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**The origin of the *elzeviro*.**  
**Journalism and literature in Italy, 1870-1920**

Federico Casari

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of Italian

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

2015

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**THE ORIGIN OF THE *ELZEVIRO*.  
JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE IN ITALY, 1870-1920**

Federico Casari

**ABSTRACT**

This is the very first historically informed investigation to offer an account of the origin of the *elzeviro*. The *elzeviro* was a very particular typology of newspaper article unique to the Italian press, printed in the two, two and a half or three columns on the left-hand of the cultural section of every daily political newspaper between 1903-4 and the end of the 1970s. Even though, by the end of its life span, the *elzeviro* had acquired a special meaning, that of a text with no narrative content, an almost gratuitous literary exercise, nevertheless for millions of Italian readers, for almost fifty years it represented the only contact with literary production. This thesis recovers the *elzeviro* to its journalistic dimension, retracing its origins in the transformation of the communicational space of the newspaper between 1870 and 1920. The original contribution of this research consists in the very first definition of the *elzeviro* as a newspaper article that originates as the answer to the modernisation of journalism occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the primacy of news began to undermine the legitimacy of the subjective moment of the opinion. The foundation of the *elzeviro* lies in claiming a territory that was felt to be the province of opinion: literary journalists demanded that subjectivity not be discarded, and proved that the operation could be undertaken through an alternative instrument for the interpretation of reality: that of literature and culture. Literary journalists carved out their own personal space within the newspaper, where they were not forced to comment on news but could instead decide what constituted news and how to comment on it. The *elzeviro* is the account of the discovery of this news: for this reason, its discursive and colloquial dimension is the basis on which that type of article is organised, as the textual organism is bound by the aim of communicating news values.

**KEYWORDS** – “Italian journalism”, “literary history”, “elzeviro”, “history of journalism”, “literary journalism”, “Enrico Nencioni”, “Ferdinando Martini”, “Emilio Cecchi”, “William Makepeace Thackeray”, “essay”, “Roundabout Papers”, “Pesci rossi”.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACBF	Florence, Gabinetto Vieusseux, Archivio Contemporaneo “A. Bonsanti”
BMF	Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana
BNCF	Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i> <sup>1</sup>
SNS	Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore

## PLACES OF PUBLICATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

In referencing newspapers and journal articles, the place of publication is regularly omitted, but it is to be intended as follows:

<i>Il Convito</i>	Rome, 1895-1907.
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	Milan, 1876-.
<i>La domenica del Fracassa</i>	Rome, 1884-86.
<i>La Domenica Letteraria</i>	Rome, 1882-85.
<i>Fanfulla</i>	Florence (16 June – 21-22 October 1870) and Rome (22 October 1870-1911).
<i>Fanfulla della Domenica</i>	Rome, 1879-1919.
<i>Il Giornale d'Italia</i>	Rome, 1901-76.
<i>L'Italia Nuova</i>	Florence, 1870-71.
<i>Il Marzocco</i>	Florence, 1896-1932.
<i>Nuova Antologia</i>	Florence (1866-1878), Rome (1878-1977) and Florence (1978-).
<i>La Stampa</i>	Turin, 1895-.
<i>La Tribuna</i>	Rome, 1883-1946.
<i>La Voce</i>	Florence, 1908-1916.

## DIACRITIC SIGNS

Omissions within quotations are marked by three points within square brackets: [...]. When the three points are not within brackets, they are part of the text, as in the case of the typical *mise-en-page* of humoristic prose.

Angle brackets (<>) are used to integrate the omission of one or more letters in a printed text, and to complete an abbreviation in a manuscript text.

<sup>1</sup> The articles from *DBI* are quoted from the online version. The link to the webpage is given in the Bibliography (Section 3).





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## PREFACE

In 1966, the great Italian historian Roberto Ridolfi wrote an *elzeviro* devoted to explaining how he wrote an *elzeviro*:

Prendo il primo libro che mi càpita, l'apro come vien viene, mi fermo alla prima parola o alla prima frase che mi battono sotto gli occhi e scrivo la parola o la frase in testa alla pagina: quello è il titolo e il punto di partenza, quella la parola d'ordine; se non trovassi qualcosa da scriverci sotto, vorrebbe dire che è venuto il tempo di scegliermi un altro mestiere.<sup>1</sup>

Not all the *elzeviri* were written following Ridolfi's peculiar technique. The passage must be read neither as the statement of a particular avant-garde artistic process, nor as a display of creative genius, but as the confession of a 'mestiere' that forced to find, day after day, allegedly new and original topics to satisfy the non-stop machine of the daily newspaper.

Ridolfi's claim should probably be placed towards the end of the life span of this very particular typology of newspaper article. By 1966, the *elzeviro* could be fully defined as the article printed in the two, two and a half or three columns on the left-hand of the third page of every daily newspaper between 1903-4 and the end of the 1970s. It found its place on the third page (*terza pagina*), because this was the physical space that, from 1901, Italian newspapers had fixed for cultural news, between political and crime news. The name *elzeviro* came from the font used by newspapers to print the article, *Elzevir*, and thus the name of the font was used to define the whole article. Towards the end of its life, the *elzeviro* had acquired a special meaning, involuntarily summarised in Ridolfi's article: that of a text with no narrative content, an almost gratuitous literary exercise, a piece in which journalists or writers could pour out their mastery and fluency using the loftiest and mightiest instruments of literature and language without necessarily having to relate it to

<sup>1</sup> Roberto Ridolfi, 'Scrivere (un elzeviro)', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 December 1966.

current cultural affairs. It was this feature that rendered the *elzeviro* famous (or infamous) as the trademark of Italian cultural journalism.

With the deep revision of the foundations of culture and literature undertaken at the beginning of the 1960s, the *elzeviro* began to be considered as a remnant of an idea of culture that had no link with the development of society or the arts. Along with the *terza pagina*, it was perceived as an old piece of furniture in the almost technologically obsolete house of the bourgeois political newspaper. Newspapers themselves were considered, in turn, to be an inadequate means to meet the new needs and targets of cultural dissemination of the new mass society emerging from the age of the “economic miracle”. The strongest and most intelligent attack on the *elzeviro* came in 1962 from *Nord e Sud*, a journal with a high intellectual profile involved in the promotion of Italy’s economic and cultural integration. Nello Ajello wrote an article against the *terza pagina*, and branded the *elzeviro* as ‘questo multiforme epifenomeno dell’Inutilità’.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the 1960s, the *elzeviro* – along with the *terza pagina* – started to disappear and slowly died at the end of the 1970s, with this placard around its neck.<sup>3</sup>

The wholesale condemnation of the *elzeviro* became almost part of its history. The debate that took place after the publication of Ajello’s study followed the same point of departure: the *elzeviro* had always been what it was in 1962. The discussion, as in every militant discussion that aimed to critique the present time and propose an alternative, did not take into account the possible origin and possible definition of the article. Equally, it did not originate any academic or scholarly work directed at investigating these two aspects.

As far as origin is concerned, the *elzeviro* appears to be an article without one. The most quoted hypotheses are, to date, those of Alessandra Briganti and Beppe Benvenuto, an academic and a journalist respectively. The former, just a few years after Ajello, claimed that the *elzeviro* first appeared in the Nationalist newspaper *L’Idea Nazionale* in 1915, in the form of two-column articles written by Antonio Baldini and Rosso di San Secondo.<sup>4</sup> The latter, in 2002, speculated that it

<sup>2</sup> Nello Ajello, *Lo scrittore e il potere* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1974), p. 4. The essay originally appeared in *Nord e Sud* under the title ‘Storia della terza pagina’.

<sup>3</sup> On the disappearance of both *elzeviro* and *terza pagina* see Gian Carlo Ferretti and Stefano Guerriero, *Storia dell’informazione letteraria in Italia dalla terza pagina a Internet 1925-2009* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2010), pp. 251-54.

<sup>4</sup> Alessandra Briganti, *Intellettuali e cultura tra Ottocento e Novecento. Storia della terza pagina* (Padova: Liviana, 1972), pp. 110-11.

came about due to the efforts of the writers of the journal *La Ronda*, who in their public performances on newspapers claimed the primacy of literature as style.<sup>5</sup> Neither, however, provide any documentary proof to support their theses. As to a definition, the *elzeviro* appears protean in nature. Ajello found humour in the long list he gave:

La gamma delle definizioni è così estesa che ciascun autore di elzeviri – a prescindere dall’eventuale contenuto che ha inteso “calare” nelle due colonne di piombo – vi può riconoscere la propria fatica. Ciò che egli ha composto sarà un “esercizio di stile” o un “gioco d’umori”, una “prosetta lirica”, una “variazione critica”, una “natura morta”, un “frammento di mito”, una “moralità aforistica”, una “variazione estemporanea”, un “avviso della fantasia, o del semplice estro, o della semplice bizzarria, o dell’intelligenza scaltrita”; o, piuttosto, un “impressione”, un “impennamento”, una “figura”, una “deviazione”, un “momento”, una “trasfigurazione”, un “palinfrasco”, un “ghiribizzo”, una “fumisteria”, un “trinciato di letteratura”. Certo, il grado di utilizzabilità pratica di alcuni di questi sinonimi si rivelerà, fatalmente, modesto. Non è facile immaginare uno scrittore che dica a sua moglie: “Ho appena spedito una ‘trasfigurazione’ al Corriere”.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the entertaining enumeration, in which invented titles were dispersed in between real ones, Ajello’s irony cast light on the volatility of the *elzeviro*. It could be, on the one hand, a Procrustean bed, summarising in the space of its two columns a series of other codified or non-codified genres. On the other hand, it could be seen as the accidental manifestation of another literary phenomenon, the so-called artistic prose (*prosa d’arte*), which dominated Italian literary research in the second and third decade of the century. Already in 1938 one of the most passionate advocates and profound connoisseurs of the third page, Enrico Falqui, considered the *elzeviro* just an accidental, material manifestation of a short piece of artistic prose.<sup>7</sup> It was thus in the destiny of the *elzeviro* to be denied both a lifespan and an identity as an organism endowed with full independence – neither literary, nor journalistic.

The aim of this research is to clarify the origin of the *elzeviro* and to understand the reasons of its appearance. The *elzeviro* did not suddenly materialise at some point in some newspaper, and it was not a pre-existent piece of writing that someone decided to translate into a newspaper one day. On the contrary, it is the combined product of a series of disparate features elaborated by the Italian press

<sup>5</sup> Beppe Benvenuto, *Elzeviro* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2002), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Ajello, *Lo scrittore e il potere*, pp. 6-7. ‘Ghiribizzi’ was the title Ridolfi usually chose for the column in which his *elzeviri* were printed.

<sup>7</sup> Enrico Falqui, *Capitoli. Per una storia della nostra prosa d’arte del Novecento*, 2nd edn (Milan: Mursia, 1964), p. 7.

between 1870 and 1901. The focus of this inquiry is, therefore, on journalism. The *elzeviro* was born as an article, and is studied according to its origin as a journal article. The risk of extracting the *elzeviro* from its medium, the newspaper, is to incur the same confusion experienced both by its enthusiasts and critics from the Thirties to the Sixties. The *elzeviro* is at the same time the story of the newspapers and of the journalists who contributed to its birth. Of newspapers intended as enterprises made of skilled workers, because they were able to break the established routine and to rethink, extend or even stretch the borders of news and information. Of journalists intended as the writers who embraced journalism with their literary background, because they had to master their fluency in the medium, and had to get a grasp of the journalistic profession if they wanted to have an impact on the readership.

The recovery of the *elzeviro* to its journalistic dimension showed that, since its appearance at the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, it originated from a desire of establishing a contact with reality. It was just the opposite of the thesis from which the attack to its legitimacy had started. The *elzeviro* was not the useless literary exercise condemned by Ajello and others. It was an original interpretation of the foundations of journalism and journalistic practice through the instruments of literature and culture. Literary journalists carved out their own personal space within the newspaper, where they were not forced to write or comment on news, but where they decided what constituted news, and how to deal with it. However, immediately after its establishment, the literary dimension of the *elzeviro* materialised as its weak point. It became the prey of authors who saw in it an immediate and profitable instrument for the realisation of their literary programme, with no connection to the original aim of the article. And when famous authors began to turn their attention to the *elzeviro*, expectations about the article rose to greater heights. At the same time, the ‘mestiere’ to which Ridolfi alluded played its part: the insatiable machine of the newspaper incessantly asked for new material day after day, often at the expense of quality. Literature became instrumental, a mere set of possibilities for tailoring an article that conveyed the idea of literariness.

The discrediting of the *elzeviro* that emerged at the beginning of the 1960s appeared to ignore the original dimension and to focus only on the subsequent development of the article. The bedrock of Ajello’s thesis was that the *elzeviro* had

been, on the one hand, the comfortable answer of a group of intellectuals to the political and cultural disengagement imposed by Fascism and an equally comfortable and quick breadwinning occupation; on the other, despite its pretences, it contained nothing that could be deemed to be art. This point of view ignored a cultural phenomenon that was being theorised in the same period: that of the transformation of the artistic experience when inserted into a context of serial production. The *elzeviro* had inevitably become a daily experiment not in art, but in ‘artisticity’, to use a word coined by Eco in 1964.<sup>8</sup> As such, it was exposed to all the perils that stemmed from its condition, not least becoming merely an example of kitsch.

But the perspective launched by Ajello was at the same time historically unfair, for at least two reasons. Firstly, the condemnation of the *elzeviro* was based on a sweeping generalisation: all the *elzeviri* were the negative repetition of the same pattern, the immutable realisation of the useless literary divagation. Ajello did not take into account the reasons behind the originations of the journalistic practice of the *elzeviro*. Secondly, it ignored the fact that, for almost two generations of newspaper readers the only contact with literature, and with cultural experience, more broadly, was mediated through the *elzeviro*. From the beginning of the 1920s, these articles had always been identified *with* culture and perceived of *as* culture, at least in the eyes of newspaper readership. The reason for this can be found in the particular status of the press in Italy. Before the advent of television and other forms that mediated cultural experience in more transparent ways, the daily press performed the role of mediation between higher culture and the public. Without exception, from local gazettes to the national newspapers, the press had hired and integrated the most advanced intellectual forces and asked them to present the products of their research to the public. The *elzeviro*, in its better and worse manifestations, performed the duty it was assigned and, when the task was over, its existence began to be questioned.

This inquiry is not an anachronistic claim for revenge of the *elzeviro*. On the contrary, it is the very first historically informed investigation that offers an account of the origin of the *elzeviro* between 1870 and 1920, and establishes a new point of

<sup>8</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘The Structure of Bad Taste’, in *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni, intr. David Robey (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 180-216 (p. 184). Eco’s essay appeared for the first time in the book *Apocalittici e integrati*, published by Bompiani in 1964.



view through which to study a series of texts that, for almost seventy years, were identified with literature by the Italians.

## INTRODUCTION

This is the first research into the origins of the *elzeviro*. While it is probably the most original product of the Italian political press, it is at the same time the most ambiguous and elusive object to ever appear in a newspaper. It is ambiguous because there are as many definitions as there are *elzeviri*. And it is elusive, seeming to shrug off every definition applied to it. Definitions, as well as chronological limits, depend on the starting point of research. There are two possibilities: to study the *elzeviro* from the moment of its appearance, or the moment of its disappearance.

Considered from the moment of its appearance, the label *elzeviro* can be applied to every article with a cultural subject matter printed in the font *Elzevir* (*elzeviro* in Italian), which appeared in many Italian newspapers after the Milanese *Corriere della Sera* started to include it in the fifth and six columns of the second page in 1882. By the end of the century, this was customary practice for the main national newspapers. From the end of 1903, the Roman newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia* started to regularly group all its cultural articles onto the third page (*terza pagina*), establishing a dedicated space for cultural news between the political news and crime news. The columns printed in *Elzevir* were therefore moved to the first two left-hand columns of that page. Shortly afterwards the main national newspapers all followed suit. By the end of the decade, the article printed in *Elzevir* in the two left-hand columns of the third page was called the *elzeviro*, regardless of its subject. Following this hypothesis, the *elzeviro* was born in 1882 and is to be identified with the cultural articles printed in 'in elzeviro' in every newspaper from 1882 to the end of the 1970s.

If considered from the vantage point of the end of the 1970s, the *elzeviro* reveals itself as something completely different. As discussed in the preface to this research, by that time – which approximately coincides with the end of its existence – the *elzeviro* was generally felt to be an old-fashioned literary exercise. The most frequently recurring and enduring definitions used to define an *elzeviro* are, among

others: a lyrical fragment in prose, an insulated chapter of artistic prose or an essay.<sup>1</sup> Yet, two facts are clear and should help clarify the terminological issue. Firstly, at some point in its history, the word *elzeviro* began to be used to define a special kind of article printed on the two left-hand columns of the third page. Secondly, at another point in its history, the *elzeviro* came to be regarded by authors and critics as a province of literature and studied as a purely literary phenomenon. This point was individuated in 1920, when the Tuscan journalist and writer Emilio Cecchi collected a selection of his *elzeviri* previously published in the Roman newspaper *La Tribuna* into a book entitled *Pesci rossi*. The publication represented a codification and a new starting point for the *elzeviro*, although Cecchi himself quickly distanced his work from its contemporary journalistic dimension and made of it a literary text to be casually translated into the newspaper. Shortly afterwards, in 1924, he claimed that modern *elzeviri* were descendants of the articles in *The Spectator*, which in turn were indebted to a longer-standing tradition that, in his view, could be said to date back to sixteenth-century Italy. In 1949, apparently oblivious to the genealogy he had himself constructed in the 1920s, Cecchi claimed even greater dignity for his articles by establishing a link with the tradition of the European essay originating with Montaigne.<sup>2</sup> In this research, the word *elzeviro* will be employed to designate every article printed in the two left-hand columns of the third page until 1920. After 1920, the word will exclusively refer to the specialised kind of article established after Cecchi's *Pesci rossi*.

The state of the art is that, nowadays, it is only possible to offer a negative definition of the *elzeviro*: what it is *not* – or, in a less categorical way, what it is not usually. It may be written, from time to time, with the intention of producing an essay, or a chapter of artistic prose, or a lyrical fragment in prose. It can even assume the guise, on occasion, of a gratuitous literary exercise. But, again, every definition is destined to slip away. Every definition aimed at highlighting the literary dimension of the *elzeviro* – which is undeniable – leaves out its other nature as a newspaper

<sup>1</sup> For a review of the definitions in a period in which the practice of the *elzeviro* was not under discussion see Enrico Falqui, 'Per una storia dell'"elzeviro"', in *Novecento letterario. Serie quinta* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1957), pp. 538-44. On the particular issue of the distinction between *prosa d'arte* and *elzeviro* see Carla Gubert, *Un mondo di cartone. Nascita e poetica della prosa d'arte nel Novecento* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2003), pp. 89-96.

<sup>2</sup> Cecchi's writings, 'Dell'articolo di giornale' (1924) and "'Saggio" e "prosa d'arte"' (1949), can be found in Emilio Cecchi, *Saggi e viaggi*, ed. Margherita Ghilardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), pp. 119-28 and 321-36 respectively.

article originating from the practice of journalism. None of the inquiries that have approached the *elzeviro* uniquely from the angle of literary criticism have been particularly successful or illuminating, so an attempt is made here to address the question of its origin as a product of the political press. In order to retrace the original identity of the *elzeviro*, it has been necessary to confine this research within strict chronological limits. It was essential to investigate the transformations that took place in the daily political press between 1870 and 1920 and equally important to provide a snapshot of the *elzeviro* before Cecchi collected and revised his articles in *Pesci rossi*, thereby redefining the nature and purpose of texts that had originated as newspaper articles.

No type of article represents the convergence of journalism and literature more effectively than the *elzeviro*, but the convergence is not exceptional: the Italian political press has always maintained a strong link with literature as a result of the particular status of the press in the Italian context, starting from the very meaning of “daily political press”. The two main historians of Italian journalism have underlined that, in Italy, the distinction between daily press and political press is not as clear-cut as it is in the Anglo-American context.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean, however, that the political press took charge of the functions and the aims of the daily press. Journalism developed in Italy according to a different pattern, which two scholars have defined as the *Mediterranean or Polarised Pluralist Model*.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Italian journalism operated in a context in which economic and political conditions prevented the creation of a media market and mass press circulation. State subsidies coupled with strong political interference conditioned the autonomy of the press in Italy, which thus never developed as an industry or a structured and integrated system with independent economic impact, but rather as a ‘sector’.<sup>5</sup> Newspapers were primarily used as bargaining tools among restricted elites. At the moment of Unification, political rights were granted to male citizens according to literacy and

<sup>3</sup> Valerio Castronovo, *La stampa italiana dall'Unità al fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1970), p. 4; Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1996), p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 89-142. The term ‘Mediterranean’ (perhaps ‘Southern European’ would have been more appropriate) is justified by the authors’ noting of a similar situation in France, Spain, Portugal and Greece.

<sup>5</sup> The term “sector”, instead of “industry” or “system”, will be used throughout this research, following a suggestion by Angelo Agostini, *Giornalismo. Media e giornalisti in Italia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2004), pp. 30-37. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult to find the slightest hint about the publishing industry in the main economic histories of Italy (for example, in the English-speaking world, those – otherwise excellent – by Zamagni or Fenoaltea).

census: only 1.9 percent of the population had a right to vote (6.9 percent after the 1882 reform), in a context where illiteracy was at a staggering 75 percent.<sup>6</sup> Even though access to literacy and political rights grew considerably in subsequent years and universal male suffrage was granted in 1912-1913, the newspaper-reading public was mainly from the middle class and the socially and politically most advanced sectors of the working class.

The heavy politicisation of newspapers had an impact on their content. They did not concentrate on news, but rather on commentary about the political situation. The scant amount of news that appeared was either facts of national interest or the chronicle of the city in which the paper was based. Free from the constraint of reporting the news, journalists decided what constituted news and their commenting voice was the centre of the newspaper. The quality of their writing was thus the instrument on which they primarily relied to obtain the favour of the public. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the profession of journalist was still consanguineous with that of writer. The ground for innovation was that of writing styles and writing genres, and literature became the technological instrument that offered the possibilities for carrying out journalistic practice.

Without these premises, it would be impossible to understand the impact of the Roman political newspaper *Fanfulla* on the world of the Italian press. Usually regarded as a colourful if not bizarre phenomenon in the otherwise stiff atmosphere of post-Unification Italian journalism, *Fanfulla* revolutionised the structure of the newspaper.<sup>7</sup> The real import of this daily has never been clearly assessed. The accomplished group of journalists and writers who established it proposed an alternative model of newspaper based on an innovative organisation of press materials, the introduction of a new writing style, and the creation of new writing genres. They opened up the communicational space of newspapers to topics that were considered unworthy of inclusion in political newspapers – lifestyle and culture. For the first time, current cultural affairs, in particular, moved out of the *appendice*, the lower part of the front and second page reserved for serialised fiction or book reviews, which had no connection to the rest of the newspaper. Cultural

<sup>6</sup> Alberto Mario Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana. L'età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> One journalist has gone so far as to state that *Fanfulla* hosted the first *elzeviri*: certainly with good historical insight, but without any supporting documents: Italo De Feo, *Venti secoli di giornalismo* (Rome: Canesi, 1962), p. 32.

topics were integrated into the political debate, and treated as part of it. Therefore, the need for a new writing style was necessary. Rival newspapers were criticised and parodied for their over-elaborate rhetorical tone, heavily influenced by the solemn political speech and the academic treatise. In the hands of the *Fanfulla* journalists, literature was pivotal in providing a new, unprecedented colloquial style based on a prose that elaborated on the experience of humoristic writing and some of the stylistic solutions that contemporary playwrights were testing in their attempts to reproduce ‘natural’ conversation. The new writing style allowed journalists to experiment with new writing genres that originated in the newspaper and were created expressly for its needs.

