo. Novella Storica di G.B.B* (Milano: presso Ant. Fort. Stella e figli, colle stampe di Gio. Pirotta, 1827)  
[Lombardy, 1385]
2. Angelica Palli Bartolommei, *Alessio, ossia gli ultimi giorni di Psara. Romanzo Istorico* (1827)<sup>571</sup>
3. Vincenzo Lancetti, *Cabrino Fondulo, frammento della storia lombarda sul finire del secolo XIV e il principiare del XV* (Milano: co' Torchi d'Omobono Manini, 1827)  
[Cremona, 1385/1425]
4. Carlo Varese, *Sibilla Odaleta, episodio delle guerre d'Italia sul finire del secolo XV. Romanzo storico di un italiano* (Milano: presso Ant. Fortunato Stella, 1827)  
[Naples, 1494/1495]
5. Stefano Ticozzi, *Memorie di Bianca Cappello, Gran-Duchessa di Toscana* (Firenze: presso Vincenzo Batelli, 1827)  
[Venice and Florence, 1556/1587]

### 1827/1828

6. Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi,<sup>572</sup>
  - a. *La battaglia di Benevento. Storia del secolo XIII* (Livorno: presso Bertani, Antonelli e c., 1827)
  - b. *La battaglia di Benevento. Storia del secolo XIII* (Livorno: presso Bertani, Antonelli e c., 1828)[Kingdom of Naples, 1265/1266]

### 1828

7. Pietro Marocco, *Avventure di Clarice Visconti duchessa di Milano* (Milano: Rusconi, 1828)  
[Milan, 1515/1525]
8. Carlo Varese, *La fidanzata ligure, ossia usi, costumanze e caratteri dei popoli della riviera ai nostri tempi* (Milano: presso Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1828)  
[Liguria]

### 1829

9. Gian Battista Bazzoni, *Falco della rupe, o La guerra di Musso racconto storico* (Milano: presso Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1829)  
[Lake Como, 1531/1532]
10. Rosini, *La signora di Monza* (Milano: a spese di Antonio Tenenti, 1829)  
[Lombardy and Tuscany, 1628/1631]

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<sup>570</sup> Information provided in square brackets indicates place and time of the story for each novel.

<sup>571</sup> No indication about the publisher is provided on the frontispiece of this novel.

<sup>572</sup> Guerrazzi's novel was published in four volumes, the first of which in 1827 and the rest in 1828.

11. Carlo Varese,
  - a. *I prigionieri di Pizzighettone, romanzo storico del secolo decimosesto* (Milano: presso Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1829)  
[Lombardy, 1525]
  - b. *Gerolimi, ossia il nano di una Principessa* (Mortara: dalla tipografia Capriolo, 1829)
12. Pietro Zorzi, *Cecilia di Baone, ossia la Marca Trevigiana* (Venezia: Gnoato, 1829)  
[Veneto, 1187/1200]
13. Giovanni Campiglio, *Oldrado, racconto storico* (Milano: tip. dei Classici Italiani, 1829)  
[Milan, 1446/1450]
14. Antonio Saffi, *Aconzio e Cidippe, favola del Conte Antonio Saffi di Forlì* (Bologna: dai tipi del Nobili e Comp., 1829)  
[Ancient Greece]

### 1830

15. Defendente Sacchi, *I Lambertazzi e i Geremei, o le fazioni di Bologna nel secolo XIII* (Milano: presso Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1830)  
[Bologna, 1271/1273]
16. Adolfo Francesco Falconetti,
  - a. *Irene Delfino, storia veneziana del sec. VI* (Venezia: Gnoato, 1830)
  - b. *La villa di San Giuliano, storia veneziana del sec. VII data in luce dall'autore di "Irene Delfino"* (Venezia: Gnoato, 1830)
  - c. *La naufraga di Malamocco, ossia I Galbai e gli Antenorei, storia veneziana del sec. VIII* (Venezia: Gnoato, 1830)  
[Venice, 6th-8th century]
17. Carlo Varese,
  - a. *Falchetto Malaspina, romanzo storico del secolo XII* (Milano: presso Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1830)  
[Lombardy 1154/1155]
  - b. *Il proscritto, storia sarda* (Torino: per Giuseppe Pomba, 1830)  
[Sardinia, 15<sup>th</sup> century]
18. Bazzoni, *La bella Celeste degli Spadari, cronachetta milanese del 1666* (Milano: coi tipi di Omobono Manini, 1830)  
[Milan, 1666]
19. Giovanni Campiglio, *La figlia del ghibellino, riguardante Milano al cominciare del secolo XV* (Milano: per Gasparre Truffi, 1830)  
[Milan, 15th century]