Among the new columns, there was the hugely successful ‘Fra un sigaro e l’altro’, written by the Tuscan Member of Parliament and playwright Ferdinando Martini, which encapsulated all of *Fanfulla*’s characteristic features. Every day in his column from 1871 to 1876 Martini discussed the widest range of subjects, with a particular focus on literary culture. Martini’s articles were organised as actual conversations; for the first time in Italian journalism, a full set of linguistic strategies were devised and put into practice in articles in which the journalist offered himself as the reader’s peer and counterpart in the conversation. This transition was of the utmost importance for the establishment of the *elzeviro*. The new format did not force the journalist to rely on the power of argument, rather, the journalist’s own subjectivity, personal experience and vision of the world, dictated by preferences and taste, were allowed to come to the fore as the filter through which every subject could be approached. When Martini decided to brand his column and subsequently to publish a collection of his articles in a book, he codified them as ‘chiacchiere’ (‘chit-chat’), whereby he underlined not so much the content as the particular emotional colouration of the new journalistic genre he had invented.

For all its innovative and even impertinent outlook and approach, *Fanfulla* did not pose any real threat to the Italian press establishment. On the contrary, the success of its formula depended on the parallel existence of an ‘anti-model’, as it were, such as the traditional political newspaper, which was the target of *Fanfulla*’s parodic stance. This is the reason why the readership was immediately attracted by it, since behind the vivacious flair and the variety of topics they could recognise the framework of the newspapers they were used to. And this is also why the *Fanfulla* model, in spite of some glitches, proved translatable to the rest of the Italian press

during the last two decades of the century. But the reorganisation of the communicational space of the newspaper did not only have an impact on daily journalism. In an attempt to expand its cultural section, *Fanfulla* reiterated its commitment through a new medium intended for cultural dissemination, the literary supplement. *Fanfulla della Domenica*, a weekly Sunday paper distributed with *Fanfulla* from 1879, had all the main features of its mother newspaper, and was edited by the same Ferdinando Martini, who infused the new medium with his characteristic conversational style. The framework of the supplement allowed further experimentation with writing styles and genres. *Fanfulla della Domenica* was thus able to secure an even greater approval rate than the newspaper: in a few months it reached the unprecedented circulation figure of 16,000 copies per week.

*Fanfulla della Domenica* conveyed a particular idea of culture. Again, as in the case of the political press, a point of clarification is necessary. The Italian literary supplement established during the last two decades of the nineteenth century is not to be confused with a literary journal. The Italian *rivista letteraria*, which can only roughly be translated as “literary journal”, is a clearly defined type of publication in which advanced intellectual groups put forward the outcome of their research in the broad fields of the arts and humanities. Compared with this, the kind of the *fin-de-siècle* Italian literary supplement occupies a lower level: it offers book reviews and articles of literary or general cultural interest and some original literary texts. The literary supplement acknowledged the existence of a cultural industry, probably for the first time, and asked its journalists to act as mediators. The mediation retained an active character, in the sense that journalists did not have to confine themselves to choosing books that the public liked, but entrusted themselves with the task of influencing the taste and, ultimately, the education of their readers. However, this did not generate any significant or coherent theoretical elaboration of principles at the cutting edge of the debate on the arts, but took the shape of a continuous reshuffling of cultural motifs taken out of their original context and finally subordinated to the cycle of fashion.

It is in this context that the Florentine journalist Enrico Nencioni found room to propose a new kind of article, the ‘Roundabout Paper’, published in *Fanfulla della*

*Domenica* from 1882 to 1887.<sup>8</sup> As the deputy editor of the literary supplement for a few years and probably the most famous cultural journalist of his time, Nencioni knew particularly well how the medium functioned. Or, at least, he knew it well enough to realise that within the framework of the literary supplement lay an opportunity for momentous innovation. Dissatisfaction with the routine of literary journalism encouraged him to search for a compromise: an article that mediated the informative content required by the supplement, yet was endowed with recognisable literary qualities. Nencioni was an expert on contemporary English literature, and he found the answer in the British genre of the sketch, and particularly in Thackeray's *Roundabout Papers*, which also provided the title for Nencioni's Italian column. The 'plotless' structure of the sketch allowed Nencioni to deal with virtually any subject without overstepping the boundaries imposed by the convention of genre and permitted stylistic experimentation. The sketch originated in the British press as a journalistic genre, but in its domestication Nencioni eliminated its primary feature: the fictional role of the journalistic persona. This was another significant step towards the *elzeviro*. In Nencioni's 'Roundabout Papers', the voice who says 'I' is to be identified with that of the actual author, Enrico Nencioni: it is the journalist directly addressing the public. His 'Roundabout Papers' are divagations in the world of literary culture and the arts with no argumentative or plotted structure, the only structuring principle being the voice of the journalist. Without disavowing the established conversational structure, Nencioni invented an entirely new format. But he went further and offered his own subjectivity as something more than a point of view. The set of literary or artistic allusions that proliferate in his articles are presented as memories from his own personal learning: taken out of their original context, they harmonise to build up a new text, offered to the reader as the account of a privileged aesthetic experience. Even when it purportedly originates from the boredom of a heat wave in summertime Florence, the text is always presented as the revelation of something unexpected, and that revelation is conveyed through an ably constructed graduation of registers and mingling of styles. The actual object, or referent, seems to vanish into the background, while its evocative power is mediated by and expressed through a surface of words. This is the third key step towards the

<sup>8</sup> Nencioni's nephew was Bruno Cicognani, a Florentine writer who enjoyed fame in the first half of the twentieth century. In his autobiography, he wrote that his uncle's 'Roundabout Papers' were the 'prelude' to the *elzeviro*: see Bruno Cicognani, *L'età favolosa* (Milan: Garzanti, 1943), p. 115.



*elzeviro*: Nencioni charged literature and the literary language with an unprecedented cognitive task.

Without renouncing the informational aim, the 'Roundabout Papers' offered themselves as refined works of art, in which the journalist's mission was to accompany the reader along a path of discovery in the highest realms of literature. While Nencioni's articles must be read within the framework of the literary supplement, which was hardly the place to tackle issues at the forefront of specialist debate or research, the idea that informed them was destined to have an enduring effect even after Nencioni's death. Nencioni's particular idea of literary criticism was retrieved and updated within the context of Italian Aestheticism by Gabriele d'Annunzio. D'Annunzio considered Nencioni's work to be the first example of collaborative endeavour conducted by the critic in conjunction with the artist towards the elucidation of the true meaning of a work of art. The main representatives of the Florentine Aestheticism, along with d'Annunzio, saw in their personal friend Nencioni the counterpart to the advancement of literary and artistic criticism based on the philosophical tenets of Idealist philosophy. It was d'Annunzio who, between 1911 and 1914, recovered and brought to perfection the structure of the sketch elaborated by Nencioni in his 'Faville del maglio', a series of articles published in *Corriere della Sera*. Although the subjects of the texts were grounded in cultural current affairs, in the 'Faville' the language aimed at recreating the connection between the inner life of the poet and his ability to reveal the hidden nature of things. The texts written by d'Annunzio represented the limit of the 'Roundabout Paper': the 'Faville' were texts with hardly any discursive character in which the cognitive value was left to the sound and rhythm of literary language. The 'Faville' could be described as lyrical fragments, or experiments in artistic prose – articles that, not unlike Nencioni's 'Roundabout Papers', were being deliberately offered as veritable works of art. At the same time, the 'Faville del maglio' had by then become associated with an external feature of crucial importance for the purpose of this research: they were printed in the two left-hand columns of the newspaper's third page and 'in *elzeviro*'.

The *terza pagina* was the answer of the political press to the decline of the literary supplement. The considerable growth of the reading public at the end of the nineteenth century sparked a reorganisation of the publishing sector at the beginning of the twentieth century. Publishers began to differentiate their cultural offerings, in

order to reach the most diverse segments of the readership. While research in the humanities became a specialised activity and withdrew to (and expanded in) the literary journal, the role of mediation between higher culture and the wider public was taken up by the political newspaper. The *terza pagina* was the result of a rearrangement of newspaper space to accommodate a cultural space on a daily basis, and the space for the cultural article was taken by the article ‘in elzeviro’.

Along with the introduction of the *terza pagina*, at the beginning of the twentieth century the political newspaper promoted a successful renewal of its format that was only undermined with the appearance of *La Repubblica* in 1976. On the one hand, readers concentrated around four political newspapers with national distribution: *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *La Tribuna* and *Il Giornale d'Italia*. The four dailies were representative of different political trends, but they tended to present themselves as ‘institutional newspapers’: organs with privileged relationships both with their readerships and with the governing forces within the convention of institutional continuity.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the model of journalistic practice typical of *Fanfulla*, and of the nineteenth century Italian press more generally, was updated. Luigi Albertini, the editor of *Corriere della Sera*, capitalised on the period he had spent in London in the editorial office of *The Times* and tried to adapt the British newspaper model to the Italian context.<sup>10</sup> As a result of this compromise, during the first years of Albertini’s editorship *Corriere* became the richest and most authoritative Italian newspaper in terms of news offered to its readership and gained a wide circulation.

The specialisation of journalistic practice fostered the professionalisation of journalism. Nineteenth century practice began to be regarded as old-fashioned. Writing for a newspaper meant being able to possess not only (and not necessarily) literary ability, but also, crucially, the skills to detect, interpret and convey an item of news with little or no subjective or personal interventions. The practice promoted by *Corriere* relegated the journalist to the background of news. Journalism seemed to progressively detach itself from literature, while the main qualities of the writer were no longer considered essential for engaging in the profession. By the end of the first decade of the century many writers had become journalists, either giving up their literary ambitions or finding a compromise between the two. At the same time, the

<sup>9</sup> Agostini, *Giornalismo*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>10</sup> Ottavio Barié, *Luigi Albertini* (Turin: UTET, 1972), pp. 22-24.

separation caused a number of influential Italian intellectuals to belittle journalism as a non-intellectual activity.

Emilio Cecchi voiced the most forceful protest between 1918 and 1919 in the newspaper *La Tribuna*. Cecchi, foreign correspondent for his newspaper in London at the time, acknowledged the dominion of news-centred practice in British journalism. His critique aimed to deny to news the status of truth and to appreciate the mediating subjectivity of the journalist, whose newly imposed professionalism he was at pains to strip away. Cecchi's reformulation of the framing questions surrounding the role of cultural journalists gave rise to what has been commonly known, until the 1970s, as *elzeviro*. In the new kind of article he devised, he showed that he had heeded the lessons of his forerunners Martini, Nencioni and d'Annunzio. Again, the journalist (the journalist-writer, this time) offered the reader a privileged account of the world and proved that the operation could, or rather should, be performed not by mere reporting, but through a particular instrument for interpreting reality: that of literary culture. Cecchi was able to preserve the journalistic character of his articles: he avoided the model of d'Annunzio's 'Faville', and drew inspiration from the tradition of the British essay. The essay allowed him to recover a discursive dimension and, at the same time, to pitch the language in a way that served the content. He successfully tried the new writing style in the reports he sent from London between 1918 and 1919. These were not the routine accounts of the most curious or important aspects of contemporary life in Great Britain; what Cecchi considered news were the apparently unimportant details of the life of a journalist in a foreign country, which in his opinion could reveal an unexpected or precious experience to the readers. The fact that the very first *elzeviri* were foreign correspondences is, therefore, probably a coincidence.<sup>11</sup> Cecchi soon demonstrated, with *Pesci rossi*, that the pattern could be applied to virtually every kind of article printed 'in elzeviro', from book reviews to obituaries.

The following pages offer a detailed account of the main issues that have been sketched here.

\* \* \*

<sup>11</sup> Some scholars see foreign correspondence as the origin of the *elzeviro*: see Benvenuto, *Elzeviro*, pp. 69-70.

The six chapters of this thesis address the different aspects that contributed to the origin of the *elzeviro* from 1870 onwards. The first three chapters are devoted to the role played by *Fanfulla* in the history of the Italian press. Chapter 1 takes into consideration the reform of the communicational space of the political newspaper, and the importance of writing as the paper's organising principle. Chapter 2 deals with the textual strategies employed by *Fanfulla* for the finetuning of its conversational style, as well as the disadvantages and limits of the journalistic practice of the newspaper. Chapter 3 examines the journalistic work of Ferdinando Martini and, in particular, his column 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro', as well as his work as editor of the literary supplement *Fanfulla della Domenica*. The figure of Enrico Nencioni as journalist is reassessed in Chapter 4, along with the analysis of his 'Roundabout Papers'. Chapter 5 analyses the innovations introduced in the press at the beginning of the twentieth century, along with the appearance of the article 'in elzeviro' and Gabriele d'Annunzio's 'Le faville del maglio' in *Corriere della Sera*. Chapter 6 is devoted to Emilio Cecchi and his troubled relationship with journalism, and the creation of the *elzeviro*.

This research focuses on newspapers and on writers from the point of view of their involvement in journalism, and the use they made of literary culture in their journalistic activity. This point of view has been made possible due to a twofold research approach. Firstly, all the writings of the authors considered in these pages have been considered in their original context: the newspapers and journals in which they were firstly published. Unless otherwise specified, *all* the texts quoted are taken from these sources. This is not just a pedantic concern: all the texts are considered within their journalistic framework, as this was the way they first reached readers. Too often in too many scholarly works, journalistic texts are quoted from the book edition provided by the authors, which is a risk from a historical point of view, as in virtually all cases the authors revised their texts and in many cases erased the contingent traces of their original journalistic destination. This is, for example, the case of the texts Cecchi collected in *Pesci rossi*. An article central to this inquiry like 'Dello stare a sedere' would lose a considerable part of its relevance if considered only in its edited form as it appears in *Pesci rossi*. The approach adopted in this research relies on the power of the method provided by the old discipline of textual criticism. Secondly, the recovery of unpublished documents such as manuscripts or personal correspondence has allowed a better understanding not only of the way

authors dealt with journalism, but also of their professionalism as journalists. Italian scholarship, from this point of view, still tends to make a neat distinction between the journalist and the writer, while scholarship on Victorian journalism has demonstrated that the dividing line is an inherent question in the biographies of individual authors.

Working with newspapers may be difficult, and not only from a practical point of view. As far as their availability is concerned, of all the newspapers and journals considered in this thesis, only four have been fully digitised: *La Stampa*, *La Voce*, *Il Marzocco* and Benedetto Croce's *La Critica*.<sup>12</sup>

All the other newspapers have been read and examined in their original form in various Italian libraries, according to the completeness of the collections and their accessibility. But the main issue that emerges when working with newspapers is what semioticians would define as entropy. In other words, the superabundance of material makes it difficult to capture and single out the elements of continuity from those of innovation – while it is equally difficult to understand short- and long-term innovations. Accounting for all this in a persuasive way is particularly difficult, and a full, scientific account would risk being uneconomical if not unreadable. The principle adopted here is thus snowball sampling, widely and successfully experimented with by media and communication students to identify relevant material according to the criteria of the research.

<sup>12</sup> For links to the websites, see Section 3 of the Bibliography.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**REFASHIONING THE DAILY NEWSPAPER:**  
**THE WORLD OF *FANFULLA***

*Fanfulla* was a political newspaper, a *quotidiano politico*, published in Florence and Rome between 1870 and 1899. Despite its relatively short life, *Fanfulla* made a substantial contribution to the modernisation of the daily press in Italy. *Fanfulla* was published with the conscious intention of offering a new kind of periodical, different from the existing models of the time. The source of *Fanfulla*'s success is not to be found in its political leanings: it was a liberal-moderate newspaper that supported the government of the Historical Right at least until 1876, as did many others. Rather, *Fanfulla*'s achievements and originality lie in the operation promoted by its founders: the radical reorganisation of the practice that informed newspaper composition.

Inspired by the innovations of the contemporary French *petite presse*, the journalists of *Fanfulla* criticised the established model of the political newspaper. Their critique unveiled a larger conflict in the world of the press concerning the aims and functions of a newspaper. The model that had dominated before *Fanfulla* was becoming obsolete by the beginning of the 1870s, and the new paper was ready to replace it and to impose new rules on the communicational space occupied by the press. In the opinion of *Fanfulla*'s journalists, established newspapers could only be read and understood by those who were actively involved in politics. The subject matter was strictly limited to politics and confined to political discourse, and the writing was archaic and incomprehensible to the common reader. *Fanfulla*'s journalists, in contrast, aimed to open the political discourse of the newspaper to the wider world. By including other aspects and events in the paper they aimed to bridge the distance between politics and life, a connection that they deemed necessary to attract a readership and maintain its interest.

The journalists of *Fanfulla* devoted themselves to constructing the material in the first three pages of the journal with the aim of promoting readability. They

operated at a twofold level. On the one hand, they rearranged the structure of the pages, shortening the length of the articles and organising them in fixed columns that were meant to suggest possible reading paths. On the other, they created a new type of journalistic writing, rejecting the political rhetoric employed by political newspapers. The new writing ('la prosa') of *Fanfulla* was easily accessible by the average reader who might have only a rough idea of what the world of politics was about. Since it was written with the aim of engaging and interesting the reader, this notion of 'prosa' ultimately became the structural principle around which the newspaper's entire material was arranged.

This chapter seeks to investigate how the journalists of *Fanfulla* carried out the transformation of the old political newspaper to shape the new communicational space for their own newspaper, and the major importance of the writing as the paper's organising principle.

## 1. Reporting and inventing news

In 1911 Ferdinando Martini wrote that, forty years after its establishment, *Fanfulla* still deserved to be praised as the most fortunate Italian newspaper of the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Today, the evolution of Italian journalism between 1870 and 1880 is seen as a decade of experimentation and incubation that led to the great newspaper triumphs of the first half of the twentieth century: *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Giornale d'Italia* and *La Tribuna*. While Martini was writing his memoirs, *Fanfulla* had already ceased its life. The swansong for its equally famous supplement, *Fanfulla della Domenica*, came a few years later, in 1919.

*Fanfulla* was born in the wake of the event that dominated the first decade of Italian political and civic life after Unification: the capture of Rome on 20 September 1870. The paper had been established in Florence, the former capital of the Kingdom

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinando Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, ed. Mauro Vannini (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1990), pp. 207-208. Despite its importance, there is no comprehensive study on *Fanfulla*. Cf. Giuseppe Augusto Cesana, *Ricordi di un giornalista. Parte II e ultima (1851-1871)* (Milan: Prato, 1892), pp. 363-83; Aldo Chierici, *Il quarto potere a Roma. Storia dei giornali e dei giornalisti romani* (Roma: Voghera, 1905), pp. 41-44; Ferdinando Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, pp. 204-15; Valerio Castronovo, 'Per la storia della stampa italiana', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 47 (1963), pp. 102-58.

of Italy, in June 1870. A small group of journalists and wealthy politicians, including Baron Francesco De Renzis, a diplomat, and the journalists Giuseppe Aurelio Cesana and Giovanni Piacentini, were responsible for its publication. On 21-22 October it was issued in Rome.

The capture of Rome, and the official establishment of the new capital the following year, should not be overlooked in considering the changes in the Italian Press. As Edoardo Scarfoglio once noted, the press literally ‘colonised’ Rome in 1870.<sup>2</sup> Almost without warning, the traditional structure of the Italian news market changed. Publishers and journalists promptly realised that the relocation of the political and administrative apparatus of the State to Rome could work to the advantage of their business. Among those moving to Rome immediately after the conquest were two of the wealthiest owners of Italian publishing houses: the Milanese Raffaele Sonzogno and the Florentine Gaspero Barbèra. In his memoirs, the latter noted how the main Italian newspapers had seized the new opportunity:

Parecchi giornali si trasferirono a Roma da varie città del Regno. [...] Vennero in seguito a Roma i più noti giornali, l'*Opinione*, il *Diritto*, l'*Italie*, i quali non perdono della loro importanza nel trapiantarsi; il giornale democratico che s'intitolava *La Riforma*, dopo un anno di vita a Roma, cessa le sue pubblicazioni per mancanza di lettori. Un giornale fortunato sorge alcuni mesi prima della inaugurazione della capitale; esso s'intitola *Fanfulla*, è governativo, e scritto in modo scherzevole e frizzante.<sup>3</sup>

All the newspapers mentioned by Barbèra had strong ties with the political and administrative life of the new State. They had already followed the government in the first transfer of the capital of the Kingdom of Italy from Turin to Florence in September 1865, and were now ready for their Roman adventure. Each of them could be said to be the expression of a particular political party. *L'Opinione*, from Turin, was the organ of supporters of the Right. *Il Diritto* and *La Riforma* were newspapers supporting the two main leaders of the Left, Agostino Depretis and Francesco Crispi respectively. *L'Italie*, a daily newspaper in French, was first issued in Milan in 1859 inspired by Countess Cristina di Belgiojoso and published by

<sup>2</sup> Edoardo Scarfoglio, ‘Cronaca bizantina’, *La Domenica Letteraria*, y. II, no. 23, 10 June 1883.

<sup>3</sup> Gaspero Barbèra, *Memorie di un editore pubblicate dai figli* (Florence: Barbèra, 1883), pp. 379-380.



Jacottet and Taylor: it moved to Turin in 1860, to Florence in 1865 and eventually to Rome in 1870.

However, while these papers had thrived in their cities of origin, they did not find rich soil in Rome. The city was not ready to foster large-scale press enterprises. The problem did not lie in a lack of capital or business initiatives, but rather in the powerful counter-offensive conducted by the clerical and legitimist press. The hostile reaction of those forces faithful to the old papal regime undermined the efforts of the pro-government press to find a sizeable reading public among the middle classes. Incapable of gaining enough strength to develop a major national project, the pro-government press remained confined to a limited circulation until the beginning of the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> The situation was worsened by Rome's position in 1870. At the time of its capture, the city had only very tenuous links with the liveliest centres of cultural and economic life in Italy.<sup>5</sup> The nearest and most important cities were Florence and Naples, but they were divided from the capital by areas of hostile swampland stricken by poverty and malaria. There were no important centres and cities in the old Papal States, and there were very few newspapers readers. Transport facilities were in a seriously backward state. Printed material, especially the daily press, struggled to reach the more peripheral centres in time to beat the competition from local papers. Moreover, an extra charge applied to each copy to take account of transport costs. *L'Opinione*, which sold roughly 10,000 copies in Turin and Florence, saw its sales fall to an average of 7,000 copies after moving to Rome, while Crispi's *La Riforma* was forced to close in 1874.<sup>6</sup>

Barbèra singled out *Fanfulla* as the only truly successful daily paper of the time. It managed to resist the shrinkage in sales, or even bankruptcy, faced by its competitors. The Florentine publisher attributed this good fortune mainly to two qualities. First and foremost, it was 'governativo': rather than following a particular political trend, it supported the new regime, the constitutional monarchy, and the moderate leanings of the government. The word 'governativo' was a common term in the field of political language at the time; it was included by Pietro Fanfani, the last representative of linguistic purism after Unification, in the dictionary of the so-

<sup>4</sup> Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Alberto Caracciolo, *Roma capitale dal Risorgimento alla crisi dello Stato liberale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, p. 31.

called ‘corrupted’ words in the Italian language. According to Fanfani, ‘governativo’ was a synonym of ‘conservativo’ and, ultimately, of ‘partito moderato’.<sup>7</sup> The other crucial feature in the paper’s success, the humorous, fluent nature of its writing, is cited in virtually all the descriptions of *Fanfulla*. According to Ferdinando Martini, its fame seemed to stem from its style:

la corretta spigliatezza della scrittura, fra le pesanti o sciatte gazzette di allora; il brio di buona lega, lontano dalle triviali arguzie e dalle sconcezze anfibologiche alle quali siam ritornati [...]

la fortuna dovè al brio, alla scioltezza singolare fra i plumbei giornali nostri d’allora.<sup>8</sup>

Martini’s words appear to echo the editorial column that opened the newspaper on 16 June 1870. The article tried to endear readers to *Fanfulla* by promising to avoid the ‘linguaggio cabalistico, grave, inamidato, pesante’ that was considered typical of other political newspapers. The aim of the new publication was to reach the largest possible audience through the use of an easier, more accessible language:

Ci è parso venuto il tempo di smettere i paroloni, le frasi rimbombanti, i periodi rotondi e i discorsi vuoti.

Vogliamo parlare alla buona, alla schietta e alla paesana, farci leggere ed intendere da tutti, e trattare argomenti che interessino tutti nella forma più spigliata, più spicciativa, più chiara che sia possibile [...].<sup>9</sup>

This manifesto suggested that the other newspapers were boring and their meaning obscure to the reading public, while what *Fanfulla* offered was interesting and entertaining. The fact that the emphasis was placed on the language rather than the content was quite unusual in 1870, especially for a political newspaper. However, *Fanfulla* also promised something novel regarding content, offering not only political themes but also a wide range of topics to stimulate readers’ interest. In this classification, politics came at the end of the list:

<sup>7</sup> Pietro Fanfani and Costantino Arlia, *Lessico dell’infima e corrotta italianità* (Milan: Carrara, 1877), pp. 115 and 250.

<sup>8</sup> Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, pp. 207 and 213.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Ai lettori’, *Fanfulla*, 16 June 1870.

Vi terremo informati di quanto avviene nel mondo della scienza, della letteratura, delle finanze; parleremo di quadri, di viaggi e di corse di cavalli... e anco di politica, se volete, ... ma della politica dei fatti, non di quella dei partiti e delle passioni.<sup>10</sup>

Ferdinando Martini echoed these words in his memoirs, concluding that the key to *Fanfulla*'s success was 'lo assegnare a ogni manifestazione della vita pubblica la parte che le spetta'.<sup>11</sup> Explicitly born as a political newspaper, *Fanfulla* rapidly characterised itself through its prevailing interest in lifestyle and culture. The founders tried to target the audience that was not to be counted among 'la gente ufficiale o semi-ufficiale', as they defined it, namely, the minority of those involved in or knowledgeable about politics. On the surface at least, *Fanfulla* did not exhibit any particular political leaning and did not root for any party or notable. If there was a political project behind it, it was support for the new political regime, the programme of the ruling élite: peace, liberal progress and social conservatism.<sup>12</sup> Since political citizenship was restricted to a scant number of individuals, the aim of the newspaper was to foster the participation of its readers in the general public life of the state. The newspaper offered the reader information on important events and on the activities in many fields of human interest in order to generate a sense of social inclusion.<sup>13</sup> However, the approach of *Fanfulla* did not have any pedagogical intent, which marked a clear departure from the previous dominant trend. The Risorgimento had tasked newspapers with a drive for civic education. The press was perceived as a powerful tool with which to fill the gap between the world of cultural production and those classes seeking social promotion and advancement through access to knowledge. *Fanfulla*, on the contrary, aimed to offer its readers a mixture of news and entertainment. In the editorial column there were no mentions either of the practical utility of the items of information, or of any special benefits for the readership.

The significance of 'vi terremo informati', however, must be seen in an historically informed perspective. In a very influential article from the mid-1990s, Jean Chalaby stressed how fact-centred discursive practices were invented by Anglo-

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> Federico Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896*, 2nd edn (Bari: Laterza, 1962), pp. 277-78.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (London-New York: Verso, 2006), pp. 35-36.

American journalism in the nineteenth century, while Continental European, and French journalism in particular, did not establish any clear-cut distinction between facts and opinion. Whereas news in Anglo-American newspapers was organised around facts, the main organising principle of articles in the French press was ‘the mediating subjectivity of the journalist’.<sup>14</sup> Post-Unification Italian journalism shared this feature with French and Mediterranean journalism: the emphasis was not on the single piece of news, but on its interpretation.<sup>15</sup> *Fanfulla* was no exception: as Martini himself recalled, ‘non dava notizie’.<sup>16</sup> News was not given, but rather presumed. From the point of view of the wider context of its reception, it may be supposed that *Fanfulla* was read alongside other important political newspapers. The journalists of *Fanfulla*, therefore, knowingly wrote daily commentaries on selected events that readers could be assumed to know about. The typical reader of *Fanfulla* was likely the reader of another (or more than one) newspaper, either at home, in a café, or at a circle – one of the so-called *lieux fédérateurs*, places with no political colour other than fidelity to the institutions, at which people who had voting rights met and discussed political events and news.<sup>17</sup>

Nor did the manipulation of news apparently clash with any consolidated notion of professional standards. An anecdote is revealing in this respect. Cesana recalled in his memoirs that, in summer 1870, the attention of Europe was on the Franco-Prussian war. The main newspapers sent war correspondents to secure first-hand accounts of army movements and battles. For *Fanfulla*, however, a war correspondent was a luxury the paper could not afford given its still precarious situation – lacking an established reputation and a faithful readership. A volunteer offered to go to France at his own expense, and remained there for three weeks until he fell ill and was forced to return home. At that point Pietro Coccoluto Ferrigni, one of the most famous Italian literary critics of the time who wrote under the assumed name of Yorick, had the idea of inventing the correspondence:

<sup>14</sup> Jean Chalaby, ‘Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention: A Comparison of the Development of French and Anglo-American Journalism, 1830s-1920s’, *European Journal of Communication*, 11 (1996), 303-326 (p. 312). For the Southern European area see Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano*, p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> On the *lieux fédérateurs* see Guillaume Pinson, ‘Travail et sociabilité’, in *La Civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, eds. Dominique Kalifa et al. (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011), pp. 653-666 (p. 660).

*Yorick* ebbe l'idea di falsificare le corrispondenze: 'Al campo ci vado io... Ma non inarcate le ciglia! Ci vado io senza movermi dall'Italia, da Firenze, anzi senza movermi da questa seggiola [...] cucinerò io delle corrispondenze da succiarsi le dita [...]'. [...] Noi ridemmo tutti dell'idea di *Yorick*, ma pensammo di lasciarglielo mettere in pratica, in via di esperimento. [...] *Yorick* fabbricava lettere ch'erano un amore! E le intesseva di episodii, di fatti d'armi parziali inventati di pianta – e s'intende! – ma d'una verosimiglianza tale da interessare anche i più indifferenti, e da illudere anche i più sospettosi. Per tutto il resto, egli si giovava dei bollettini ufficiali tedeschi e francesi e dei telegrammi che pubblicavano i giornali esteri e specialmente quelli di Londra.<sup>18</sup>

Cesana felt compelled to clarify that the forgery was only partial: *Yorick's* narratives consisted of grafting invented stories onto real facts drawn from the foreign press. What emerges from the words of the gloating old journalist is an awareness that the forgery's success was due to the writer's literary ability. His whole argument was grounded on literary premises. The word 'verosimiglianza' sloppily echoed the theory of verisimilitude elaborated by classical literary criticism to regulate the mixture of history and invention in literary works. But the kind of verisimilitude advocated by Cesana consisted of the anecdotes invented or recast by *Yorick*, a combination of 'concrete details' that contributed to produce a 'reality effect'.<sup>19</sup> 'Interessare' and 'illudere' were the two verbs used to describe the kind of reaction the journalist tried to elicit from the public. Ordinarily, the pact between journalist and reader is based on the assumption that the discourse can be verified. In this case, the reader was not required to discern between reality and fiction, true and false, but encouraged to read according to his or her experience as a reader of fictional and literary works, to admire not the fact in itself, but the way it was conveyed. The anecdotes invented by the journalist were meant to exploit the 'reality effect' offered by literature in order to enhance another 'reality effect', the one inherent to the medium, the newspaper.<sup>20</sup> This latter 'reality effect' was thus subordinated to an

<sup>18</sup> Cesana, *Ricordi di un giornalista. Parte II*, pp. 376-77. The war correspondences started on the 28 July 1870 issue of *Fanfulla*.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard (Berkeley-Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 141-48 (p. 147).

<sup>20</sup> The question – or, according to the Foucauldian vocabulary of Jean Chalaby the 'discursive practice' – of objectivity and truth has never been studied in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italian journalism, at least at an academic level. Some sparse historical hints on the attitude of journalists towards their practice can be drawn from a debate fuelled by the Italian translation of Brent Cunningham's article 'Rethinking Objectivity' in the journal *Problemi dell'informazione*, 3-4 (2003) and 1 (2004), (originally published in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, 11 July 2003).

aesthetic principle: it revealed how journalistic practice was assessed on the basis of literary writing, and how the literary ability of the journalist was considered to be the main value in his own professional standards and, accordingly, those of the newspaper.

The character imposed on *Fanfulla* by its editorial staff from the beginning was, therefore, one of meticulous attention to writing style. In the lead article, where a reader would expect an editorial focused on the newspaper's political position, *Fanfulla* offered instead a programme that revolved around its language. The import of writing was presented as central in the economy of the new daily paper. Because of the particular discursive practice that superseded the handling of news, the individual items of information could be submitted to and sacrificed in favour of a specific linguistic rendition. Such emphasis on the language was unusual at the time and attracted the attention of observers, who tried to interpret the phenomenon.

## 2. *Fanfulla* praised and blamed

The opening column of *Fanfulla* in June 1870 emphasised the language of other political newspapers in a derogatory way. As an alternative, the public was presented with a promise:

vi faremo leggere articoli corti, spicciativi, più ricchi d'idee che di parole, ogni cosa scritta, per quanto ci sarà possibile, con grazia, con brio, con spirito, senza pedanteria, senza presunzione, senza malignità.<sup>21</sup>

This formula proved to be so successful that in 1882 two famous poets and literary critics, Olindo Guerrini and Corrado Ricci, praised *Fanfulla* for its writing in a satirical poem on Italian culture entitled *Giobbe*:

Quel giornal moderato e riverito  
Il sangue ci rinnova nelle vene  
Con la prosa di zucchero candito.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> 'Ai lettori'.

<sup>22</sup> [Olindo Guerrini and Corrado Ricci] *Giobbe. Serena concezione di Marco Balossardi* (Milan: Treves, 1882), p. 29.

In the satirical Parnassus of the Italian press imagined by the two poets, *Fanfulla* was the only newspaper to be mock-praised for its writing, while all the others were ridiculed as boring. The allusion to ‘candy sugar’ pointed to the ease and pleasure experienced by the readers of *Fanfulla*.

Other views were less favourable. In an overview of the Roman press that appeared in Angelo Sommaruga’s *La Domenica Letteraria* in 1883, Edoardo Scarfoglio regarded *Fanfulla* as an evil influence on the Italian press:

Così il *Fanfulla*, che tra i sospiri dell’*Opinione*, ove la prosa musicale del marchese d’Arcais tentava invano di insinuare qualche gaiezza solfeggiatrice nel peso degli articoli economici del senatore Luzzatti, e le prediche del *Diritto*, marciava zuffolando con una impertinenza di *dandy* fortunato, incominciò ad avere una influenza dissolutrice: incominciò a sgretolare e a sminuzzare per modo l’intelligenza di tutti quelli che gli stavano intorno, che a poco a poco una dolce pigrizia mentale curvava atrofizzando ogni buona abitudine ai lavori serii.<sup>23</sup>

Scarfoglio’s words suggest that there had been some attempt to make changes to the ‘prosa’ in other political newspapers to make it more enjoyable. All efforts, in his opinion, had come to nothing: it was impossible to lift the weight of the articles, which often took the form of sermons to the readers. *Fanfulla* had undoubtedly succeeded, but the downside of its success was, according to Scarfoglio, a degeneration in the practice of journalism itself as the writing in *Fanfulla* had been imitated and exploited by other papers. In a passage that ended with a bout of his typically gross off-colour humour, Scarfoglio offered a vivid caricatured description of an article of *Fanfulla*:

L’articoletto leggerino e incipriato, con un po’ di vento nella pancetta mingherlina, con un pizzico di cipria sulla testolina bizzarra e un grano di sale nella coda, era così facile a fare, e giovava tanto alla popolarità, e soddisfaceva così bene il bisogno di una prosa né in tutto politica né in tutto letteraria, ma soprattutto brevina, e digestiva, che per molti anni Roma non ha avuto altri bisogni letterari.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Edoardo Scarfoglio, ‘Cronaca bizantina. II – Il Giornalismo’, *La Domenica Letteraria*, y. II, no. 33, 19 August 1883. Franco Flores d’Arcais was musical critic for the *Opinione* (hence the ‘prosa musicale’), and one of the most feared critics of the second half of the nineteenth century. Scarfoglio’s article appeared in a series of geographic surveys on the state of literary culture in the main Italian cities (Bologna, Milan, Turin, Rome, Venice and Naples were covered). ‘Ci proponiamo di dare [according to the wish of the anonymous editor (probably the Bolognese journalist Luigi Lodi, deputy editor of the journal)] non dei saggi critici intorno alle opere, ma qualche notizia biografica non inutile e curiosa di tutti gli scrittori delle varie città italiane’ (ibid., y. II, no. 23, 10 June 1883). Some of the writers were also interviewed. Ugo Ojetti was, therefore, not the first with the idea of *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, published in 1895.

<sup>24</sup> Scarfoglio, ‘Cronaca bizantina. II’.

Scarfoglio is referring to three different levels of communication: the character of the articles that appeared in *Fanfulla*, the aim for which they were conceived, and the way they were written. In the main, he devoted his attention to the formulas habitually used in order to write a successful piece; the main characteristics of the articles were their levity and their embellishments; the images of face powder on the head and the grain of salt on the tail suggest that the articles' strong points were the introduction and conclusion. The body of the article, as the image of wind in the 'weedy belly' implied, was unimportant. The beginning must be gracious in order to capture the attention of the reader, while the image of salt at the end had a twofold meaning. 'To put the salt on the tail' means to set a trap to catch a bird, but at the same time 'salt', as in English, is used in the Latin sense of *sales* to indicate a lively wit; Scarfoglio thus suggested that the article should end with a joke to impress the reader. He added that this particular manner of composing the written piece eminently suited readers' post-lunch perusal and peaceful digestion.

In spite of their eccentricity, Scarfoglio's notes revealed that, at a higher level, the issue at stake was, once again, *Fanfulla*'s 'prosa', a term also used by Guerrini and Ricci to define the particular realisation of the linguistic material the newspaper used. When Scarfoglio defined it as 'una prosa né in tutto politica né in tutto letteraria', he emphasised its hybrid nature, but at the same time involuntarily stated that it had already established itself as a specific type of journalistic prose. The double negative (*né... né...*) reveals how, thirteen years after its appearance, *Fanfulla* had created a medium around which to organise its own particular and inimitable communicational space. Scarfoglio's critique is not only a recognition that *Fanfulla* relied primarily on its linguistic performance, but also the first testimony of the codification of journalistic prose in Italy. In the lack of a codified model, journalists had to draw upon literature, the only system capable of providing the instruments, both theoretical and practical, to work on the language. As Barthes foresaw in an analysis of political writings, 'la Littérature n'a pu être entièrement liquidée: elle forme un horizon verbal toujours prestigieux'. The political writer cannot fail to consider it as a benchmark: 'il ne peut que revenir à la fascination



d'écritures antérieures, transmises à partir de la Littérature comme un instrument intact et démodé'.<sup>25</sup>

The renewal of journalistic writing brought about by *Fanfulla* had an impact both at the pragmatic and the semantic level. This process also involved the non-linguistic elements of the newspaper: to produce meaning, the whole structure of the newspaper had to be updated, from the individual paratextual items to the disposition of the news within its four pages. In order to understand the significance of the large-scale operation carried out by *Fanfulla* within the sector of the Italian press, it is necessary to firstly examine the structural reorganisation of the newspaper, and its impact in terms of journalistic practice.

### **3. *Forma letteraria and compilazione.* The structural reorganisation of the newspaper**

In 1886 the news editor of *Fanfulla*, Gian Leopoldo Piccardi, produced a short historical overview of the world press, with particular emphasis on contemporary Italian journalism.<sup>26</sup> Examining the language of the Italian press up to the 1870s, he claimed that, when one considered the 'forma letteraria', *Fanfulla* had ushered in a new era in Italian journalism. 'Forma letteraria' was the way Piccardi referred to the writing in the newspaper.<sup>27</sup> As late as 1886, literature and rhetoric still provided the standards against which to assess journalistic prose.

Every political newspaper, until the end of the nineteenth-century, was made up of four pages in full broadsheet format, divided in up to six columns. Piccardi observed that, in an average pre-*Fanfulla* newspaper, the first two pages were usually occupied by 'lunghissimi articoli di fondo, tre, quattro o magari cinque in uno stesso numero'.<sup>28</sup> This clue confirms that the main focus of newspapers was on commentaries at the expense of news. But Piccardi also suggested that the length of

<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zero de l'écriture, suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris : Seuil, 1972), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> The only scant pieces of information on Gian Leopoldo Piccardi, who wrote on *Fanfulla* under the *nom de plume* Lelio, are provided by Nicola Bernardini, *Guida della stampa periodica italiana* (Lecce: Tipografia Editrice Salentina, 1890), p. 627.

<sup>27</sup> L. G. [Gian Leopoldo] Piccardi, *Saggio di una storia sommaria della stampa periodica* (Rome: Bencini, 1886), p. 221.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

the articles was highly dependent on the way they were written. They were composed, he went on, ‘nel bello stile accademico’: every piece that aimed at being authoritative was built ‘sulla base classica del “non pertanto” e del “conciossiacosaché”’.<sup>29</sup> Excessive length was thus accompanied by elaborate sentence structure, overdeveloped arguments and stylistic amplification, as these elements were perceived as signs of *gravitas* and professionalism. Beyond the commonplace, Piccardi argued that after the great and heroic moments of the Risorgimento the political press had not been able to adapt to ordinary, everyday life. It was Benedetto Croce who noticed that, at the beginning of the 1870s, politicians used the word ‘prosa’ as opposed to ‘poetry’ to state that the ‘heroic’ period of the Risorgimento had given way to a new and uninteresting, ordinary period, ‘quello del lavoro economico’.<sup>30</sup> Journalism, in Piccardi’s opinion, had inherited and retained ‘uno stil gonfio e vuoto, roteante attorno a piccole cose’.<sup>31</sup>

Piccardi’s use of the word ‘stile’ had a technical meaning. It pertained to the field of rhetoric, and was based on the classical theory of the *aptum*: the appropriateness of the means of expression to the topic and the aim of the discourse.<sup>32</sup> Each discourse must conform to one of the three genres of elocution (the ‘styles’) belonging to rhetorical tradition: *humilis*, *medium* and *sublime*. The ‘stil gonfio e vuoto’, a remnant from the Risorgimento, was a shadow of the last, sublime, style, the aim of which was to inspire the audience to great deeds. It was characterised in tone by seriousness and solemnity, in language by vigorous and abundant use of ornament and figures of speech. The underlying model was that of the exhortatory speech: after the end of the political turmoil of the first half of the century, it continued to be a reference point for the politician or the political journalist wanting to promote action. According to Piccardi, however, the orotund articles he condemned were unfit for the communicative frame of a medium like the newspaper. The length and ‘academic’ style so stigmatised were typical of the

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. In his autobiography, Alfieri related that in 1775 he was infuriated when he opened Giovanni della Casa’s *Galateo* and had to struggle with the complex syntax of the very first sentence, which begins with a *Conciossiacosaché*. From Alfieri’s condemn, the connective stood for a quintessential example of pedantry and archaism: cf. Luca Serianni, *Italiano in prosa* (Florence: Cesati, 2012), p. 13 and note 8.

<sup>30</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Storia d’Italia dal 1871 al 1915*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1991), pp. 12 and 377.

<sup>31</sup> Piccardi, *Saggio*, p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> Heinrich Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik* (Ismaning: Hueber, 1990), p. 28.

articles that appeared in political reviews. Many contributors to the newspapers of the Left and the Right like *L'Opinione* or *Il Diritto* used to write articles for *Nuova Antologia*, the most authoritative national political review.<sup>33</sup> The continuity between the two different media forms of the political review and the daily newspaper was made possible by the uniformity of the ruling class that actively participated in these kinds of publications. This was not a question of content or political programme: rather, it was perceived as a common practice of intervention in the public sphere. The restricted community of those involved in politics, in spite of their differences, shared – as the editors of *Fanfulla* noted in their opening manifesto – a jargon that could be understood ‘only by initiates’.<sup>34</sup> In line with contemporary European liberalism, such a community considered every organised party system as a threat to democracy, and did not care about the ‘dimensione ideologico-organizzativa della politica’ outside Parliament.<sup>35</sup> The same community was therefore simultaneously addresser and addressee of this press, which – in Gramscian terms – was thus ‘organic’ to the ruling class.<sup>36</sup>

As seen in the Introduction, the slow but progressive widening of political participation after 1870 was characterised by a substantial growth in the establishment of new periodical publications. As the newspaper was perceived to be a tool for gaining consensus, the new political periodicals had to hold an audience larger than that of the old, limited group of supporters. The language of the ‘initiates’, as it was called, had a symbolic value that could not be grasped by a new public with no previous experience or involvement in the stuff of political life. The rhetorical organisation of the discourse, exhortatory and deliberative, belonged to the oral context of Parliament. Outside the assembly, political debate conducted on such terms lost its strength. The journalists who established *Fanfulla* understood that there was an opportunity to shape the communicational space of the newspaper outside the

<sup>33</sup> Established in Florence in 1866, *Nuova Antologia* claimed to be the continuation of Gian Pietro Vieusseux’s *Antologia*, the journal that from 1821 to 1832 had promoted the rallying of elements of the ruling class who proved to be decisive in the process of national unification. A generic cultural periodical, *Nuova Antologia* was inspired by the French *Revue des deux mondes*, and offered articles in the form of long commentaries on current affairs or the most urgent economic and political questions. See Ricciarda Ricorda, “*La Nuova Antologia*” 1866-1915. *Letteratura e ideologia fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Padua: Liviana, 1980); Marino Berengo, *Cultura e istituzioni nell’Ottocento italiano*, ed. Roberto Pertici (Bologna: il Mulino, 2004), pp. 106-110.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Ai lettori’ (my translation).