### 1831

20. Achille Mauri, *Caterina Medici di Brono, novella storica del secolo XVII* (Milano: coi tipi di Luigi Nervetti, 1831)  
[Milan, 1616/1617]
21. Giovanni Girolamo Orti Manara, *Grassa e Ceresio: fatto storico veronese del secolo duodecimo* (Verona: Paolo Libanti, 1831)  
[Verona, 1176/1179]

### 1832

22. Carlo Varese, *Preziosa di Sanluri, ossia i montanari sardi* (Milano: presso Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1832)  
[Sardinia, 1470/1480]
23. Giovanni Campiglio, *Il conte di Lavagna: storia genovese del secolo XVI* (Milano: Felice Rusconi, 1832)  
[Liguria, 1546/1547]
24. G. B-a, *La lega lombarda, romanzo con note storiche* (Milano: presso la ditta di A. F. Stella e Figli, 1832)  
[Lombardy, 1176]
25. Defendente Sacchi, *Teodote, storia del secolo VIII* (Milano: Nervetti, 1832)  
[Pavia, 690/720]

### 1833

26. Giovanni Rosini, *Luisa Strozzi, storia del secolo XVI* (Pisa: Capurro, 1833)  
[Tuscany, 1531/1534]
27. Massimo D'Azeglio, *Ettore Fieramosca o la Disfida di Barletta* (Torino: G. Pomba, 1833)  
[Barletta, Puglia, 1503]
28. Giuseppe Di Cesare, *Arrigo di Abbate, ovvero la Sicilia dal 1296 al 1313* (Napoli: Stamperia della Pietà de' Turchini, 1833)  
[Sicily, 1296/1313]

### 1834

29. Tommaso Grossi, *Marco Visconti; Storia del Trecento, Cavata dalle Cronache di Quel Secolo e Raccontata da Tommaso Grossi* (Milano: per Vincenzo Ferrario, 1834)  
[Lombardy and Tuscany, 1329]

### 1835

30. Giacinto Battaglia, *Giovanna prima regina di Napoli. Storia del secolo XV* (Milano: presso la ditta Gio. Pirota, 1835)  
[Kingdom of Naples, 1343/1382]

### 1836

31. Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, *L'assedio di Firenze* (Parigi: Baudry, 1836)<sup>573</sup>  
[Florence, 1527/1530]
32. Carlo Leoni, *Lucrezia degli Obizzi, racconto storico* (Milano: coi tipi di Felice Rusconi, 1836)  
[Padua, 1654/1657]
33. D'Ignazio Valletta, *Le nozze di Buondelmonti, ossia origine della divisione de' Guelfi e Ghibellini in Fiorenza con brevi note e schiarimenti* (Parigi e Lione: Cormon e Blanc, 1836)  
[Florence, 1215]
34. Carlo Rusconi, *Giovanni Bentivoglio, storia bolognese del secolo decimoquinto* (Firenze: presso S. Usigli, 1836)  
[Bologna, 15th century]

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<sup>573</sup> The novel originally appeared under the pseudonym Anselmo Gualandi and in the Italian language, although published in Paris.

### 1837

35. Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, *Veronica Cybo, Duchessa di San Giuliano. Racconto storico* (Livorno: G. B. Rossi, 1837)  
[Florence, 1637/1638]
36. Niccolò Tommaseo, *Il duca d'Atene* (Parigi: Baudry, 1837)  
[Florence, 1343]
37. Giovanni Campiglio, *Lodovico il Moro. Condizioni, usi, costumi, singolarità e memorabili avvenimenti di Milano sulla fine del secolo XV. Romanzo storico* (Milano: per Gaspare Truffi, 1837)  
[Milan and Pavia, 1489/1508]
38. Bassano Finoli, *Igilda di Brivio, storia del secolo XV* (Milano: O. Manini, 1837)  
[Lombardy, 1427/1450]
39. Carlo Leoni, *Speronella, o l'origine della Lega Lombarda. Storia del secolo duodecimo* (Milano: Pirotta, 1837)  
[Padua, 1165]
40. Lorenzo Sonzogno, *Il castello di Milano. Cronaca di cinque secoli* (Milano: presso Lorenzo Sonzogno editore libraio, 1837)  
[Milan, 1355/1807]
41. Angelo Maria Ricci, *Gli sposi fedeli. Storia italo-gotica-romantica* (Milano: per Giovanni Silvestri, 1837, 2nd ed.)  
[Ravenna, 526/535]
42. Giovanni Colleoni, *Isnardo, ossia il milite romano. Racconto italico* (Milano: Borroni e Scotti, 1837)  
[Italy and near East, 1230/1259]