<sup>35</sup> Fulvio Cammarano, *Storia dell’Italia liberale* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011), p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Sergio Landucci, *Cultura e ideologia in Francesco De Sanctis* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), pp. 256-57.

traditional contexts devoted to politics: Parliament, local political circles and the entourage of national and local politicians. In many respects, they embarked on a process which had already taken place in the world of the French press, albeit under radically different circumstances. In France, fidelity to rhetorical tradition and literary models on the one hand and the extreme closure towards media innovations on the other, were typical of the press in the Restoration period. The reign of Charles X (1824-30) had limited press freedom, worsening an already stifling climate. The birth of a ‘*presse fantaisiste et moqueuse*’ was a reaction both to the dominant solemnity, and to political oppression.<sup>37</sup> *Le Figaro*, established in 1826, was the most notable product of this situation. The two foundational features of the *Figaro* were attention to the outside world and the sustained use of irony as the dominant tone in its prose. The newspaper literally brought modernity into the daily press: the readers were introduced to the Parisian smart set, fashion, cultural life and theatre, while irony acted as a means of interpreting reality based on ‘*un esprit de dérision systématique*’ against the political regime.<sup>38</sup> The bond with the satirical press of the Revolution was only apparent, as the protest voiced by the newspaper had more complex ideological motivations in the latter example.

The link with the *Figaro* is not just an academic comparison. The French newspaper was explicitly mentioned with reference to *Fanfulla*. According to Piccardi, *Fanfulla* was ‘*fatto ad esempio dei giornali mondani francesi*’.<sup>39</sup> This remark appears to be confirmed by another source. In the same year as Piccardi’s book was published, the king of Italy, Umberto I, commissioned a secret investigation on journalism. Andrea Adolfo Tonelli, the police commissioner in charge of the report, recounted that the foundation of *Fanfulla* took place as a consequence of a discussion comparing French and Italian journalism. All of a sudden, the founders said: “‘o perché non fondiamo noi un giornale sul tipo del Figaro?’” Detto fatto: pochi giorni dopo usciva il primo numero del *Fanfulla* che fu per l’Italia, avvezza al giornalismo dottrinario e a tesi, una rivelazione’.<sup>40</sup> Both Piccardi and Tonelli established a link between *Fanfulla* and the French ‘*fantaisiste*

<sup>37</sup> Dominique Kalifa et al., ‘Les scissions internes à l’histoire de la presse’, in *La Civilisation du journal*, pp. 249-68 (p. 251).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>39</sup> Piccardi, *Saggio*, p. 222.

<sup>40</sup> Castronovo, ‘Per la storia della stampa italiana’, p. 126 (the report is published in its entirety in the article).

et moqueuse' press. The fact that the imitation of the *Figaro* carried out by *Fanfulla*'s founders turned out to be a 'revelation' means that the French model had not hitherto found fertile ground in Italy. Or, at least, *Fanfulla* differed from the Risorgimento papers that mirrored the French *petits journaux* in their titles: *Il Lampione*, *Il Charivari* etc. In the rest of Europe, as Sassoon has noted, the French model had already spawned numerous imitations and exploited the market targeting different audiences.<sup>41</sup>

Although there are no studies on the diffusion of the French press and particularly the *Figaro* in Italy, Tonelli's remark on *Fanfulla*'s 'revelation' seems to suggest that the *petite presse* had not yet had any kind of impact on upmarket political newspapers. In effect, the *Figaro* acted as a model for *Fanfulla* on a twofold level: those of plastic organisation and topicalisation. Semiotic awareness – *in re*, if not *in verbis* – is no modern invention, and was already operative in the nineteenth century. In particular, journalists seemed to be aware of the strict correlation between the verbal and non-verbal elements of a newspaper. For Piccardi there was a strong bond between what he had called the 'forma letteraria', and the 'compilazione' of the newspaper.<sup>42</sup> In modern semiotic terms, Piccardi's use of 'compilazione' suggests two different levels of analysis: the plastic organisation of the newspaper, and the topicalisation of news. The plastic organisation is the articulation of all the elements that contribute to the signifier of a piece of art.<sup>43</sup> As applied to a newspaper, the plastic organisation is the arrangement of the paratextual components: format and layout (lettering, titles, sections, images).<sup>44</sup> Topicalisation is derived from Umberto Eco's concept of 'topic' as a pragmatic indicator that discloses the semantic properties of a text.<sup>45</sup> Within the frame of the newspaper's format, it is used to

<sup>41</sup> Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans from 1800 to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 321.

<sup>42</sup> Piccardi, *Saggio*, p. 221.

<sup>43</sup> Greimas, who introduced the concept, made a distinction between chromatic, eidetic and topologic categories in order to mark the chromatic, linear and spatial organisation of the various elements in the frame of the work of art respectively: Algirdas Julien Greimas, 'Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts', trans. Frank Collins and Paul Perron, *New Literary History*, 20 (1989), 627-49 (pp. 639-41 in particular).

<sup>44</sup> Anna Maria Lorusso and Patrizia Violi, *Semiotica del testo giornalistico* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 24-27. Cf. Id., *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979), pp. 87-92.

identify the criterion that governs the *mise-en-page* and the distribution of the articles according to their topic.<sup>46</sup>

The plastic organisation of *Fanfulla* differed radically from that of its main rival newspapers such as *L'Opinione* and *Il Diritto*. The pages of the latter newspapers were structured in up to six long, narrow, vertical columns in which articles were arranged in paragraphs, often separated by graphic elements. Full-page titles were not customary, and the titles of individual articles were usually in bold, but the dimension of the font was the same for both titles and text. The column was a feature commonly adopted by the main newspapers. However, they presented the news material arranged according to a principle that Andrea Moroni has defined as 'a cannocchiale', that is, telescopically.<sup>47</sup> Current affairs (international politics, then internal politics) were ordinarily given priority, followed by a gradual transition to regional and local news. Graphically, *Fanfulla* resembled the *Figaro*. Just as in the French newspaper, its pages were structured in four wide columns and the *continuum* that characterised the other Italian newspapers was broken by a different partition of the empty spaces. The traditional *mise-en-page* of Italian newspapers was partially retained in terms of topicalisation, but *Fanfulla* further developed an aspect that had been introduced by the *Figaro*: recurrent columns with fixed names. The founder of the French paper, Hyppolite de Villemessant, claimed in his autobiography that it was his first consideration ('mon invention') to 'diviser par cadres' the newspaper. The news, he suggested, must be arranged like the goods in a department store, namely, always in the same place, so that the customer knows exactly where to find it. The reason, according to his metaphor, was mainly commercial: 'nulle peine pour le client, qui sait d'avance où on lui donnera ce qu'il désire'. 'De même pour un journal', he went on :

il est indispensable que le lecteur sache où il trouvera la Causerie, les Echos de Paris, ceux de la Chambre, les articles Variétés, les Tribunaux, le rayon des Faits divers, celui des Théâtres, etc., etc., et ne soit pas obligé d'errer à la pêche de tel ou

<sup>46</sup> The concept of 'topicalizzazione' in journalism studies (the term is borrowed from linguistics, hence my English translation as 'topicalisation') was introduced in 1984 by two Italian students of Eco, Omar Calabrese and Patrizia Violi, 'Il giornale come testo', in *La fabbrica delle notizie. Una ricerca sul "Corriere della Sera" e "La Repubblica"*, ed. Marino Livolsi (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1984), pp. 104-51 (pp. 120-22 in particular). See also Lorusso and Violi, *Semiotica del testo*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>47</sup> Andrea Moroni, *Alle origini del "Corriere della Sera". Da Eugenio Torelli Viollier a Luigi Albertini (1876-1900)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005), pp. 44-45.

tel article [...] L'ordre est aussi nécessaire dans un journal que sur une table : il faut que le couvert y soit bien mis, et que l'abonné puisse trouver aussi facilement l'article qu'il veut lire que le consommateur trouve le poivre ou le sel sur la table à laquelle il vient de s'asseoir.<sup>48</sup>

With his real-life comparisons, de Villemessant suggested that his innovation made possible another modality of reading a newspaper. The kind of plastic organisation and topicalisation he envisaged did not merely free the newspaper from book form; the procedures of composition were considerably accelerated by this innovation, and the adoption of fixed columns and labels offered effective guidance to the reader, which facilitated the act and increased the speed of reading. *Fanfulla* adopted the same device, at least on the front page: before the end of 1871, it opened with an editorial, regularly followed by a column entitled *Giorno per giorno*, in which the main events were “satirised” – as shall be illustrated further on – in very short paragraphs (between one and ten lines), reminiscent of modern day “tweets”. In 1872, the first anonymous column was replaced by the hugely successful column of Ferdinando Martini, ‘Fra un sigaro e l’altro’. Other columns appeared and disappeared, lasting for only limited periods of time, for example Carlo Collodi’s ‘Insalata cappuccina’. These columns, however, were quite different in nature from those of the *Figaro*. The French columns still resembled the intertitles in a book, in the synthetic form elaborated in the nineteenth-century novel. The Italian titles were less efficacious in orientating the reader, but more sophisticated and refined from an editorial point of view. The creative names employed were not just trivia. According to Genette’s classification of book titles, they performed a descriptive, connotative and seductive function at the same time. While the *Figaro*’s titles were merely thematic, the generic (rhematic) designation of *Fanfulla*’s titles acted as a paragenic label, as they imparted ‘a sort of genre innovation’.<sup>49</sup> They served to individuate pieces which did not have any precise topic or content and, above all, no precedent in journalism, but were primarily characterised by the nature of their writing. The choice of the name had a seductive aim as well, promising an article as eccentric and original as the title suggested. In the case of Martini’s ‘Fra un sigaro e l’altro’, the title appealed to a moment of leisure during the day, that of the siesta

<sup>48</sup> Hyppolyte de Villemessant, *Mémoires d'un journaliste. Troisième série: A travers le Figaro* (Paris : Dentu, 1873), pp. 40-41.

<sup>49</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretations*, trans. Jane E. Levin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 115.

after lunch. Compared to the *Figaro*, the principle that structured the Italian newspaper was, again, its writing, the ‘prosa’, which stood in for a generic indication and influenced the moment of the topicalisation of the various items in every issue of the newspaper.

\* \* \*

In an attempt to identify the strategies of representation of common language in Italian fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century, Enrico Testa linked the tension towards expressive immediacy with the ‘principio, retorico e stilistico, della leggibilità’.<sup>50</sup> Political journalism was dealing with a similar problem. The ultimate aim behind the structural reorganisation of the established model of the political newspaper was, for the editorial staff of *Fanfulla*, to create a space that would favour and promote readability. The new criteria adopted in the topicalisation and plastic organisation meant, from a rhetorical point of view, the abandoning of the exhortatory and deliberative discourse and also implied, from a stylistic point of view, the dropping of the remnants of the sublime style that had characterised journalistic practice since the Risorgimento. Once the old code of practice had been discarded as obsolete, and a new framework introduced, the journalists had to elaborate new textual strategies to fulfil their innovative programme. The new communicational space of the newspaper was the foundation of the living space for the *elzeviro*.

<sup>50</sup> Enrico Testa, *Lo stile semplice. Discorso e romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), p. 8.





## CHAPTER 2

### THE PARODY OF JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE IN *FANFULLA*

The main goal of *Fanfulla*'s prose was to pursue and foster readability, in order to gain the widest audience and to undermine the prestige of the established political newspapers. The paper's journalists found the equivalent of the French *petite presse* writing in the Tuscan satirical press of the Risorgimento which had adopted the model of humoristic prose after Foscolo's Italian translation of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. The central appeal of humoristic writing lay in its textual dimension: Sterne's prose, in its Italian adaptation, reproduced conversation. Humoristic prose, as a non-structured way of writing, offered an alternative to literary language and the rhetorical conventions of established genres. By incorporating some of the stylistic solutions that contemporary playwrights were experimenting with in their attempts to reproduce 'natural' conversation, the writers of *Fanfulla* produced their own particular brand of conversational journalism.

The potential of this 'conversational journalism' was activated through the systematic use of parody, intended to mock and supersede the stifling, old-fashioned journalistic practice of rival newspapers. However, parody cannot operate out of sight of its target; in order to drive home their point, *Fanfulla*'s journalists had to have knowledge of rival newspapers. Parody was, in other words, *Fanfulla*'s very *raison d'être*: it was the principle that guided the selection, layout and meaning of the material used. Adherence to this principle prevented *Fanfulla* from developing any further significant innovation in journalistic practice; even a radical attempt at criticising the very form of the journal article, which resulted – as will be seen – in a highly original experiment, could not survive outside the newspaper.

This chapter deals with the textual strategies on which *Fanfulla*'s conversational language was grounded and seeks to investigate the advantages, as well as the disadvantages and limits, of the use of parody in journalistic practice.

## 1. The strategy of readability: *facezia*, humoristic prose and *Umgangssprache*

Following the example of the French *petite presse*, and in particular of the *Figaro*, in its attempt to promote a new type of political newspaper, the journalists of *Fanfulla* sought to challenge their competitors through mockery and derision. Yet, the historical conditions that had engendered and nurtured the French model were different. *Fanfulla* had no definite programme of political or social criticism, let alone any overt intention of undermining institutional legitimacy. On the contrary, it operated in a regime of press freedom and shared the political leanings of its main competitors – which were, in turn, those of the government. Italian journalists were not interested in the ideological implications behind their models. They regarded the practice of their French colleagues as a benchmark insofar as it suggested a set of strategies for reaching the widest possible audience.

In *Fanfulla*'s structural reorganisation as a political newspaper, the editorship elaborated a new writing style. This was the starting point for launching their attack against the established newspapers. Leopoldo Piccardi in 1886 claimed that, in order to imitate the prose of the French *petite presse*, the journalists of *Fanfulla* looked back to the Tuscan satirical journalism of the Risorgimento.<sup>1</sup> However, it was not his intention to label *Fanfulla* a satirical newspaper. Rather, his perspective was focused on the literary aspect, suggesting that *Fanfulla*'s prose originated from that of the satirical papers published in Florence in the decade before Unification. From a purely historical point of view, Piccardi could hardly be contradicted. All the main journalists on *Fanfulla*, including its founders, had experience of satirical journalism, not only in Tuscany. Collodi had been the editor of *Il Lampione* (Florence), Yorick was a satirist esteemed in the Florentine press, Martini had collaborated on *La Lente* and *Lo Scaramuccia*, both published in Florence, Cesana had established in Turin an important, Liberal-inspired, political satirical journal called *Pasquino*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Piccardi, *Saggio*, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Cesana's experience as a satirical journalist see his *Ricordi di un giornalista*, pp. 65-107 and, for Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, pp. 111-28. A detailed account of the Florentine press can be found in an old essay by Giuseppe Rondoni, *I giornali umoristici del triennio glorioso (1859-1861)* (Florence: Sansoni, 1914) which, despite the title, also covers the 1850s. For the subsequent period see Viva Tedesco, *La stampa satirica in Italia 1860-1914* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991), for good coverage of the main political events though predominantly anecdotal in content.

The link between the political and the satirical press became established in Tuscany during the last decade of the Risorgimento. According to Marino Berengo, the only link between power and public opinion during the Restoration was represented by official newspapers, the so-called ‘gazzette ufficiali’ – a collection of official communications with no critical comment.<sup>3</sup> However, freedom of the press had been abolished in all Italian states with the exception of Piedmont after the revolutions of 1848-49. Thus, while there was ample space available for the development of a periodical press, the adoption of an agenda of political opposition to the regime remained a dangerous business. The solution was found in the adoption of covert satire as an effective means of propaganda for political unification. Satirical newspapers and journals published in Tuscany in the 1850s faced hardly any serious opposition, as loyalist forces never joined the fight on the same ground. In fact, satire proved a successful way of conveying strong political messages in a ciphered code that confounded censorship.

The Tuscan journalists of the 1850s found an authoritative model in the tradition of the eighteenth-century humoristic novel, which had long been popular in Tuscany. In this respect, it is difficult to underestimate the influence exercised by Ugo Foscolo’s translation of Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*.<sup>4</sup> With his *Viaggio sentimentale di Yorick lungo la Francia e l’Italia*, first published in Pisa in 1813, Foscolo offered an example of humoristic prose that claimed a special status for the so-called ‘scrittura delle opinioni’.<sup>5</sup> This proved a powerful legitimisation for subsequent journalistic practice. The language and style of Foscolo’s translation provided a means to express the variety and multiplicity of points of view required in a society where public debate was regarded as an ethical, moral and social ideal.<sup>6</sup> The sequence of Foscolo’s *Viaggio sentimentale*-Tuscan satirical press-*Fanfulla*, presented here as a working hypothesis, constitutes an area of enquiry that deserves further investigation.

<sup>3</sup> Berengo, *Cultura e istituzioni*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>4</sup> On Sterne’s early Italian fortunes and the impact of the first French and Italian translations see Maria Clotilde Bertoni, ‘Il filtro francese: Frenais & C. nella diffusione europea di Sterne’, in *Effetto Sterne. La narrazione umoristica in Italia da Foscolo a Pirandello*, ed. Giancarlo Mazzacurati (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1990), pp. 19-59.

<sup>5</sup> Matteo Palumbo so defined the style adopted by Foscolo in his translation of Sterne, as opposed to the style of his novel *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*: ‘Jacopo Ortis, Didimo Chierico e gli avvertimenti di Foscolo “Al lettore”’, in *Effetto Sterne*, pp. 60-89 (p. 77).

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 29.

After Unification, the humoristic prose that had been formerly adopted by the satirical press lost efficacy for two reasons. Firstly, the new political circumstances reoriented the political debate onto parliament and the political press. The majority of satirical papers ceased publication, as their cultural and ideological stance and purpose – and their readership – was absorbed by the political press. According to Piccardi, the Florentine newspaper *La Nazione* did continue to give credit to such successful writers as Yorick and Collodi, but ‘senza derogare alla sua gravità’,<sup>7</sup> as they were mostly required to write dispatches and reviews. Seriousness and *gravitas* were now deemed essential for reporting on political matters, while satirical journalists were hired solely to enliven those sections of the newspaper devoted to entertainment. Secondly, the local dimension of the pre-Unification press relied on a type of discourse that would not be appreciated outside the region and therefore could not appeal to a national audience. The Tuscan satirical press could not expand its remit to include the rest of Italy unless a radical reformulation of its means and aims took place in line with the changed circumstances.

Those limitations became clear in 1870, when the journalists of *Fanfulla* were driven to revisit their approach to journalistic prose. The new Italian law on the freedom of the press and political debate guaranteed the legitimate exercise of ‘scrittura delle opinioni’. What appeared to be out of date was the satirical model as encrypted criticism of governmental policies. The condition for the use of satire, the radical opposition between two conflicting visions of the world, had vanished – there was no longer a right and a wrong option to try to convince readers of. Satire was, then, discarded as a literary genre, but it remained as a local component of the discourse, with the limited aim of criticising a single claim or situation. Ferdinando Martini claimed that laughter was an essential ingredient in his idea of journalistic prose and used a French word, *esprit*, to designate its main source.<sup>8</sup> In this, he was referring to the vernacular tradition of satirical literature, the ‘dialoghi vernacoli’ and ‘novellette’:<sup>9</sup> the *facezie*, popular comic jokes and wit of the Tuscan countryside which dated back to Boccaccio and were perpetuated in prose as well as verse through the centuries via such texts as the *Motti e facezie del Piovano Arlotto*, culminating in the first half of the nineteenth century with Giuseppe Giusti’s poetical

<sup>7</sup> Piccardi, *Saggio*, p. 222.

<sup>8</sup> Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

production. That such a tradition was unable to expand beyond Tuscany's regional borders is clear from the trajectory of Giusti's reputation. In 1859, when Giosuè Carducci edited a collection of Giusti's verse, he could hail the author as *the* poet of contemporary history. However, in 1874, the same Carducci felt forced to admit that Giusti 'rado o non mai allargò le ali oltre il confine delle Alpi e spesso non oltre l'Appennino'.<sup>10</sup> A time-honoured and thriving tradition of expressiveness had been turned into a blunt instrument by the changed political and social circumstances that, when one considers the rapidity of events leading to Italy's unification, occurred over a very short period of time. In order to resharpen that blunt instrument, it was critical to adapt it in line with the demands of a different, wider public. Thus, the old *facezie* begot humoristic prose.

For the journalists of *Fanfulla*, the appeal of humoristic prose lay primarily in its stylistic characterisation. Its power consisted in its apparently irregular, digressive, even moody, nature, which allowed it to circumvent and overcome the limits of genre conventions. The disrupted textuality of humoristic prose deliberately contrasted with the dignified varieties of old-fashioned literary language that was the source of the solemn style adopted by rival newspapers. This chimed with another aspect of Tuscan pre-Unification journalism, also inspired by Foscolo's translation of Sterne. As Olivia Santovetti has observed, one of the major achievements of Foscolo's translation had been the reproduction of the 'conversational style' of Sterne's prose;<sup>11</sup> *Fanfulla*'s writers adopted this principle insofar as it could reproduce the natural movement and flow of conversation. It was, according to a felicitous definition by Giovanni Nencioni, a 'parlato-scritto', a written simulation of the spoken language.<sup>12</sup>

*Fanfulla*'s 'parlato-scritto' has never been systematically examined. In Serenella Baggio's words, it could be tentatively defined as a manifestation of the 'registro colloquiale alto, parlato (della conversazione colta), assolutamente moderno

<sup>10</sup> Giosuè Carducci, *Bozzetti critici e discorsi letterari* (Leghorn: Vigo, 1876), p. 115. See also Carlo Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), p. 41. On Carducci's acknowledgment of the eminence of the Lombard tradition, with Giuseppe Parini and Carlo Porta as its greatest representatives, see Dante Isella, *I Lombardi in rivolta. Da Carlo Maria Maggi a Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Olivia Santovetti, 'Sterne in Italy', in *The Reception of Laurence Sterne in Europe*, eds. Peter de Voogd and John Neubauer (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 193-220 (p. 199).

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni Nencioni, 'Parlato-parlato, parlato-scritto, parlato-recitato', in *Di scritto e di parlato. Discorsi linguistici* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1983), pp. 126-79.

e prosastico, alternativo allo standard letterario promosso dalla scuola'.<sup>13</sup> As such, it characterised the sociability of the economic and political elite in the newly unified state. Its adoption in *Fanfulla* had a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the newspaper pursued the diffusion of a linguistic model with a prestigious social connotation. On the other, it aimed to facilitate the reading of the newspaper, expressly adopting a variant of the language used in conversation in describing every aspect of political, economic and cultural affairs. Journalists shared novelists' and playwrights' attempts to reproduce spoken language in their written style. The common effort to conquer a communicational space was aimed at addressing the public and securing a readership that was essential for survival in political debate as well as in the increasingly competitive market of periodical publications.