### 1838

43. Cesare Cantù, *Margherita Pusterla: Racconto* (Livorno: N. Gamba, tip. Truffi 1838)  
[Lombardy, Pisa, Avignon, 1340/1341]
44. Ignazio Cantù, *La giornata misteriosa del conte Minelli* (Milano: Manini, 1838)  
[Lombardy, 1500]
45. Luigi Carrer, *Anello di sette gemme, o Venezia e la sua storia* (Venezia: co' tipi del Gondoliere, 1838)  
[Venice, 1400/1836]
46. Bartolomeo Signori, *Adelaide regina dei Longobardi* (Milano: P. Manzoni, 1838)  
[Northern Italy, 930/952]
47. Girolamo Fiorio, *La Regina di Cipro. Romanzo storico* (Mantova: presso li Fratelli Negretti, 1838)  
[Venice and Cyprus, 1470]

### 1839

48. Carlo Varese, *Torriani e Visconti, o scene casalinghe, pubbliche e storiche della vita milanese nel secolo XV* (Milano: A. F. Stella, 1839)  
[Milan, 1310/1311]
49. Giovanni Campiglio, *Elena della Torre o sia Milano seicento anni fa* (Milano: Tip. Truffi, 1839)  
[Lombardy, 1237/1241]

50. Cesare Monteverde, *Astorre Manfredi: storia dei tempi del duca Valentino* (Milano: Tip. Truffi, 1839)  
[Romagna, 1499/1501]
51. Giuseppe Castiglione, *Il rinnegato salentino ossia i martiri d'Otranto: racconto storico del secolo XV* (Napoli: stamperia della Fenice, 1839)  
[Otranto, Puglia, 15th cent.]

#### 1840

52. Carlo Tenca, *La ca' dei cani, cronaca milanese cavata da un manoscritto di un Canottiere di Barnabò Visconti* (Milano: coi tipi di Borroni e Scotti, 1840)  
[Milan, 1374]
53. Agostino Ademollo, *Marietta de' Ricci, ovvero Firenze al tempo dell'assedio* (Firenze, stamperia granducale, 1840)  
[Florence, 1527/1530]
54. Ignazio Cantù, *Cecco Maroni e la Celestina della Vedra, cronaca milanese del secolo XVII* (Milano: tip. Manini, 1840)  
[Lombardy, 17th cent.]
55. Teresa Perversi, *Evelina: racconto* (Milano: vedova di A. F. Stella e Giacomo figlio, 1840)  
[Tirano, Valtellina, Northern Italy 1620]

#### 1841

56. Massimo D'Azeglio, *Niccolò de' Lapi, ovvero i Palleschi e i Piagnoni* (Milano: Ferrario, 1841)<sup>574</sup>  
[Tuscany, 1529/1530]
57. Carlo Rusconi, *L'incoronazione di Carlo V* (Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 1841)  
[Bologna, 1529/1530]
58. Ignazio Cantù, *Casimiro il baccelliere. Cronache del secolo XVII* (Milano: Andrea Colombo, 1841)  
[Lombardy, 1609]
59. Matteo Benvenuti, *Il cavalier Bajardo, racconto del secolo XVI* (Milano: per Santo Bravetta, 1841)  
[Lombardy, 1512/1524]
60. Federico Borella, *Brazzo da Milano, manoscritto del secolo XVI* (Milano: coi tipi di Borroni e Scotti a V. Ferrario, 1841)  
[Lombardy 1502/1535]
61. Ifigenia Zauli Sajani, *Gli ultimi giorni dei cavalieri di Malta* (Malta: tipografia Tonna, 1841)  
[Malta, 1798]

#### 1842

62. Lorenzo Ercoliani, *I valvassori bresciani. Romanzo storico* (Brescia: Girolamo Quadri, 1842)  
[Brescia, 1100/1101]

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<sup>574</sup> Although fairly popular, D'Azeglio's second novel was not as well received as his *Ettore Fieramosca*, partly because by 1840 the trajectory of success of Risorgimento historical novels was declining, and partly because, as Claudio Gigante puts it "il *Niccolò* è un romanzo pasticciato, sovraccarico di erudizione." Claudio Gigante, "La nazione necessaria: Massimo d'Azeglio e il diritto di unirsi ovvero di dividersi", *Between*, II.3 (2012) p. 5.