A comparison of late nineteenth-century journalistic prose with that of novelists and playwrights from the same period offers further elements of reflection. For these writers, the search for a living language grounded on spoken language and capable of being understood nationwide posed a serious challenge. For a novelist or narrator, the possible alternatives seemed to reside in the traditional opposition between national language and dialects, as Enrico Testa has underlined. The varieties of 'italiano regionale' had just begun to develop, and the only effective ways of conveying the language of real-life relied on local, vernacular varieties of Italian or, alternatively, on the language of the literary tradition punctuated with Tuscan idioms.<sup>14</sup> The difficulties of such an enterprise were clear to Luigi Capuana, a non-Florentine writer who was associated with Florentine journalism throughout his life, notably as drama critic of the Florentine *La Nazione* from 1864 to 1867 and then as general editor of *Fanfulla della Domenica* in 1882-83. In an 1885 collection of his articles from *Fanfulla della Domenica*, Capuana defined the object of his linguistic quest in terms of 'aver parlato scrivendo', a principle he applied to his narrative work and journalistic essays.<sup>15</sup> His criticism was levelled at the rhetorical background of Risorgimento literature which was, in his opinion, a tradition dominated by politics. The historic novels of Guerrazzi and d'Azeglio or the

<sup>13</sup> Serenella Baggio, 'Introduzione', in Elena Carandini Albertini, *Le case, le cose, le carte. Diari 1948-1950*, eds. Oddone Longo, Serenella Baggio and Adele Cambria (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2007), pp. 11-54 (p. 35).

<sup>14</sup> Testa, *Lo stile semplice*, pp. 115-16.

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Per l'arte*, ed. Riccardo Scrivano (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1992), p. viii.

tragedies of Niccolini, he wrote, were barely readable because of their oratorical and declamatory nature. They shared, all things being equal, the same limitations shown by the journal articles stigmatised by Piccardi. The new style gave mixed results, which Capuana himself defined as ‘confusionale’ – a *Sprachmischung* of sorts, based on different and, at first glance, irreconcilable traditions that had come into contact with one another: the prose of the great French novelists, Manzoni’s style, and the regional inflections of contemporary writers. Capuana’s goal, however, was to reach a different level: a type of prose ‘in cui il narratore si presenti come conversatore e la storia come enunciazione’.<sup>16</sup>

The use of a language that could plausibly reproduce conversation was particularly strategic in the theatre. In 1894, Giovanni Verga told Ugo Ojetti that the playwright did not write for an ideal reader, but ‘per un pubblico radunato a folla così da dover pensare a una media di intelligenza e di gusto, a un *average reader*, come dicono gli inglesi’.<sup>17</sup> Verga’s ‘average reader’ likely included the reading public of newspapers: if not ‘radunato a folla’, this was more varied and unpredictable than the readership of novels. In parallel with *Fanfulla*, the ‘dramma borghese’ – the bourgeois theatre that flourished in the second half of the century – had to elaborate an ‘average language’ capable of approximating the conversation of spectators. By ‘bourgeois drama’, literary historians usually understand theatrical productions from the works of Paolo Ferrari and Achille Torelli to those of Giuseppe Giacosa. Their inspiration came from the French plays of Dumas *fiils*, Emile Augier and Victorien Sardou. After Unification, the ‘dramma borghese’ was hailed not only as a means of linguistic unification following the Tuscan example, but also as a coherent system upon which a model of conversational language could be built and disseminated.<sup>18</sup>

The journalists of *Fanfulla* were all involved in theatre. Yorick was one of the most prominent drama critics of the time, as was Ferdinando Martini. Both were involved in discussions around the creation and consolidation of a national theatre at an institutional level; both attempted theatrical careers, albeit unsuccessfully. Another journalist, Carlo Collodi, wrote plays, most of them at the beginning of the

<sup>16</sup> Testa, *Lo stile semplice*, p. 121.

<sup>17</sup> Ugo Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, 2nd edn (Turin: Bocca, 1899), pp. 70-71.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriella Alfieri, *L’«Italiano nuovo». Centralismo e marginalità linguistici nell’Italia unificata* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1984), p. 227.



1870s. The plots and social environment portrayed by the ‘dramma borghese’ were characterised by the presence of middle-class characters and situations, representative of the social group that was increasingly participating in the political life of the unified new State. They reflected, albeit in somewhat muted tones, the monotonous rituals and conventions of life – its prosaic element, as Benedetto Croce famously labelled it. In fact, this was also the title of one of the archetypes of the ‘dramma borghese’, Paolo Ferrari’s comedy *La Prosa* (1858): a text in which the values of honest family life eventually defeat the tensions provoked by a life spent in debauchery.

A term like ‘prosa’ also alluded, inevitably, to the kind of language that characterised this production, and it had in the young Leo Spitzer its best investigator and interpreter. Following the example of earlier German models, Spitzer coined the expression *Italianische Umgangssprache* in 1914 to describe the language of this specific theatrical genre.<sup>19</sup> Not only was this the variety of language spoken by the ‘average reader’ of *Fanfulla*, as well as the language that best represented the world of the reader’s social position; there was also at the core of this *Umgangssprache* a set of textual strategies aimed at ensuring the speaker’s emotional engagement and interaction within a specific social context (*Umgang*). One could even suggest that such strategies worked not only at the level of the theatrical text to be performed, but also exerted a performative tension through the written text printed in the newspaper. Addressing the reader, in other words, involved deploying a set of strategies that were implied in the pragmatic aspects of an actual conversation; he or she became the interlocutor in a dialogic situation prompted by the new conversational style of the newspaper article. The primary organisation of the discourse; the graduation of the linguistic choices in order to adapt them to the counterpart; the empathic movement towards, together with the regard shown for, the interlocutor; and finally the devices used in the organisation of the discourse to pursue the speaker’s own purpose: all these features were emphasised and capitalised on in *Fanfulla* articles.

*Fanfulla* thus achieved its goal of readability through the refashioning of the humoristic prose adopted by the Tuscan satirical press during the Risorgimento in the light of strategies aimed at the elaboration of a conversational language that

<sup>19</sup> Leo Spitzer, *Lingua italiana del dialogo*, eds. Cesare Segre and Claudia Caffi, trans. Livia Tonelli (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2007), pp. 59-60. Spitzer’s book was finished by 1914, but was not published until 1922.

could overcome rhetorical conventions and restrictions. On the one hand, the operation entailed the automatic dismissal of theoretical disquisitions on the nature of humour (a fashionable subject at the end of the century) in favour of that special brand of uncomplicated comedy provided by Tuscan *facezie*. On the other hand, the textual dimension of prose style was expedient in activating the potential strategies of *Umgangssprache*. The imitation of spoken discourse and a sprinkling of comedic elements doubtlessly helped to secure the participation of readers. Yet, the attainment of readability was not in itself sufficient to undermine and eventually dislodge the established model of the political newspaper. To achieve this latter goal, a structural renovation of the newspaper became essential. In order to appreciate how the potential inherent in the revolution that has been described was harnessed and directed towards the ambitious new target, it is necessary to examine in greater detail the use of prose in the journalistic practice of *Fanfulla*.

## 2. Three kinds of parody

To render effective their critique of the established political newspaper model, the editorial staff of *Fanfulla* decided to attack it from the angle of journalistic practice. For this reason, the articles that appeared in its first issues were all characterised by a parody of the way an ordinary newspaper was written. However, the proposed alternative had a significant inconvenience: as has been observed, it could not ignore the practice that was the object of its scorn. On the contrary, it relied on it; the parodied practice constituted, at least in part, *Fanfulla*'s reason for existing. The kind of parody practised by its journalists can be described as an example of writing 'under erasure', according to the formulation proposed by Robert Phiddian. The metaphor, which Phiddian derives from Derrida, is used to stress how 'all parody refunctions pre-existing text(s) and/or discourse(s), so it can be said that these verbal structures are called to the readers' minds and then placed under erasure'.<sup>20</sup>

We have seen how Yorick, in the act of inventing his pretended war correspondence from France, responded to an emergency dictated by the needs of the market. In so doing, he adhered to and elaborated on a consolidated model of

<sup>20</sup> Robert Phiddian, *Swift's Parody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 13.

practice that was passed off as authentic, and the reader remained unaware of its falsity. The three kinds of parody regularly offered by *Fanfulla* diverged from Yorick's earlier work and served an altogether different purpose, in that they were characterised by overt criticism of accepted journalistic practice with the aim of also securing the support of the reader. The first kind of parody was characterised by the imitation of the typologies of articles that regularly appeared in political newspapers. The second consisted in disguising articles on political subjects. The third was perhaps the most radical: the parody of the journal article itself.

The first kind of parody was an overt imitation of columns that appeared in every political newspaper. 'La situazione', for example, was the name regularly given to a column widely used in every newspaper to discuss the circumstances and options around momentous political events. Commenting on the Roman question, the journalist and founder of *Fanfulla* Giovanni Piacentini (Silvius), began by mocking the habit of writing 'situazioni':

Nei momenti solenni un articolo sulla *situazione* è di prammatica, e fa comodo per cavarsela quando non si sa veramente che cosa dire.

I miei colleghi, giornalisti di pesante formato, non si lasciano mai sfuggire la favorevole occasione.

Mi ricordo d'aver letto una volta undici *situazioni*, diverse tutte l'una dall'altra – come vuole la libertà di pensare e di scrivere, della quale godiamo. – Però tutte concordavano nel dire che *l'orizzonte era buio!* Se la memoria non mi falla, dieci almeno, su undici, erano giornali del mattino che si fanno di notte!

Io seguirò il comodo precedente – come dice l'elegante linguaggio che si parla in Palazzo Vecchio.<sup>21</sup>

Such an introduction was interlaced with *facezie* that singled out the methods and habits of writing 'situazioni'. It was the belittlement of a ritual.<sup>22</sup> The *situazione*, Piacentini argued, was a very useful expedient when there was really nothing to say. This was perhaps the reason for its fortune since, in his opinion, journalists rarely had anything important to write, especially when the 'situation' was not transparent and required unravelling. Moreover, colleagues from rival newspapers were labelled with the ambiguous and scornful 'giornalisti di pesante formato', a *facezia* which

<sup>21</sup> Silvius, 'La situazione', *Fanfulla*, 5 September 1870. For the identity of Silvius see Bernardini, *Guida*, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> On jokes as anti-rite that serve as a depreciation of common values see Mary Douglas, 'Jokes', in *Implicit Meanings. Selected Essays in Anthropology*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 146-64 (p. 155 in particular).

meant both those who wrote for important newspapers (usually printed in large format, but just as *Fanfulla*), and those whose authority was burdensome and dreary. Piacentini assembled a playful sequence of apparent contradictions that also involved language. He mocked the journalese of other newspapers, the use of the same weary, formulaic language, exploiting the metaphor of darkness to ridicule their obscurity. At the same time, he made fun of political jargon, scoffing at the expressions commonly used in governmental circles (Palazzo Vecchio in Florence was the seat of the Italian government at the time). From a rhetorical point of view, Piacentini employed an apophasis or *occupatio*: he blamed the articles on the ‘situazione’, but what he actually wrote was also a ‘situazione’. The introductory claim was part of a strategy aimed to include the public in his critique. The passage from the impersonal structure of the discourse (‘un articolo [...] è di prammatica’, ‘fa comodo’) to the personal (‘i miei colleghi’, ‘mi ricordo’) marks the passage to a narration in which the reader is asked to take part as a listener. The journalist associated himself with his colleagues, but only in order to set himself apart from them: in the end, he just appeared to borrow the genre from other journalists (‘seguirò il comodo precedente’), and only because it was an effortless choice. The claim ‘mi ricordo’ added a hint of truth to the anecdote he was trying to recount. But the subsequent ‘libertà [...] della quale godiamo’ is what Spitzer has defined an associative plural, used in order to gain the consensus of the reader. It is used ‘affinché l’interlocutore viva nella finzione di non essere solo [...] e di agire assieme al parlante’.<sup>23</sup>

The second kind of parody consisted of disguising articles on political subjects. Instead of being built on a rational argument and organised as an essay, an article was presented using a formal and unusual pattern, often borrowed from literature: dialogue, apologue or short story. The debate surrounding French claims to the Spanish throne after 1868 (especially during the Franco-Prussian war) constituted a matter of political interest because one of the pretenders was Amedeo d’Aosta, the second son of the King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele II. Instead of reporting extensively on the covert moves of the European powers to secure the Spanish throne, Carlo Collodi wrote a theatrical *pièce* in a prologue and two acts. He staged a private, informal colloquium between Napoleon III and the Spanish general Juan Prim, who ends up being bribed by a Prussian salesman to whom he sells the

<sup>23</sup> Spitzer, *Lingua italiana*, p. 139.

Spanish throne.<sup>24</sup> The literary disguise aimed to be a more direct, entertaining and emotional way to make predictions about the political situation. The language used either avoided political jargon or made fun of it, while the whole *pièce* was characterised by an insistence on the language of trade and retail, as the issue was the bartering of the Spanish throne. Napoleon complained that his health was ‘cotizzata [from Fr. *cotiser*] sul listino dei valori pubblici’. The Prussian salesman spoke the typical language of the textile retailer (‘Abbiamo dei Re di una stoffa eccellente, che son buoni per tutte le stagioni e per tutti i climi’). At the same time, the numerous mockeries in the article conveyed a general sense of ambiguity about the real points Collodi wanted to make. In his piece one could not find any substantial comment about the political situation. Pay attention – Collodi seemed to suggest – because, despite Napoleon III’s optimism, Prim, the Spanish general, is playing his cards close to his chest.

The third kind of parody, which was to become the trademark of *Fanfulla* and therefore deserves detailed scrutiny, was a column that was apparently detached from any political or cultural issue. The initial article appeared as early as 3 July 1870, a few weeks after the first issue of the newspaper. It was entitled ‘Domenica!...’, as it appeared on Sunday, and the author was Yorick. Its position made clear its importance in the newspaper: it was the opening piece, situated on the front page. Sunday, according to Yorick, was a good day because the shops were closed and women could not pester their husbands with requests to buy new clothes. But the article’s argument rambled, punctuated by continual diversions and casual political comments. In a long introduction at the beginning of the article, Yorick tried to explain why Sunday was his favourite day of the week. Sunday was the most boring day from the point of view of marital happiness, but luckily the shops were closed. ‘Nessuno – he tried to argue – ha mai pensato a scrivere un libro intorno all’influenza delle botteghe aperte, sugl’infortuni matrimoniali del regno d’Italia’.<sup>25</sup> Yorick went on, lamenting that, despite continuous complaints about the tight circumstances for Italians, luxury (‘il lusso’) was spreading: wives wasted their husbands’ earnings on clothes. Then, out of the blue, Yorick interrupted his argument to start a discussion about a moderate who loved the republic as a polity,

<sup>24</sup> C. [Carlo Collodi], ‘La neutralità. Commedia in due atti con prologo’, *Fanfulla*, 10 July 1870.

<sup>25</sup> Yorick, ‘Domenica!...’, *Fanfulla*, 3 July 1870.

but hated the republicans. The digression, which went on for six paragraphs, was just a comparison: like the moderate, Yorick loved the shops, but hated the shopkeepers:

Un moderato, un consorte, di quelli che non hanno il coraggio della propria opinione, ripete spesso: mi piace la repubblica, ma non posso soffrire i repubblicani.

Cotesto gli è semplicemente un discorso imbecille.

A nessun uomo di buon senso verrebbe in testa di dire: mi piacerebbero i ciliegi... ma vorrei che non producessero ciliegie!...

Ora le repubbliche fanno dei repubblicani precisamente come i ciliegi fanno delle ciliegie!

La differenza è solamente nel nocciolo... i repubblicani sono più difficili a digerire!...

Anch'io dunque, scimmieggiando cotesto ragionamento d'una stupidità tutta parlamentare, dirò alla bella libera: mi piacciono le botteghe, ma i negozianti che ci stanno dentro non hanno affatto le mie simpatie.

The digression attacked the moderates who adhered to a particular political trend, the so-called *consorteria*. This was a parliamentary group informally constituted mainly of the most conservative MPs on the Right from Emilia, Tuscany and southern Italy. Yorick was criticising their approach to the Roman question, which was particularly cautious – it was bound to be resolved at Porta Pia a little more than two months later. It was the burning question of the moment, which explains why he decided to castigate some of the main actors. The constant use of suspension points in the midst of the argument suggests that the task of completing the line of reasoning be left to the reader. *Ora* and *dunque* are constantly used as signals to mark the turning points of the discourse: *ora* is used to summarise what has just been said and to introduce the heart of the matter, while *dunque* was employed to convey the idea of a logical and cogent conclusion.<sup>26</sup> Yorick's line of reasoning was consciously conducted on the edge of absurdity, as the continuous use of jokes seemed to suggest. But it was recreated through the imitation of the movements of a plausible discourse. If it was 'semplicemente un discorso imbecille', why was he following it? To demonstrate that the typical way of thinking in the parliament was stupid? Or that the moderates were cowards? Or that the republicans were stodgy? The paradox was deliberate, and the reader was left free to read whatever subliminal message he wanted, as there was no risk of being contradicted. His opinions were as legitimate as the opinions suggested by Yorick.

<sup>26</sup> Spitzer, *Lingua italiana*, pp. 326 (suspension), 281-82 (*dunque* and *ora*).

Then Yorick shifted to depicting a short *tableau*: a dialogue between husband and wife, where the wife forced the husband to accompany her on a shopping trip. The scene was constructed on a continuous set of allusions that tried to involve the reader in the situation. As in the rest of the article, the reader's imagination and belief were stimulated by the use of suspension points and the use of the second person plural. The suspension points perform a threefold role. In one passage, Yorick seemed to nod to his readers when he remarked on how women took advantage of their husbands' weak spots:

Le donne,... e specialmente le mogli, che lo sanno, speculano su quel difetto...

[...] quando la moglie annunzia una confessione da fare è sempre meglio averne paura... prima di toccare!

First, suspension points represented different cases of aposiopesis: for the journalist and his readers, what followed the suspensions should be taken for granted; a shared opinion and conviction was suggested, even if it was not printed.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, they aimed to reproduce the pragmatic aspects of the conversation (rhythm, timing and pauses), and to reinforce the illusion of a conversation in a text that was not meant to be performed.<sup>28</sup> Thirdly, they had an emotive function, as the aposiopesis, according to Spitzer, represents silence, which is the most intense part of speech.<sup>29</sup> In the case of the pronoun *voi*, it was used to address the public ('Quando non avete quattrini') when the journalist wanted to single out the 'lettore modello di massa'. In this case, the husband staged by Yorick represented the average bourgeois husband – and, therefore, 'ad assurgere in realtà a rappresentante della massa medesima'.<sup>30</sup>

The *tableau* ends in the couple's kitchen the subsequent morning, during breakfast, in a situation recalled in *Tristi amori*, the famous Italian bourgeois drama written by Giacosa in 1887. According to Yorick, 'la moglie si lamenta perché il burro è rincarito d'un centesimo al chilogrammo, e il marito bestemmia la tassa sul macinato, che in capo a un anno gli *rubà di tasca* dodici lire e trentadue centesimi...

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>28</sup> On the use of punctuation marks as a melodic element in the reproduction of the spoken dialogue see Giovanni Nencioni, 'L'interiezione nel dialogo di Pirandello', in *Tra grammatica e retorica. Da Dante a Pirandello* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 210-53 (pp. 211-18).

<sup>29</sup> Spitzer, *Lingua italiana*, p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

il pane de' suoi poveri figliuoli... che non ha!...'. The hypocrisy of the couple is summarised, again, in a parody of journalistic practice: if the husband 'sa scrivere', he sends an article to *La Riforma* or *La Nazione* to complain about the parlous state of the country. A letter – commented Yorick – 'sull'inettezza del governo che ci conduce all'anarchia per la strada del fallimento': and the use of the *ci* is almost an example of indirect speech, as it states the husband's opinion in the first person. But the remark is ambiguous: it could be read as an associative plural as well, and a critique of the government, or just scorn directed at an apathetic person.

Yorick's article was an omnium-gatherum of different themes and motives. In the *tableau*, he even took pleasure in producing detailed lists of the items of clothing looked at by the wife during the shopping trip. It was a 'practical list', as Umberto Eco would define it, just like Leporello's catalogue of women in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*:<sup>31</sup> 'nastri di velluto, passamani, nappe, ghiandine, alamari, cordoni, fiocchi e frangie', and again 'fodere di *cambrich*, di cencione, di tela doppia, trecciuoli, nastri, orlature...'. This was a typical feature of the humoristic novel, even though in the article it did not suggest any reference to the literary genre. But the original topic – Sunday as a day of the week – was simply a pretext for the elaboration of a text based on the most diverse material. The parody, in this case, was all-embracing, as the article ended with an ambiguous remark on journalistic writing: 'E così si scrivono i giornali!', Yorick concluded. The joke referred to both the tone of the letters published in newspapers by these kinds of family men, and on journalists' habit of writing plaintive articles that proved to be pharisaic. It could also have referred to the article he had just written, since it appeared in an isolated paragraph, at the end of the piece. Yorick's article was not a parody of a journal article, but a parody of *the* journal article, an overextending of the idea and entity of the article as the basic unit of meaning in a newspaper. Even if its features were confused and its limits blurred, such a process resulted in the creation of a completely new, original and unprecedented type of article.

The main advantages and disadvantages of articles like that discussed above derived from their parodic stance. As has already been said, to establish itself as a different newspaper, *Fanfulla* had to mark its distinctiveness from other newspapers.

<sup>31</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), p. 116.



Its journalists chose to do this by challenging the practice of their colleagues. But while they ridiculed it, they by no means intended to take the place of the press they were mocking. On the contrary, as the idea of ‘writing under erasure’ suggests, *Fanfulla* could be fully understood and appreciated only in relation to its competitors, and only when read in parallel with them. In other words, this particular parodic procedure retained a special relationship to the model. To use the taxonomy devised by Guido Almansi and Guido Fink in a pivotal essay on parody, the relationship to the model involved both a ‘perverse’ and a ‘consecrating’ parodic stance. The aim of the former is to diminish the model, in order to magnify its flaws and deficiencies. However, in the context of *Fanfulla* this kind of relationship had also an explanatory purpose, and took the nuance of what Almansi and Fink defined as ‘exegetic parody’.<sup>32</sup> It presupposed a special effort to understand and explain to the reader the characteristics of the model which were being deliberately targeted. At the same time, such a use of parody did not presuppose the will to destroy the model and the system of values on which it was based. The whole play was aimed to emancipate from an admired model, that of the rival political press, whose existence was not put into question. This kind of ‘passionate parody’, according to Almansi and Fink,<sup>33</sup> ultimately promoted the consecration of the model as a dangerous constant and familiar presence, with the power to exert an evil influence and to hamper any attempt to gain an original and independent voice. And the relationship of *Fanfulla* to its rivals was neither intended to be part of a dialectical dialogue, in search of political debate, mediation and synthesis, nor as research for an alternative space to describe a political and cultural alternative. It was merely the newspapers’ newspaper. It had to be derivative, since what *Fanfulla* wrote stemmed from what the other newspapers had already written. From this point of view, *Fanfulla* retained the function of a satirical newspaper.

From a purely textual point of view, the particular use of parody in *Fanfulla* performed a modal task. Alastair Fowler has defined the mode as the qualification of a genre, used to characterise its possible extension: a novel may be comic or an elegy may be pastoral. In his terminology, ‘when a modal term is linked with the name of a kind, it refers to a combined genre, in which the overall form is determined by the

<sup>32</sup> Guido Almansi and Guido Fink, *Quasi come. Parodia come letteratura. Letteratura come parodia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1976), p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

kind alone'.<sup>34</sup> The term *modal* may sound deceptive, as the idea of genre, in the historical period of journalism we are examining, was quite a loose one. Loose because the idea of historical or "fixed" genres suggested by literary theory ('kinds' in Fowler's terminology) had not been enacted in journalistic practice. Genre in journalism, as in Piacentini's remarks on the 'situazione', was still perceived as a container, a merely technical device for accelerating the article's composition.<sup>35</sup> The focus on humoristic prose as a unique and undifferentiated kind of discursive practice blocked the formation of a codified hierarchy of genres. Parody was identified with humoristic prose, and the organisation of the whole set of thematic, formal and rhetorical standards inevitably converged on the unique type of textuality admitted. In this sense, parody in *Fanfulla* was used as a mode, but it was the only mode admitted by the newspaper: it crossed the thresholds of genre and style. It was an element with the power of affecting all genres that could possibly appear in the form of an article.

At the same time, the mode of parody had another impact on *Fanfulla*, which affected the interpretations the newspaper insinuated to its readership. No article bore the author's real name. Such regular use of pseudonyms (and sometimes anonymity) can be interpreted as a sign of the editorial staff putting forward the 'corporate identity of the journal as a journal'.<sup>36</sup> The modal use of parody represented an isotopy, as it was a common practice shared by virtually all journalists; it was also the coherence that regulated the interpretation of the texts. Isotopy was, at a semantic level, what topicalisation was at a pragmatic level. As a pragmatic or 'cooperative' movement, topicalisation performed the duty of disclosing the semantic properties of a text or a group of texts. Isotopy, in turn, regulated the 'reading path', and allowed the interpretation of the text, assuring that the reader was able to grasp all the connections of the semantic elements.<sup>37</sup> At the same semantic level, the use of pen names allowed journalists to present themselves

<sup>34</sup> Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> Dallas Liddle has defined genres in the journalistic practice of Victorian journalism as 'technologies of discourse': see *The Dynamics of Genre: Journalism and the Practice of Literature in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville-London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 153.

<sup>36</sup> Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 201.

as disembodied authorities, bearers of the same set of values and languages, and a particular worldview, that were not necessarily those of the real writer of the article. Such practice produced an identification of the journalistic personas with their opinions, leaving the journalists' real identities untouched and uncompromised. As it was practised outside the conventions of literature, this form of self-distancing eventually allowed journalists to shrink from their own responsibilities in their commentaries on news.

Playing with anonymity may look like a pale reflection of the political use of satire in the period of the Risorgimento, but was also a product of the new political trend developing in Italy at the time – the culture of *trasformismo*. Hallin and Mancini noticed that the configuration of a political system in a particular historical period may have an impact on the media.<sup>38</sup> Both Piccardi and Scarfoglio agreed that the new model established by *Fanfulla* endemically spread in the Italian press after 1876, the year the moderate right-wing coalition, the *Destra storica*, was defeated in Parliament.<sup>39</sup> Valerio Castronovo claims that the 'rivoluzione del linguaggio giornalistico' allegedly carried out by *Fanfulla* and, later, by its rivals (notably the *Don Chisciotte* and the *Capitan Fracassa*) was only a pretext to hide 'manifestazioni pubblicistiche prive di vero mordente e di passione politica, improntate piuttosto ad un umorismo volutamente carico e ad effetto, di sapore sostanzialmente demagogico'.<sup>40</sup> This is overall true, but demagoguery may not be the key point here. In fact, the new journalistic language reflected the main feature, indeed the intimate nature, of Italian political praxis based on a system in which governments built their parliamentary majorities day after day by attracting their ephemeral supporters from unstable groups of interest, rather than a system that assumed a contraposition between two or more parties. *Fanfulla*'s textual strategies constituted an apt response to the ambiguous nature of an ever-shifting political debate, so that political discourse could be detached from heavy ideological issues and primed to align with the practical political needs of the moment.<sup>41</sup> Through *Fanfulla*, parody did not only become a particular type of journalistic practice: it informed the strategic discourse

<sup>38</sup> Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Piccardi, *Saggio*, pp. 222-23; Edoardo Scarfoglio, 'Cronaca bizantina. III. Il "Capitan Fracassa"', *La Domenica Letteraria*, y. II, no. 36, 9 September 1883.

<sup>40</sup> Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>41</sup> Giovanni Sabbatucci, *Il trasformismo come sistema. Saggio sulla storia politica dell'Italia unita* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003), pp. 29-30.

of *trasformismo*. As in the case of journalistic practice, parody could also hit the language and rituals of political debate that were reported by the press. As Ernesto Ragionieri has observed, ‘transformist’ practices were not aimed to the renewal of the ruling class or the enlargement of the political basis.<sup>42</sup> While *Fanfulla* mocked the language of a restricted group of political newspapers, parody equally allowed to handle and manoeuvre a political discourse that was ultimately confined to the skirmishes and verbal fencings of the same small political groups and personalities. Parody consented thus to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the political discourse at every level. The press thus contributed to ratify the impossibility for politics to take clear and firm stance on issues, in a regime in which political differences tended to be minimized and absorbed by the government as a whole.

\* \* \*

Parody thus proved to be, at one and the same time, the strength and the weakness of *Fanfulla*. The paper developed a radical critique of the traditional political newspaper and offered a reader-friendly alternative that was new, accessible and entertaining, in line with the dominant political discourse. However, in order to achieve this, the identity of the newspaper was sacrificed in some respects, as its critique was too focused on the traditional newspapers. Parody, in other words, prevented innovations that could have gained greater independence for *Fanfulla* and spread into the routine of journalistic practice. Even the radical example offered by Yorick’s article remained confined within the mode of parody, and destined to be interpreted according to the reading path established in the newspaper. The particular regime of the newspaper could be broken only outside of it, as the operation of Ferdinando Martini demonstrated.

<sup>42</sup> Ernesto Ragionieri, ‘La storia politica e sociale’, in *Storia d’Italia*, eds. Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti, 6 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1972-76), 4. *Dall’Unità a oggi*, pp. 1667-2832 (pp. 1741-42).



### CHAPTER 3

#### FERDINANDO MARTINI AND HIS *CHIACCHIERE*

Ferdinando Martini's collaboration with *Fanfulla* between 1871 and 1876 made him probably the first celebrity Italian journalist. His contribution to the newspaper was encapsulated in the daily front page column 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro' in which he commented on political current affairs. His articles followed the conversational style established by *Fanfulla*, but he gradually began to experiment with introducing cultural topics, initially within the political commentary and subsequently as autonomous subjects, often with no direct or obvious link to cultural current affairs. In Martini's work, for the first time in Italian journalism, culture came out of the *appendice* and was considered on a par with political information. Despite this major innovation, Martini's articles were constrained by the limitations of *Fanfulla*'s parodic regime and could not, therefore, gain autonomy and consequently could not serve as a new format for cultural information. It was only in 1876, after having left the newspaper, that Martini collected a selection of his columns in a book entitled *Fra un sigaro e l'altro*. By gathering together his ephemeral texts in book format, Martini subtracted them from the contingency of the periodical publication and ensured them longevity and stability. The stability stemmed from the individuation of a genre: the 'chiacchiere', which pointed at a conversational style of journalism that was starting to gain independence from *Fanfulla*. Thus codified as a genre, the 'chiacchiere' became an instrument that could be translated into different media. In 1879, Martini was called on to establish *Fanfulla della Domenica*, the paper's literary supplement. What the newspaper reader was offered with the literary supplement was something different from the literary journal. The new medium transformed cultural debate into a new dimension of cultural consumption, of which Martini's 'chiacchiere' became a fitting format.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, it investigates the translation of Martini's column 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro' into the genre of

‘chiacchiera’. In the second, it analyses the use of ‘chiacchiera’ within the framework of *Fanfulla della Domenica*.

### **1. Ferdinando Martini and *Fanfulla*: between politics and literature**

Born in Florence in 1841, Ferdinando Martini came from a family with a long involvement in politics. His father Vincenzo was finance secretary to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Ferdinando, on the other hand, took part in the Florentine movements for the unification of Italy and was investigated by the police for his journalistic activity. As a journalist, he worked for the satirical press that had come to occupy the place of the political press after the suppression of the latter in 1852. The young Martini also had literary ambitions. He made his debut as a playwright in 1863, while working as a teacher in secondary schools. In 1875 he was elected Member of Parliament, at the beginning of a long and felicitous political career that lasted for almost forty years.<sup>1</sup>

Martini’s regular involvement with *Fanfulla* started in 1871, but his popularity began with an article he wrote on Mazzini’s death in Pisa in 1872, where Martini was working as a schoolteacher. In similar fashion to a twentieth-century reporter (as he himself noted in his memoir), Martini was lucky enough to be in place and to be the first to send details of the event. Although he wrote for a royalist newspaper such as *Fanfulla*, he was the only journalist admitted to Mazzini’s deathbed. His account of the immediate moments after Mazzini’s death, and in particular his description of Mazzini’s most famous disciples rallied around the body, was a sensation. The article went around the world and was translated into many languages. ‘Avevo parlato nel *Fanfulla* del Mazzini con ammirata venerazione’, he wrote in his memoir, ‘mi stavano traducendo in svedese e in rumeno [...] l’articolo fu prima, anche, ristampato in moltissimi giornali d’Europa e

<sup>1</sup> Martini, as we have seen, wrote his own memoir. The first part, which included the period before Unification, was published in 1922, while the second, which extended to his experience in Eritrea up to 1907, was published in 1928. The two volumes are now collected in Vannini’s edition under the title *Confessioni e ricordi*. The best biography of Ferdinando Martini has been recently published by Raffaele Romanelli, *DBI 71* (2008). For a more detailed overview of his literary activity see Marino Biondi, ‘Un politico-letterato tra Italia e “Affrica”’: Ferdinando Martini’, in *La tradizione della patria. Letteratura e Risorgimento da Vittorio Alfieri a Ferdinando Martini* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2009), pp. 293-309.

d'America'.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the article's publication and his commemoration of Mazzini to his students in Pisa Martini was dismissed by the school, which persuaded him to become a full time journalist. Because of this exploit, hitherto unimaginable for an Italian journalist, Martini became responsible for *Fanfulla's* main column, which he wrote almost every day between 1871 and 1876 using the pen name *Fantasio*. Fantasio was the name Mazzini was given by one of his followers, the Italian exile Giovanni Ruffini, in his fortunate novel *Lorenzo Benoni, or Passages in the Life of an Italian*, published in Edinburgh in 1853.

Martini's background was similar to that of his colleagues: theatre and satirical journalism. Apart from a very brief sojourn in Vercelli, he had always lived in Tuscany; in Monsummano (his birthplace), Florence, Pisa and Leghorn. Many of *Fanfulla's* Tuscan journalists, from Yorick to Collodi, were part of his circle of friend, and shared the same political and cultural horizon. When Martini started writing for *Fanfulla* at the end of 1871 he immediately demonstrated his affinity with the newspaper. His articles, published under the general title 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro', usually occupied the first two, three or even four columns of the first page. Such a swift appearance suggests that the column had been carefully planned beforehand. The articles replicated all the features of conversational journalism already encountered in articles by Piacentini, Collodi and Yorick, but Martini's refinement, subtlety and mastery proved incomparably superior to those of his colleagues.

Three features characterised Martini's journalism: an emphasis on the conversational style of the language, a habit of keeping the argumentation on the brink of the paradox, and the inclusion of literary culture. However, as long as he wrote in *Fanfulla*, Martini was not able to fully overcome the limits of the newspaper that, as we have seen, imposed on its contributors the adoption of a parodic regime. His first piece, 'Penitenza', appeared on 3 December 1871 and already included derisive comments about rival newspapers.<sup>3</sup> According to Martini, it was impossible to read *L'Osservatore romano*, the Vatican's newspaper, without falling asleep. *La Riforma*, Crispi's paper, accused France of being weak and immoral but its own articles were weak. *La Gazzetta Ufficiale* was mocked as the

<sup>2</sup> Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> Fantasio [Ferdinando Martini], 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro. Penitenza', *Fanfulla*, 3 December 1871.



only newspaper capable of rejuvenating the Italian people and making them invincible. His critique found the readers of *Fanfulla* prepared, as it had been the most common kind of attack on the paper's competitors since the very first issue. The article was organised as a mechanism to dismantle the arguments of the other newspapers, with constant derogatory allusions to their practice.

This article is a good example in understanding the emphasis Martini put on the conversational strategies devised by *Fanfulla*. His purpose – in this, as well as in other articles – is marked by a considerable effort to form an association with the reader. This aim was achieved by operating at a twofold level. On the one hand, Martini carefully selected his content: the article is punctuated with cutting remarks directed at common things in the lives of *Fanfulla*'s readers, including liqueurs ('l'assenzio svizzero e il vermouth di Torino'), famous places like the fanciest cafés in Florence ('Doney e Spillmann posson chiudere bottega'), or even books popular among middle-class readers ('le satire del professore Fichert' and 'una dose di novelle del Dall'Ongaro'). On the other hand, as a seasoned playwright, Martini had full grasp of the possibilities offered by *Umgangssprache*. His journalistic persona was that of his readers' peer. Fantasio's eye was pointed at his target from the inside, from the same social and political stance as the readers he addressed: it was a strategy that could be defined as 'associative' and 'inclusive'. His reproduction of the movements of conversation had a persuasive intent. When he wrote:

*'Dico il vero, a questa relazione tra la immoralità e la debolezza io non ci avevo mai pensato [...] E non ci avrei mai posto mente se non avessi letto i giornali tedeschi di questi giorni'*

or

*Pensiamoci e pensiamoci sul serio. Credete a me, fratelli miei, l'immoralità mandata via dalla porta ritorna per la finestra.*<sup>4</sup>

he was using language structures to emotionally involve the reader in his argument. In all cases, such an intense use of strategies of persuasion was necessary to sustain arguments that were usually taken to the level of paradox and comic absurdity. The article 'Penitenza' was a false praise of German virtues that compared them with those of Sparta and emphasised the moral decline of France after the defeat of 1871.

<sup>4</sup> My emphasis.

The purpose of the article was to attack the position of Italian Germanophiles. Martini, a staunch Francophile,<sup>5</sup> sketched an imagined portrait of Europe under the austere moral influence of Germany that would even affect dietary habits. The article ended by praising the imagined future Italian life under the new moral regime, in which Italians were to become the new Spartans:

Spirito di Licurgo, che ci guardi dagli Elisi allietati! Ritorneranno i bei tempi dei costumi spartani. – Doney e Spillmann possono chiuder bottega. – Noi non ci ciberemo più che del brodetto e de' cavoli raccolti negli orti de' Lacedemoni!

Martini's communicative aim also had an impact on the form his articles took. In many cases, especially when he had to address a particular topic, he used the letter form, as in 1874 when he was involved in the parliamentary discussion of the school reform that was approved in 1876.

The space given to 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro' allowed Martini the liberty of choosing the topics for his articles. Right from the beginning, his collaboration was characterised by the organic inclusion of culture in the newspaper. In the political press, literary culture was traditionally relegated to the *appendice*, the lowest part of the front and occasionally second page. It was reserved for serialised fiction, book reviews and occasional general interest articles. In some cases, new books were briefly reviewed on the second and third pages. With Martini, however, literary culture was integrated into political journalism. Topics of national cultural interest acquired unprecedented importance – at the same time a subject of political discussion and an instrument to stimulate political discussion. Between 1872 and 1876, Martini constantly commented on the works of writers, playwrights and painters, intervened on education policies and wrote obituaries of authors and actors. Many of his interventions on literature generated political discussion. In 1874, for example, he wrote an article on the French *Bohème*, on the occasion of the death of the poet Armand Barthet. A few days later he felt forced to answer attacks from other newspapers on him for depreciating the political *Bohème* of the Commune period.<sup>6</sup> Martini also understood that articles published in newspapers should not have the same argumentative structure as an academic essay. The articles in the

<sup>5</sup> Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana*, pp. 109-11.

<sup>6</sup> Fantasio [Ferdinando Martini], 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro. Viaggio nel paese di bohème', *Fanfulla*, 5 March 1874 and Id., 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro', 12 March 1874.

*appendici* were often published in series of two or three instalments, as if they were written for a specialist journal. Martini's articles were always concluded within the daily space of the column 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro' and abounded in anecdotes and witticism.

Martini also realised that within the framework of 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro' he could accommodate articles that had only tenuous links to cultural current affairs. In many cases, the articles resulted from a lack of political news – fillers in other words – when the newspaper needed one more article in order to be finished and sent to the typography. In the issue of 26 June 1872, Martini published an untitled piece about the coming of the summer. Although the beginning of summer was not in itself news, Martini wrote two columns on the topic. He considered summer as the most democratic season because the heat wave, 'la canicola', did not spare anybody, from the rich man to 'il proletario'. In the body of the article, he evoked the song of the cicadas and defended their dignity against a literary tradition that condemned them:

Dell'estate una sola cosa amo: le cicale; povero insetto a cui è toccata la stessa sorte di Lucrezia Borgia; – Lucrezia Borgia calunniata da Victor Hugo per il gusto di fare un dramma; la cicala calunniata da Fontaine per mettere insieme una favola in cui manca una sola cosa: il senso comune.

Ve lo ricordate?

«La cigale ayant chanté

«Tout l'été,

«Se trouva fort dépourvue

«Quand la bise fut venue.»

Nessun dubbio, povera cicala, che la si trovasse maluccio quando vennero i geli del novembre... Povera cicala! a quel tempo era morta.<sup>7</sup>

The series of associations was dictated by a taste for paradox. The mention of Lucrezia Borgia and Hugo's homonymous play was unnecessary but helped to reinforce his defence of the insect and of one of the most notorious protagonists of the Italian Renaissance. The mention of Hugo was deliberate; a few months previously the French writer had published *L'Année terrible*, his successful collection of poems on the experience of the Commune in Paris, and Martini's article began with reference to the 'partigiani della Comune'. The short quotation from La Fontaine, preceded by an address to the reader, reproduced the famous verses in a social context.

<sup>7</sup> Fantasio [Ferdinando Martini], 'Fra un sigaro e l'altro', *Fanfulla*, 26 June 1872.

The whole article was a divagation, a continuous addition of apparently unrelated images, jokes and puns. Politics, current affairs and culture, tackled by Martini with his usual and corrosive *facezie*, were mixed with evocations of the season that seemed drawn from Romantic poetry. For example, one description is reminiscent of the poems of Horace and their nineteenth-century imitations – although the lyrical effusion concludes with an ironic remark about the lack of water in Rome during the summer:

Nell'inverno, i dolci dormiveglia presso al camino dove crepita la stipa, sono contesi al povero: nell'estate c'è acqua per tutti, meno per le strade di Roma.

Often, a direct quotation served to reinforce the imagery of a maritime landscape, where the use of the aposiopesis was meant to prolong the reader's involvement with the description:

[...] lungo le rive dell'Adriatico, per le spiagge del Mediterraneo alita la fresca brezza marina...

Il sole saetta sul curvo lido rosei splendori. Le Naiadi vi aspettano vagabonde e sorridenti; le Naiadi che vi culleranno, insidiando forse, sulle molli braccia...

Una voce dallo scoglio susurra il verso del vecchio Pindaro: «Ottima è l'acqua!». Ed un'altra risponde cantando i versi di Enrico Heine:

«... è una fragranza  
«In ogni dove, e un riso,  
«E un mormorar diverso e un rifiatare,  
«E nell'azzurro ciel cantan li uccelli:  
«Il mare! il mare!».

The quotation from Heine was not gratuitous, but appealed to the reader's imagination. That kind of imagery had just been revamped by none other than Giosuè Carducci in his *Primavere elleniche*, a very successful series of poems characterised by their frequent use of traditional maritime classical mythology.<sup>8</sup>

Articles like this one frequently appeared in Martini's writing for *Fanfulla*. However, despite the contingent nature of articles written to supplement the lack of news, they did retain a parodic intent. They were the expression of the journalist's liberty to take a break from the heavy routine of commenting on political life, but this liberty was seen as only an occasional swerve. In a meta-journalistic claim at the

<sup>8</sup> See Mario Praz, 'Il "classicismo" di Giosuè Carducci', in *Gusto neoclassico* (Milan: BUR, 2003), pp. 359-74.

end of the article on summer, Martini wrote: ‘Noi scrittori di articoli leggeri – come dicono i pedanti che non li fanno né leggeri, né gravi – seguiranno intanto a pensare, a scrivere per voi...’. The codification and practice of the article – of every kind of was article – was still to be read against the standard of the other newspapers.

As we have seen, Martini collected many of his articles on cultural topics in a volume entitled *Fra un sigaro e l'altro*, published in 1876 by one of the major Italian publishers of the time, Gaetano Brigola. Brigola specialised in these new books collecting texts that had appeared in the periodical press.<sup>9</sup> On the overall, the translation from the periodical to the book entailed a “re-functionalisation” of the text. In other words, the text is called to perform a new function, while only some of its original features are recovered. From this point of view, as Margaret Beetham has noticed, in the history of a text this passage is always important because it signifies ‘the rescue of the text’.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, in book form the text is saved from the destiny of the newspaper, which is to sink into oblivion within a few hours of publication, immediately replaced by new production. On the other, the book requires that the text be recognisable as a genre and must correspond to rules of consistency and stability that derive from the fact that the sequence of texts is not open to limitless additions, as in a newspaper. Within a single issue of *Fanfulla*, the articles were an unstable entity: day after day, there was room to offer different typologies of texts and to discuss and destroy some or all of their features. The book lived in a completely different domain than did the press, as it did not participate in *Fanfulla*’s daily fight to find its own communicational space among other newspapers. Martini could regain his authorial identity: the book bore his full name and his ‘putative responsibility’.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Martini got rid of the most contingent traces of journalistic practice. When ‘Penitenza’ was reprinted in 1876,

<sup>9</sup> Giovanni Ragone, ‘La letteratura e il consumo: un profilo dei generi e dei modelli nell’editoria italiana (1845-1925)’, in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa, 6 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1982-1986), 2. *Produzione e consumo* (1983), pp. 687-772 (pp. 726-27). In 1875, as a sign of his interest in the world of the press, Brigola had published the repertoire *La stampa periodica. Il commercio dei libri e la tipografia in Italia* by Giuseppe Ottino, one of the very first collections of the Italian publishing sector. After Martini’s book, Brigola published in turn all the journalistic writing of Luigi Capuana, from *Profili di donne* (1877) to the two collections of *Studii sulla letteratura contemporanea*, originally appeared in newspapers and literary supplements (1880 and 1882).

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Beetham, ‘Towards a Theory of the Periodicals as a Publishing Genre’, in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, eds. Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 19-32 (pp. 27-28).

<sup>11</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 40.

Martini revised it and eliminated the section on rival newspapers.<sup>12</sup> With the addition of a subtitle, *Chiacchiere di Fantasio*, the original title of the column, ‘Fra un sigaro e l’altro’, was deprived of its function as a ‘parageneric label’ that, in the newspaper, was used to underline a genre innovation.<sup>13</sup> Martini elevated ‘chiacchiere’ to the dignity of genre label, which gave his articles the fixity of a codified genre – the first codification of a journalistic genre in Italy. The term ‘chiacchiere’, which recalled the French *causerie*, explicitly recognised the conversational character of *Fanfulla*’s journalism.