63. Ignazio Cantù, *Il marchese Annibale Porrone* (Milano: coi tipi di Borroni e Scotti, 1842)  
[Milano 1658/1665]
64. Bassano Finoli, *Le rovine di Milano e di Lodi, episodi storici del secolo XII* (Milano: Angelo Bonfanti, 1842)  
[Lombardy, 1111/1190]
65. Pier Ambrogio Curti, *La figlia dell'armajuolo, storia domestica milanese del secolo XVII* (Milano: Paolo Ripamonti Carpano, 1842)  
[Lombardy, 1590/1608]

### 1843

66. Giuseppe Rovani, *Lamberto Malatesta, o i masnadieri degli Abruzzi* (Milano: Guglielmini, 1843)  
[Tuscany and Abruzzi, 1587]
67. Giovanni Rosini, *Il conte Ugolino della Gherardesca e i ghibellini di Pisa, romanzo storico* (Milano: dalla Società tipogr. de' classici italiani, 1843)  
[Pisa and Florence, 1284/1289]

### 1844

68. Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, *Isabella Orsini, Duchessa di Bracciano* (Firenze: F. Le Monnier, 1844)  
[Tuscany and Rome, 1576]
69. Lorenzo Ercoliani, *Leutelmonte, continuazione dei Valvassori bresciani* (Brescia: Girolamo Quadri, 1844)  
[Brescia, 1104/1105]
70. Giuseppe Rovani, *Valenzia Candiano o la figlia dell'ammiraglio* (Milano: V. Guglielmini, 1844)  
[Venice, 14th cent.]

### 1845

71. Giambattista Bazzoni, *Zagranella o una pitocca del 1500* (Milano: Pirotta, 1845)  
[Milan and Paris, 1509/1545]
72. Ignazio Cantù, *Macario Spaccalancia, avventure di un uomo di pace ai tempi della battaglia di Pavia* (Milano: coi tipi di Borroni e Scotti, 1845)  
[Lombardy, 1515/1530]
73. Alessandro Bulgarini, *L'assedio di Siena: racconto storico* (Firenze: a spese degli editori 1845)  
[Siena, 1554/1555]
74. Giuseppe Rovani, *Manfredo Palavicino* (Milano: coi tipi di Borroni e Scotti, 1845)  
[Lombardy, Rome, Germany, 1515/1522]
75. Bassano Finoli, *Eurilla Malastrena, episodio storico del secolo XII* (Milano: Crespi, 1845)  
[Lombardy, 1135/1154]

### 1846

76. Bassano Finoli, *Una matrigna del secolo XIII* (Milano: per Paolo Pagnoni, 1846)  
[Lombardy, 1277]

77. Michele Giuseppe Canale, *Gerolamo Adorno, racconto storico* (Genova: presso Girolamo Filippo Garbarino, 1846)  
[Genoa, 1522/1528]
78. Giulio Pullè, *Alba Barrozzi, ovvero una congiura sotto il doge Piero Gradenigo: racconto veneziano* (Venezia: G. Zanetti, 1846)  
[Venice, 1309/1310]
79. Carlo Rusconi, *Luigi XVI. Scene della rivoluzione di Francia* (Milano: per Borroni e Scotti, 1846)  
[Paris, 1789/1793]
80. Ignazio Cantù, *Ardigotto degli Avogadri. Episodio al tempo dell'arcivescovo Anselmo IV. Storia milanese-comasca del secolo XII* (Milano: Colombo, 1846)  
[Como and Milan, 12th cent.]

#### **1847**

81. Antonio Zanolini, *Il diavolo del Sant'Ufficio, ossia Bologna dal 1789 al 1800: narrazione storico-romanzesca* (Capolago: Tipografia Elvetica, 1847)  
[Bologna, 1789/1800]
82. Carlo Cajmi, *Ghisola Caccianimico. Cronaca bolognese del secolo XIII* (Milano: Colombo, 1847)  
[Bologna and Ferrara, 1288]
83. Tommaso Vallauri, *Il cavaliere Giambattista Marino in Piemonte, episodio della storia subalpina del secolo XVII* (Torino: Stamperia Reale, 1847)  
[Turin, 1608/1615]

#### **1848**

84. Giuseppe Cannonieri, *L'assedio di Ancona dell'anno 1174 per Cristiano arcivescovo di Magonza luogotenente di Barbarossa* (Firenze: per Carlo Soldi, 1848)  
[Ancona, 1174]