As already anticipated in the previous chapter, Alastair Fowler has individuated a variety of features that characterise the articulation of a genre. According to his classification, it is possible to provide a precise description of the genre of the pieces that appeared in the book *Fra un sigaro e l’altro*.<sup>14</sup>

- a) *Distinctive representational aspect*: the texts, as the subtitles chosen by Martini suggested, were classified as ‘chiacchiere’, thus underlining their discursive feature.
- b) *External structure*: the text, which in the newspaper was divided in columns, retained the characteristics of the original collocation. It was characterised by very short paragraphs and the blocks of text were divided by short white spaces to underline a change of topic. The same structure was preserved in the book.
- c) *Size*: in the newspaper, the length of Martini’s articles rarely overflowed the last column on a four-column page. Moreover, the text occupied only two-thirds of the page, with the bottom of the page occupied by the *appendice*. In the book, the length of the text varied according to the format and editing. But the articles rarely exceeded the average length of ten pages when printed in the book.
- d) *Subject*: the range of subjects appears to be unlimited and not easily identified at the level of the single article or across the entire output. As Fowler has underlined, even ‘writing about “no subject” itself implies a choice of genre. [...] Without pretending that every kind has a precise

<sup>12</sup> Ferdinando Martini, *Fra un sigaro e l’altro. Chiacchiere di Fantasio* (Milan: Brigola, 1876), pp. 11-14.

<sup>13</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 60-74. The analysis is limited to the features that appear in a genre in prose. Features pertaining to poetry, such as metrical structure, are not taken into account.

range of subjects all its own, we can claim the obverse: that no kind is indifferent to subject'.<sup>15</sup> As we have already underlined, Martini's articles could accommodate virtually every subject, but we can develop the hypothesis that subjects that could be included in the 'chiacchiere' were limited only by the criteria that they be topics of journalistic interest, subjects that could be made newsworthy as occasions in the 'journalistic calendar'. The subject was, then, dependent on the occasion, but the main feature of Martini's 'chiacchiere' was its relevance to political and cultural current affairs.

- e) *Values*: the textual structure elaborated in *Fanfulla*, and perpetuated by Martini, was a parody of the rival press. In the book, the texts were offered as an entertaining discussion on themes of topical interest and at times assumed the value of a testimony of the cultural and political debate of a particular period. The value of the 'chiacchiere' corresponded with their own subject, and could be charged with different functions and meanings according to the purpose for which they were written.
- f) *Mood or emotional coloration*: the mood of the genre is that of a conversation in a dimension of amusement and relaxation. Even the suggested fruition of the single article – during leisure time, smoking a cigar – denoted a dimension of amusement.
- g) *Style*: from a rhetorical point of view, the purpose of the *genus medium*, or middle style, in the theory of styles was *delectare*. The reproduction of conversation met the requirements of clarity, simplicity and vivacity that had been individuated as the style of *Fanfulla*'s opening column.
- h) *The reader's task*: through the adoption of the structures of conversation, the reader was invited to follow along, as if the journalist were speaking to him or a group of people around him. The 'associative' strategies advanced by Martini encouraged the reader to feel part of a group that shared the same set of values.

With the 'rescue' of his texts, Martini demonstrated that the genre was able to overcome the limitation imposed by *Fanfulla*'s parodic regime and be translated into

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

other media. In addition, he suggested that the ‘chiacchiera’ model could host in a newspaper not only the political but also the broader cultural debate. Although lacking the depth of a specialist journal essay, ‘chiacchiera’ could provide hints on cultural current affairs, and at the same time offer an entertaining digression that mentioned poems, books or plays on the cultural horizon of its readers.

The potential of ‘chiacchiera’ to host cultural news at the same level as political news was not fully appreciated until the beginning of the 1870s. Towards the end of the decade, newspaper readership started to ask for more cultural news. The response from the press was the literary supplement, a product capable of offering a fair amount of information on happenings in the world of cultural production and providing entertainment. In 1879, *Fanfulla* was the first newspaper to meet readers’ demands and it encountered immediate success.

## **2. Remediation and cultural recycling: the world of *Fanfulla della Domenica***

In 1879, *Fanfulla* launched its literary supplement, *Fanfulla della Domenica*, which appeared every Sunday between 27 July 1879 and 31 October 1919.<sup>16</sup> Martini was its first editor until his departure in 1882. In 1879 *Fanfulla della Domenica* was one of countless literary periodicals in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Its apparent originality lay in the fact that it was the supplement of a political newspaper. The idea, however, was not new; it had at least one competitor. A Piedmontese writer, Vittorio Bersezio, the famous author of the play *Le miserie di Monsù Travett* and a widely feared literary critic, had already established the *Gazzetta letteraria* in 1877 as the literary supplement of *Gazzetta Piemontese*, the forebear of *La Stampa*.<sup>18</sup>

The success of *Fanfulla della Domenica* was partly due to its national distribution. *Fanfulla* and its supplement benefited from a wide circulation driven by Ernesto Emanuele Oblieght, who was responsible for the management of publicity and distribution. Oblieght’s nationality and the origin of his fortune have never been

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the supplement and an account of the literature see Antonia Arslan and Maria Grazia Raffeale, *Fanfulla della Domenica* (Treviso: Canova, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> For a full list see *I periodici letterari dell’Ottocento. Indice ragionato (collaboratori e testate)*, eds. Alessandra Briganti, Camilla Cattarulla and Franco D’Intino (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Valerio Castronovo, “*La Stampa*” 1867-1925. *Un’idea di democrazia liberale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1987), pp. 45-47.



fully clarified;<sup>19</sup> he began his career as a press agent in Tuscany between the 1860s and 1870s, and quickly expanded his business so that in less than ten years his *Società generale italiana per la pubblicità* controlled publicity for more than fifteen major Italian newspapers – of varying political orientations – and countless local gazettes.

But much of the supplement's success stemmed from its identification with *Fanfulla*. The printed papers looked identical: four pages in broadsheet format, each composed over four columns. While the fourth page of the Sunday paper was devoted to publicity, in the first three the reader could find an editorial that tackled current cultural affairs or commented on the issues of the week, book reviews, brief bibliographical notes, often a piece of literature (a short story, *novella*, or lyric poem) and a selection of 'varietà' – short articles on a wide variety of themes.

The literary supplement was a new medium that linked together the different practices of the literary journal and the daily newspaper. Literary journals offered new and original works that could immediately be recognised as literary (the *novella*, novels, poems). At the same time, in essays and the often detailed discussion and lengthy reviews of books and other journals, they provided in-depth analysis of, and an active contribution to, the ongoing cultural debate. The literary supplement, instead, represented a compromise between the journal and the daily newspaper, both of which are characterised by a degree of closure. A close form limits alternative options, offering the reader only a single possible textual interpretation. In a periodical, every issue must differ from the preceding issue and work as part of a series – as an autonomous unit that must produce meaning. It is, at one and the same time, an open-ended and end-stopped form.<sup>20</sup> The main difference between a journal and a newspaper relates to time; a journal has a higher degree of openness because disseminated over a longer period, a fundamental dimension that encourages readers to broaden their cultural experience in between two issues. Readers may feel encouraged to read a book or an article in another review, or to attend a theatrical or musical performance. The newspaper does not assume that readers should have enjoyed any kind of cultural experience or deepened the content of an article from

<sup>19</sup> Oblieght's real name was Ernő Obladt: see the excellent recent biography by Andrea Moroni in *DBI* 79 (2013), with new data and documents. The structure of his company and trust has never been studied, and the nature of his influence on the political trend of the newspapers he controlled is not clear.

<sup>20</sup> Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodicals as a Publishing Genre', pp. 27-28.

the earlier issue in the period between two issues (usually 24 hours). Time plays a determinant role also in the fruition of single articles. In a journal, articles are long (although not necessarily), they can be split into instalments and spread across more than one issue and it is expected that a reader reads them attentively and perhaps re-read them. In a newspaper, on the contrary, articles are usually short, are not usually published in instalments (apart, of course, from serialised novels) and a re-reading at a later time is not expected, and not likely to occur.

In the particular case of the Sunday newspaper and its supplement, their articles were meant for leisure time, the pause in the week, the socially acknowledged break from the disciplined time dedicated to work. The supplement was not aimed at the public's contribution or direct involvement in the cultural debate. On the contrary, it carried out a selection in the literary market, with the aim of affecting its readership's choices and influencing and steering its tastes, feelings and likings for certain authors and books, just as the newspaper aimed to approach, influence and direct its political leanings. The aim of both newspaper and supplement was persuasive in nature, not dialectical. As Habermas pointed out, the space for engagement and debate had been replaced by consumption.<sup>21</sup> In this sense the adoption of the newspaper format constituted a representation of one medium, the newspaper, into another medium, the supplement. It is a phenomenon that two media scholars have defined as *remediation*.<sup>22</sup> The association of the literary supplement with the newspaper, and the supposed modality of their reading – one after the other – placed the two different publications on the same level. The newspaper was represented in the supplement, and the supplement acted as a cultural newspaper.

The identification of culture with news marked a profound shift that was occurring in the world of cultural production. *Fanfulla della Domenica*, and the other supplements that flourished after it, can be approached on a twofold level. They positively contributed to cultural dissemination and to a general rejuvenation of readership by establishing a closer contact between producers and consumers. A new troop of writers, journalist, amateurs and *dilettanti* was recruited for the task of contributing to the new medium. This function also consisted in a reshuffling,

<sup>21</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 45.

refashioning, dilution and popularisation of culture that was taken with the utmost seriousness by the audience, and contributed to the creation of a new cultural discourse in post-unification Italy as described by Fabio Finotti in his enquiry on the diffusion of the Decadent movement in *fin-de-siècle* Italy.<sup>23</sup> With the transformation of culture into a commodity, the reader did not require rigorous training to comprehend and contribute to an understanding of the new ‘cultural goods’. On the contrary, as Habermas observed, the new situation ‘guaranteed an enjoyment without being tied to stringent presuppositions [...] a kind of experience which is not cumulative but regressive’.<sup>24</sup>

This new and specific use of culture was officially inaugurated by *Fanfulla della Domenica* in 1879. It was a gigantic operation of cultural recycling, perhaps the first of its kind in Italy. According to Jean Baudrillard, the dimension of cultural recycling is not a rational process of accumulation of cultural capital, but a social process comparable to that of fashion, and thus a process of cultural consumption.<sup>25</sup> If newspapers and, later, literary supplements promoted a revitalisation of the literary world that was apparently patterned after the more advanced position of the cultural *avant-garde*, the nature of their action was closely bound to the same cycle of fashion. They continuously revamped the legacy of cultural tradition and submitted the process of theoretical and critical elaboration to the ‘principle of being-up-to-the-minute’.<sup>26</sup> Culture had been identified with the medium, and was produced according to the procedures and codes of the medium itself – procedures that Baudrillard described as a mere ‘play on forms and technology’ in which the same distinction between ‘avant-garde creations’ and ‘mass culture’ is nullified: ‘The latter tends to combine stereotyped themes and (ideological, folkloric, sentimental, moral, historical) contents, while the former combines forms and modes of expression’.<sup>27</sup> It was a kind of production shaped by a combination of formal patterns and themes composed according to the most fashionable literary trends of the time.

<sup>23</sup> Fabio Finotti, *Sistema letterario e diffusione del Decadentismo nell’Italia di fine ’800. Il carteggio Vittorio Pica-Neera* (Florence: Olschki, 1988), pp. 25-60.

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Sage 1998), p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Martini had deduced a fitting format for his task, and was rewarded with an average sale of 16,000 copies per week.<sup>28</sup> When he ventured further towards greater specialisation, the trend reversed: at the beginning of 1880, he noticed that *Fanfulla della Domenica* was losing subscribers; almost 700 out of 8,000 cancelled their subscriptions because they felt the supplement lacked variety and was not sufficiently exciting. There were two reasons for this; the first was the length of the articles. The problem of length, usually neglected by historians of journalism, was probably the main cause of trouble for Martini and his collaborators. Martini handled the issue by paying his collaborators according to word length, but the fee was inversely proportional to the length of their articles: the more they wrote, the less they gained. This was the agreement Enrico Nencioni reached with Martini:

ora sarei pagato secondo la nuova tariffa [...] che mi avrebbe dato di articoli lunghi come Poesia di Roma e Carducci £ 65 – (dando 5 soldi il rigo per le 1<sup>e</sup> 200 righe, e 3 soldi per le altre 100, da 300 in là niente – talché un articolo di 2 colonne verrebbe a 50 lire, e di 3 o poco più a 65.).<sup>29</sup>

This letter is of the utmost importance in clarifying a vital point – that the collaborators of *Fanfulla della Domenica* did not have any interest in writing long articles and that they were discouraged by a strict editorial policy from doing so. Martini explained his reasons to his future collaborator Guido Biagi in June 1880:

Dopo un anno di prova, sono in grado di sapere quel che i lettori vogliono... o almeno quel che non vogliono. Non vogliono articoli di oltre tre colonne. [...] Se vedesse le cartoline e le lettere che ricevo ora al rinnovarsi dell'associazione! È un plebiscito: suonano presso a poco tutte così: “Va bene, va benone il vostro giornale: ci piace: ma, per carità, non ci date scritti che vadano più in là di due colonne o tre, perché è raro che più lunghi di così si leggano volentieri”. [...] Già avevo tentato di infrenare, limitando il compenso alle 300 linee: ora debbo assolutamente andar più in là: e quando lo scritto oltrepassi certi limiti rimandarlo senza leggerlo, per non lasciarmi invogliare dall'argomento attraente o dalla forma nitida e viva.<sup>30</sup>

Martini himself appeared quite puzzled by the enthusiastic remarks of the readers, who seemed to care more about the length of an article than its quality – quality which, for the editor-in-chief, would have consisted of interesting topics and fine

<sup>28</sup> Ferdinando Martini, *Lettere (1860-1928)*, [ed. Ugo Ojetto] (Milan: Mondadori, 1934), p. 102 (Martini to Enrico Nencioni, Rome 11 August 1880).

<sup>29</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini 20, 10, 11 (Nencioni to Martini, [Naples] 12 April [1880]).

<sup>30</sup> Ferdinando Martini, *Lettere*, pp. 95-96 (Martini to Biagi, Rome 20 June 1880).

writing, regardless of length. But no article, regardless of purpose or genre, was allowed to be longer than three columns.

The second reason for the fall in sales was the way in which cultural news was approached. Martini confessed to one of his collaborators that he had received a letter from 35 former subscribers in Milan,

i quali in sostanza dicono: “Prima di rinnovare l’associazione staremo a vedere che strada pigliate [...] Noi di *alte questioni letterarie* non possiamo interessarci: dunque, o fatela finita co’ giambi e co’ gli anapesti, o vi piantiamo per sempre. E articoli lunghi non ce ne date, perché non li leggiamo”.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to confirming the appetite for shorter pieces, the Milanese subscribers made a point of declaring themselves uninterested in literary technicalities. They mentioned the *giambi* and the *anapesti* in the wake of the debate on metrics and prosody begun in 1877 after the publication of Carducci’s *Odi barbare*. The topic was unlikely to have been interesting to the average reader, who had already endured an article by Guido Mazzoni entitled ‘Spigolature per servire alla storia della Metrica in Italia’ (29 February), and another by Ruggiero Bonghi with a similar title, ‘Spigolature metriche’ (6 June). At that point, Martini had to intervene and prevent Giuseppe Chiarini from replying to Bonghi on the same topic.<sup>32</sup>

The public wanted news, and not in great depth. *Attualità* was the word that Martini used to explain the kind of articles he wanted from his collaborators. In another letter to Chiarini, who was trying to have published an erudite article by his son-in-law Guido Mazzoni, Martini pointed out that,

senza mutare l’indole del foglio, [it is necessary to] arrendersi un po’ alle istanze altrui, scriver più breve, trattare un po’ di letteratura soltanto; tra gli argomenti scegliere i più ameni, e dove sia necessario porgere *succhi amari* di quando in quando aver cura di di aspergere gli orli del bicchiere di *soave licore*.<sup>33</sup>

The famous Lucretian metaphor, quoted here as reworked by Torquato Tasso in the proem to *Gerusalemme liberata*, was inspired by another tenet of Western culture: Horace’s *utile dulci misceri*. There was no ideal reason behind it, however: ‘c’è il rischio di fare alle capate co’ muriccioli’, Martini claimed – translated from Tuscan

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 98 (Martini to Biagi, Rome 4 July 1880).

<sup>32</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini, 8, 23, 1-3 (three undated letters of Chiarini to Martini).

<sup>33</sup> Martini, *Lettere*, p. 99 (Martini to Chiarini, Rome 9 July 1880).

to English, it would read *grosso modo* as 'it's better to bow than to break'. In order not to break, it was necessary to please the readership. There were three rules: to offer a variety of topics that went beyond literature; to amuse; to keep the public informed. In the desire for *attualità* lay the similarity of the supplement and the political newspaper.

The technical jargon of literary theory was affected by cultural recycling as well. The meaning and the sense of words lost their univocity, as technical terms were used in a way that was detached from their original theoretical background. Words such as 'realismo', 'romanticismo' or 'classicismo', as well as philosophical terms like 'forma', 'idea' or 'immaginazione', became part of a greater repertoire that Silvio Lanaro has defined as a 'parlato' – a generic vocabulary capable of penetrating all strata of society through the work of 'romanzieri d'appendice, giornalisti plebei, capitani al balcone, istruttori e confessori del *pagus cattolico*'.<sup>34</sup>

Cultural recycling influenced the formation of an audience for the new media. The readers' judgement became central to the process of production of the text, which acquired its meaning in the interaction with the public and its expectations.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the dimension of recycling, with its regressive character, pursued the production of texts aimed to find the gratification of the audience. The kind of message that was created was not intended to be polysemic and favour different interpretations, but the readers were rather expected to follow the producer-intended meaning of it. The readership was called on to express its judgment and to condition and influence editorial policy. At the same time, cultural recycling favoured the exchange of the roles of producers and consumers, and redefined the meaning of culture and literature. Everything that was published in the pages of the supplement had to be considered as culture. Everyone capable of publishing had to be included among the number of those admitted to the world of cultural production. Journalism was ready to gain its independence and assert new operational strategies: a road that passed through seduction and transformation of the audience into a collaborative force that could ensure the life and reproduction of the media system. Martini and, among his collaborators, Nencioni, as well as many

<sup>34</sup> Silvio Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro. Saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia 1870-1925*, 2nd edn (Venice: Marsilio, 1988), p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, ed. Paul De Man, trans. Timothy Bathi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 3-45 (p. 15).

others of their generation, only partially realised the implications of the new trend they contributed to establishing. Despite advocating themselves to the old generation of writers, it was not in their interest to back out of the system that had sanctioned their success.

Ferdinando Martini could easily translate his ‘chiacchiere’ into the new framework of the literary supplement. Throughout the period of his editorship, he published a column every Sunday entitled ‘Chiacchiere della Domenica’, between one and three columns long, in which he expressed his opinions on the main issues of cultural interest. Within the new form of the literary supplement, the conversation acquired a completely different quality for Martini. Free from the ties of the political commentary, he could bring the cultural conversation back to the sociability of the bourgeois *salotto* and its archetype: seventeenth- and eighteenth-century salons and courts. He was very keen on this topic and, in one of his very first ‘Chiacchiere della Domenica’, wallowed in a bout of nostalgia for the bygone era of aristocratic conversation:

Le corti del secolo XVIII! Qual è di noi che anche sapendo vita, morte e miracoli delle favorite di Luigi XV, avendo a memoria la lista dei debiti di Giorgio III, essendo istrutto delle munificenze di quella gran Caterina che spese, secondo i conti del Castera, sei milioni per gratificarsi i *filosofi* e 490 per mantenere gli amanti; [...] E i salotti! Chi sa dirmi qualcosa, per esempio, delle conversazioni in casa del principe di Craon o del marchese Rinuccini a Firenze se non che furono famose anche fuori d’Italia per la decente gaiezza, per la dignitosa affabilità?<sup>36</sup>

This taste for the courts of the *ancien régime* was part of a greater feeling of nostalgia for that period that continued to characterise *Fanfulla della Domenica* even after Martini’s departure. Such interest may be interpreted as a reaction to the decline of the salons from the 1880s. In Gabriella Romani’s opinion, the progressive disappearance of this important institution transported the cultural traditions of sociability into the framework of newspapers.<sup>37</sup> The appeal of the *bienséances* – the unwritten law that established the superiority of the aristocracy in the context of sociability and regulated conversation, behaviour, *loisir* and amusement – acquired a

<sup>36</sup> Ferdinando Martini, ‘Chiacchiere della Domenica’, *Fanfulla della Domenica*, y. I, no. 3, 10 August 1879.

<sup>37</sup> Gabriella Romani, *Postal Culture. Writing and Reading Letters in Post-Unification Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 59.

public dimension and became a feature of the literary supplement.<sup>38</sup> Certain values from courtly society were equated with those of the newspaper. Readers who could understand and share them proved their social and cultural superiority. It was a cultural preference that operated as a sign of distinction. The qualities and values of the courts and the salons were summarised in the practice of the written conversation, which guaranteed a sort of ‘mondanité médiatique’ conveyed through the mediation of writing.<sup>39</sup> The ‘conversational’ style of the ‘chiacchiere’ suggested that Martini linked them to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century value of *honnêteté* – the ‘decente gaiezza’ and the ‘dignitosa affabilità’ he hinted at. The ‘chiacchiere’ were now charged with an ethical value.

In his famous reflections and self-criticism written in 1915, Benedetto Croce recalled that as a young student he tried to replicate the style of Martini’s writings: ‘lettore di giornali letterarî, e soprattutto del *Fanfulla della Domenica* del Martini [...] introducevo nei miei componimenti lo stile disinvolto di quei giornali, più adatto alla mia indole di quello poetico o enfatico [...]’.<sup>40</sup> The success of Martini’s ‘chiacchiere’ may thus be said to be associated with the renewal of cultural dissemination promoted by the literary supplements. As Croce’s testimony suggests, they were two faces of the same coin: culture was identified with the means of its dissemination – the literary supplement and the ‘chiacchiera’, and all later attempts to alter the established pattern were to prove not as successful.

\* \* \*

The process of cultural dissemination envisaged in *Fanfulla* and realised by *Fanfulla della Domenica* benefited from Ferdinando Martini’s mediation. With the column ‘Fra un sigaro e l’altro’, he was able to elaborate the very first journalistic genre in Italy, the ‘chiacchiera’. It was brief, characterised by the conversational tone of *Fanfulla*, and it had been created for a brand of information that did not require any analysis. The ‘chiacchiera’ met the needs of the literary supplement, and was used as

<sup>38</sup> On *bienséances* see Benedetta Craveri, *La civiltà della conversazione* (Milan: Adelphi, 2001), p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Guillaume Pinson, ‘Le carnet mondain vers 1890: un aspect de la sociabilité médiatique’, *French Studies*, LX, 2006, 191-204 (p. 202).

<sup>40</sup> Benedetto Croce, ‘Contributo alla critica di me stesso’, in *Filosofia – Poesia – Storia. Pagine tratte da tutte le opere a cura dell’autore* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1951), pp. 1137-74 (p. 1143). Further evidence in Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita*, 11th edn (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011), pp. 112-13.



a seductive means to spread the discourse established in the new medium, based on cultural recycling. And, within the framework of the literary supplement, the 'chiacchiera' underwent a further momentous transformation, which took place in *Fanfulla della Domenica* as a result of the work of one of Martini's most active collaborators: Enrico Nencioni.

## CHAPTER 4

### ENRICO NENCIONI AND HIS ‘ROUNDABOUT PAPERS’

Enrico Nencioni was a literary journalist whose activity spanned from 1879 to his death in 1896. In 1882 he started to publish the ‘Roundabout Papers’ in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, inspired by Thackeray’s homonymous articles. The ‘Roundabout Papers’ embodied Nencioni’s personal idea of cultural journalism. They consisted of a series of digressions on the most disparate cultural topics (art, music, literature), usually sparked by a particular event or moment in the journalist’s life. The ‘Roundabout Papers’ were the first journalistic genre that, in Italy, proposed itself as a product endowed with a creative content and literary qualities. Despite the intrinsic limits of the experiment, Nencioni’s articles pioneered a new approach to journalism, based on the mediating subjectivity of the journalist as a person capable of suggesting a new approach to cultural experience.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it proposes a new interpretation of the figure of Nencioni as a journalist, reconstructing the beginnings of his activity during the period when he acted as Martini’s assistant at *Fanfulla della Domenica*. Secondly, it investigates how Nencioni adapted the British sketch model, and how he used it in his ‘Roundabout Papers’.

#### **1. Enrico Nencioni, a nineteenth-century journalist**

Giuliana Pieri has recently restored the nineteenth-century figure of Enrico Nencioni, whom she has defined as ‘the single most important cultural mediator of Umbertine Italy’.<sup>1</sup> Pieri emphasises Nencioni’s lifelong activity as that of the most accomplished enthusiast of English literature during the last two decades of the

<sup>1</sup> Giuliana Pieri, *The Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Fin de siècle Italy. Art, Beauty, and Culture* (Leeds: Maney, 2007), p. 40. See also Ead., ‘Enrico Nencioni. An Italian Victorian’, in *Biographies and Autobiographies in Modern Italy: A Festschrift for John Woodhouse*, eds. Peter Hainsworth and Martin McLaughlin (Leeds: Maney, 2007), pp. 38-54.

century, as well as the role he played in the diffusion of pre-Raphaelite culture in *fin-de-siècle* Italy. Such a portrait of Nencioni's work became standard after 1943, when Luigi Russo defined him a 'scrittore europeizzante', thus privileging the part of Nencioni's work dedicated to foreign literatures.<sup>2</sup> However, there is a dual risk entailed in this approach. On the one hand, it considers only this particular expertise of Nencioni, without taking into consideration his strenuous engagement in a number of other fields, as well as his personal literary activity. On the other, the approach routinely neglects the medium through which Nencioni managed to unfold his cultural mediation.

A close examination of his unpublished correspondence reveals that Nencioni enjoyed fame as soon as he found a place in the cultural market as part of the larger network of cultural production. In other words, his success and the extent of his impact depended on the fact that he was called on to contribute to a literary supplement at the moment his potential was recognised by the editor. At the beginning, his success did not depend on the fact that he was an expert in foreign literatures, but came about because his cultural background was suitable for the periodical. Before that point in 1879, Nencioni's biography appears to have been a sequence of failures and disappointments. His involvement in the field of journalism corresponded with the acquisition of a series of skills that allowed him to carve out his own space, in which he was to elaborate a new and original modality for cultural dissemination.

Nencioni was, then, a cultural journalist: from 1879 to 1896 his activity was channelled through the medium of the periodical publication. It was thanks to his work at *Fanfulla della Domenica* between 1880 and 1882 that he acquired both the status of journalist and the experience of journalistic practice as assistant editor to Ferdinando Martini. In fact, it was Martini who re-invented Nencioni as a journalist. Martini, who was younger than Nencioni, had known him in Florence during his youth and had tried to get him published in *Nuova Antologia* in 1866.<sup>3</sup> In 1879, Giosuè Carducci proposed that Martini publish some of Nencioni's poems in his supplement.<sup>4</sup> At that time, Nencioni's name was almost unknown. He had worked as

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Russo, 'Lo zio celebre di Cicognani', in *Ritratti critici di contemporanei* (Genoa: Società Editrice Universale, 1946), pp. 35-40.

<sup>3</sup> Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi*, pp. 139-143.

<sup>4</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Vari, 471, 1 bis, 3 (Nencioni to Telemaco Signorini, Naples 18 October 1879).

a private tutor in some Italian aristocratic families, and since 1874 had been in Naples employed by the family Caramanico. He was in Naples when Martini's offer of collaboration with the newspaper reached him.<sup>5</sup>

Martini fulfilled Nencioni's wish to have his poems published, but he soon asked his new collaborator to contribute with some articles on contemporary literature. Nencioni replied with a long list of over thirty possible topics that fitted into the supplement and agreed with Martini a fee for every article published, starting with his first on Walt Whitman, which appeared on the front page of the issue dated 7 December 1879.<sup>6</sup> After this debut, Martini enrolled Nencioni as a regular contributor and endorsed him as one of the main signatories of the new literary supplement. Prudently, Martini waited several months before promoting his new collaborator to the lead article on the front page again, a position from which he was rarely absent from March 1880 onwards.

Nencioni's relationship with the world of journalism, albeit ambivalent, proved to be long-lasting. He never trusted the publishing sector and in 1883 accepted a state job as a teacher in Florence. However, the crucial opening that allowed Nencioni to develop his skills as a journalist was collaborating alongside Martini in the editorial office of *Fanfulla della Domenica*. In 1879, Martini realised that his new collaborator's articles were successful and, two months later, he raised Nencioni's fee from 40 to 65 lire per piece and granted him the privilege of choosing his topics.<sup>7</sup> Such a concession was Martini's implicit admission that Nencioni had understood the supplement's editorial policy and the taste of its readership. In March 1880, Martini informed Chiarini that 'gli scritti [...] del Nencioni [...] *strapiacciono* a parecchi e ad altri non piacciono punto. Io vorrei poterle mostrare le lettere che ricevo a centinaia [...]'.<sup>8</sup> The editor of *Fanfulla della Domenica* had also grasped that Nencioni could be a very prolific collaborator: they agreed that he should write two articles every month.<sup>9</sup>

For Nencioni, journalism represented a risky but profitable occupation. He decided to embrace it mainly because his family inheritance could not ensure survival, and because no particular degree or qualification was required in order to

<sup>5</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini 20, 4, 1 (Nencioni to Martini, Naples 10 November 1879).

<sup>6</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini 20, 4, 11 (Nencioni to Martini, Naples 4 December [1879]).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Martini, *Lettere*, p. 86 (Martini to Chiarini, Rome 14 March 1880).

<sup>9</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini, 20, 4, 21 (Nencioni to Martini, [Florence] 10 June 1880).

join the profession. Nencioni never fully realised that, among the liberal professions, journalism was the most open, where ‘la possibilité finale d’accès aux positions les plus enviabiles restait liée à l’héritage propre à chaque individu’.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning, like many of his generation, he saw it as a temporary substitute, or even a springboard for an alternative career in teaching. The data compiled by Antonia Acciani more than thirty years ago still provides some generic but valuable information. For the generation born before 1849 (to which both Nencioni and Martini belonged, as Nencioni was born in 1836 and Martini in 1841), journalism represented an activity to be carried out in parallel with different, socially recognised professions: teaching, public service, private practice. In Central Italy, where Nencioni lived, only 8 percent of so-called men of letters of his generation were full-time journalists, a third lower than the national average (13 percent). Competition in journalism increased among the generation born between 1850 and 1874: 19 percent in Central Italy versus a national average of 23 percent.<sup>11</sup> An almost 80 percent increase in access to the profession reveals that journalism was taking shape not as a discontinuous activity mixed with other liberal professions but as a job capable of providing for the maintenance of its staff. Nencioni thus represented the transition between two generations of men of letters: that of civil servants, professionals and landowners, and the new and growing generation of young journalists moving to Rome in order to work in the press.

During the same period, Nencioni had started to comment in his letters on the quality of the supplement’s issues covering the first half of 1880. His letters to Martini are full of compliments and suggestions:

Bravo! hai messo insieme un bellissimo numero: forse, per varietà, più rimarchevole di tutti i precedenti.<sup>12</sup>

Le “Chiacchiere della Domenica” son *gustatissime*. Dalle *spesso*. Dammi retta.<sup>13</sup>

Gli ultimi N<sup>ri</sup> son *vari e intonati* è vero – ma devo dirti sinceramente la mia impressione? alcuni specialmente mi son parsi un po’ *ternes*, un po’ *grigi*.... un po’ *pesi* in una parola. Quello d’oggi è *un buon numero*: (ma quel ritratto di De Nittis

<sup>10</sup> Christophe Charles, *Le Siècle de la presse (1830-1939)* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> Antonia Acciani, ‘Dalla rendita al lavoro’, in *Letteratura Italiana*, 2. *Produzione e consumo* (1982), pp. 413-48 (p. 423 table 6).

<sup>12</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini, 20, 9, 5 (Nencioni to Martini, [Rome] 25 January [1880]).

<sup>13</sup> BNCF, Carteggi Martini, 20, 8, 17 (Nencioni to Martini, [Rome] 16 March [1880]).

pare una stampa di Sesto Cajo Baccelli. Meglio nulla). Buone le tue chiacchiere: esse *vivificano* il giornale.<sup>14</sup>

Il N° del 25 aprile mi parve un buonissimo numero. Quello d'oggi... non tanto...<sup>15</sup>

Mi è piaciuto assai *Philomela* e assaissimo *l'Usciere*... Povero Archimede? Importantissime le lettere Orsini e Cavour. Buono in parte l'articolo Bonghi. Importante lo scritto del Chiarini. Veramente *orrendo* (almeno per forma) il *Maggio* del Betteloni. Due colonne consacrate agli amori maritali e alle poesie del Pieroni... c'est un peu fort!...<sup>16</sup>

In his letters, Nencioni showed that he had developed a reliable instinct for the needs of the supplement. He could perceive its general tone and ascertain the importance of every article in the general economy of each issue. Then, at the beginning of July 1880, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Martini noticed and lamented the fall in sales. It was at that moment that Martini decided to offer him a job. In October, Nencioni moved to Rome,<sup>17</sup> where he was offered the post of assistant editor of the supplement, a position he held until the end of 1882.

During his first two years as the assistant editor at *Fanfulla della Domenica*, Nencioni, as a member of the editorial staff, had to supervise the entire editing process, from the selection of the articles to discussion with the editor and the authors. When Martini was busy with parliamentary work or away from Rome, Nencioni acted as editor of the supplement.<sup>18</sup> But he was also asked to write about a range of topics that spanned from accounts of the work of contemporary authors (Carducci, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, Flaubert, Carlyle, Swinburne, Lamartine, Hugo, Daudet, Prati, Tommaseo, Barbier) to review articles (on Sainte-Beuve, Vernon Lee, Serao, d'Annunzio, Tennyson, Halévy, Ademollo, Panzacchi, Capuana), to articles of so-called literary variety (Boccaccio; literary places in Rome; the lovers of George Sand; the insanity of Orlando, King Lear and Don Quixote; Saint Francis of Assisi; literary memories of Christmas). The articles usually consisted of a biographical outline of the author, a succinct account of the work or works considered, and a brief contextualisation of author and work in the literary trends of the period. Nencioni's point of view was usually uncontroversial,

<sup>14</sup> BNCf, Carteggi Martini, 20, 4, 20 (Nencioni to Martini, [Rome] 18 April 1880).

<sup>15</sup> BNCf, Carteggi Martini, 20, 9, 10 (Nencioni to Martini, [Rome] 2 May [1880]).

<sup>16</sup> BNCf, Carteggi Martini, 20, 10, 7 (Nencioni to Martini, [Rome] 29 [June 1880]).

<sup>17</sup> BNCf, Carteggi Martini, 20, 5, 3 (Nencioni to Martini, Florence 28 October 1880).

<sup>18</sup> BNCf, Carteggio Martini, 20, 5, 9 (Nencioni to Martini, Rome 4 September 1881).

while his comments were generally to highlight what he believed to be the best passages of a work and to condemn its formal deficiencies. The format was the same for the pieces on literary variety: from gossip to the theme of insanity, the articles summarised some famous works, offering readers an entertaining account that, again, was meant to underline the noteworthy parts or passages of a masterpiece. All the articles adopted the conversational style of journalism that Martini had translated from *Fanfulla* to the supplement.

However, as Nencioni stated in 1885, by 1881 he had grown tired of producing ‘articoli di pura critica letteraria’ and had devised an alternative to the toil of informational journalism.<sup>19</sup> At that time he had experimented with two new kinds of article, which allowed him more freedom from the agenda of current cultural affairs without subverting the nature of the literary supplement: the ‘Medaglioni’ and the ‘Roundabout Papers’. The ‘Medaglioni’ were shaped by Sainte-Beuve’s *Portraits de femmes*, published in various French journals and in a collected edition in 1844. The ‘Roundabout Papers’ were inspired by the series of articles that William Thackeray had published in the *Cornhill Magazine* between 1860 and his death in 1863. The first ‘Medaglione’ was published in March 1881, while the first ‘Roundabout Paper’ appeared in July 1882.

The ‘Medaglioni’ were portraits of the great French aristocratic dames of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> Nencioni added to the collection Italian and British contemporary figures such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Teresa Guiccioli and Jane Carlyle. The new articles proved so successful that, in 1883, they were collected in a book published by Sommaruga.<sup>21</sup> However, the limit of the ‘medaglioni’ lay in their very subject matter: they were a specialised genre that could serve only one purpose. The restrictions imposed by the subject could not be overcome without ultimately distorting its generic features.

In contrast, the ‘Roundabout Papers’ provided fuller freedoms. They were a series of digressions on literature and the arts, with no apparent link to the cultural

<sup>19</sup> Enrico Nencioni, ‘Botta e risposta per la Contessa Guiccioli. Lettera aperta a Giuseppe Chiarini’, *La domenica del Fracassa*, y. II, no. 6, Rome, 8 February 1885.

<sup>20</sup> On the relationship between Nencioni’s ‘Medaglioni’ and Sainte-Beuve’s *Portraits de femmes* in his collection of ‘Medaglioni’, see Petre Ciureanu, ‘Sainte-Beuve e Enrico Nencioni’, *Studi Francesi*, 20 (1963), 291-99 and, for a more detailed outline, Id., *Sainte-Beuve e l’Italia* (Abano Terme: Piovan, 1987), pp. 337-49.

<sup>21</sup> Enrico Nencioni, *Medaglioni* (Rome: Sommaruga, 1883). In 1884, a second edition of the book was published and, according to the frontispiece, 2,000 copies were printed.

agenda of the supplement. Moreover, they represented for Nencioni not only a relief from the hard labour of writing articles on contemporary literature but also a specific way of looking at the aims and functions of the cultural journalist. With Nencioni, the journalist acquired a new task: he remained the person required to inform on the latest books or trends in the world of literature and art, but he also claimed a space, through the framework of the journal, for the production of culture.

## 2. The ‘Roundabout Papers’: catalogue and definition

Nencioni’s first ‘Roundabout Paper’ appeared in *Fanfulla della Domenica* on 23 July 1882, and was entitled ‘A una certa età’, followed by the second, entitled ‘Settembre’. Between 1882 and 1887, when he cut back his collaboration with literary supplements and took on a full commitment to *Nuova Antologia*, Nencioni had already published a body of eight articles in *Fanfulla della Domenica* that he explicitly defined as ‘Roundabout Papers’. One appeared in *La domenica del Fracassa* in 1885, bringing the total to nine ‘Roundabout Papers’:

### *Fanfulla della Domenica:*

- ‘A una certa età’, y. IV, no. 30, 23 July 1882, 2.
- ‘Settembre’, y. IV, no. 37, 10 September 1882, 1-2.
- ‘Capo d’anno’, y. IV, no. 53, 31 December 1882, 1.
- ‘Resurrezioni fiorentine’, y. VI, no. 27, 6 July 1884, 1-2.
- ‘Proserpina (Roundabout Paper)’, y. VIII, no. 21, 23 May 1886, 1-2.
- ‘Nel giardino di Boboli. Roundabout Paper (a Giuseppe Sacchetti)’, y. VIII, no. 38, 19 September 1886, 1-2.
- ‘La Domenica delle Palme (Roundabout Paper Occidentale)’, y. IX, no. 14, 3 April 1887, 1-2.
- ‘Donne e romanzi. Roundabout Paper’, y. IX, no. 34, 21 August 1887, 1-2.

### *La domenica del Fracassa:*

- ‘In vacanza, ovvero la Congiura di Macerata (Roundabout Paper)’, y. II, no. 41, 11 October 1885, 1-2.

In his notes, preserved at the Biblioteca Marucelliana (Carte Nencioni E.13.2), Nencioni entitled three other ‘Roundabout Papers’ that he intended to write: ‘Dalla Marucelliana’, ‘Sancta Simplicitas!’, and ‘Pro bestiis’, probably on the issue of vivisection, of which he was a fierce opponent. The note can be dated to around



1885. In another note (Carte Nencioni E.24.12) there is the suggestion of another ‘Roundabout Paper’ entitled ‘Valdarno e Versilia’.<sup>22</sup>

In 1894 Nencioni considered many articles of his to be ‘Roundabout Papers’ that had not previously been explicitly acknowledged under that definition. That year Martini asked him to contribute to a school textbook. While deciding which to include, Nencioni numbered among this genre other three articles and, in particular.<sup>23</sup>

*Fanfulla della Domenica:*

- ‘Centesima edizione’, y. III, no. 44, 30 October 1881, 1-2.
- ‘Questioni ardenti’, y. V, no. 33, 19 August 1883, 1-2.
- ‘Flora romantica’, y. V, no. 52, 28 December 1884, 1-2.

Almost twelve years after the appearance of the first, the boundaries of the ‘Roundabout Papers’ were still unstable. In spite of proposals received by two publishers, he had not yet ‘rescued’ the text into a book.<sup>24</sup> But with this self-catalogue Nencioni recognised that the particular style he adopted in those articles had always been part of his conception of literary journalism.

Thackeray had originally created his *Roundabout Papers* for the literary journal, where the pieces could enjoy a considerable length; but the format was oversized for the literary supplement, as the sketch would probably have occupied four pages by itself. Moreover, as we have seen, it was not convenient to write long articles in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, as the fee received by the journalist was inversely proportional to the length of the piece; the convenient limit was the third column of text. Nencioni had thus to adapt his writing to the economy of space requested by the newspaper. The average length of a ‘Roundabout Paper’ was three and a half columns. Usually, the article covered almost the entire front page of the supplement, when it was displayed in that position, as the page of *Fanfulla della Domenica* was composed of four columns. It often overflowed onto the second page,

<sup>22</sup> Details on these manuscripts are given in Monica Maria Angeli, *Le carte di Enrico Nencioni* (Florence: Manent, 1999), pp. 59 and 70 respectively.

<sup>23</sup> BNCF, Carteggio Martini 20, 7, 20 (Nencioni to Martini, [end of June-July 1894]).

<sup>24</sup> The traces of an agreement with Barbèra date back to 1883, for a 300-page volume (BMF, Carteggio Nencioni, II, 15, 1, Pietro Barbèra to Nencioni, 5 February 1883), and of another agreement, this time with Sommaruga, in 1884 (BNCF, Carteggio Martini 20, 9, 15, Nencioni to Martini, 29 May [1884]). In 1923 the ‘Roundabout Papers’ (and other writings) were collected in a posthumous volume entitled *Impressioni e rimembranze*, published by Le Monnier.

as usually a poem was placed at the beginning or in the centre of the front page, or another short article preceded it.

‘Roundabout Papers’ did not suggest the subject of the article, as for example ‘Medaglioni’ did, with a word that implied the idea of a painted portrait. However, following the fashion for the titles of *Fanfulla*’s fixed columns, Nencioni used a rhematic designation as a paragenic label, in order to mark a genre innovation.<sup>25</sup> And, as in the case of *Fanfulla*, the title also had a seductive aim: the use of a foreign phrase was meant to attract the attention of the reader, promising something singular and unusual. As a derivative title it suggested an idea of originality that was part of the mood of the piece.<sup>26</sup> The difference with the *Fanfulla* titles in this case was that the ‘Roundabout Papers’ were a trademark of Nencioni’s journalism, rather than a particular type of article that contributed to forming the newspaper’s brand. Nencioni could publish them in any newspaper or journal he wanted, and so he did. He found special accessibility in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, but one also appeared in Chiarini’s *La domenica del Fracassa*.

Before the regular use of the subtitle, established with ‘La congiura di Macerata’ in 1885, Nencioni would tell readers that they were reading a ‘Roundabout Paper’ only at or towards the end of the article. ‘A una certa età’, the first one, ended with the words:

Ah, se si uccidesse davvero con uno sguardo, chi sa se oggi avrei potuto scrivere questo *Roundabout Paper*?<sup>27</sup>

The second ‘Roundabout Paper’, ‘Capo d’anno’, followed the same pattern:

Non mi fate colpa se procedo a zig-zag – se salto di palo in frasca: questo non è un articolo ordinato, ma un capriccioso *Roundabout Paper*.

In the third, ‘Settembre’, Nencioni concluded the article with a detailed apophasis, in which he tried to gain the reader’s goodwill by describing the way the text had been organised:

<sup>25</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> Harry Levin, ‘The Title as a Literary Genre’, *The Modern Language Review*, 72 (1977), XXIII-XXXVI (p. XXXIII).

<sup>27</sup> As the bibliographical details of the ‘Roundabout Papers’ have been listed at the beginning of the chapter, hereon they will be quoted without referencing, except when the context may suggest some ambiguity.

Ma io mi avveggo che lo spazio mi manca, e anche mi accorgo, un po' tardi, che ho troppo deviato dall'argomento. In verità non saprei dir nemmeno io come son passato dal *Settembre* alla *Messa*... Fortuna che ho inteso scrivere un *Roundabout Paper*, in cui le digressioni e le divagazioni son come di rito! E se non sono uggiose, mi saran perdonate volentieri. Se invece ho annoiato i lettori (e non è punto difficile) dirò come il gran lombardo: Credete che non l'ho fatto apposta.

Nencioni also used the same device in 'Proserpina' (1886), despite the generic indication in the subtitle. He delayed the genre declaration and satisfied readers' expectations only at the end of the article. The importance of 'generic recognition' in the reading process is fundamental in constructing the meaning of a text.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the 'Roundabout Papers', the act of recognition became crucial in order to understand the meaning of the article: it acted as a strategy of cohesion. The general stability of the article, as well as its meaning, was expressed through the generic label, which was an interpretative signal. The meaning of the article was, thus, concentrated in the genre: the various elements that appeared in its body did not carry importance if considered separately, or if read together without the appropriate awareness. Nencioni probably wanted to underline the fact that the article was not a digression, a creation of a side note within a major narration, but was an organism endowed with a full degree of autonomy.

In fact, Nencioni had recognised this particular characteristic of the original genre to which Thackeray's *Roundabout Papers* belonged. In 1871, reviewing an edition of Thackeray's work, he warned that the '*Roundabout Papers* [...] significa fogli diffusi, senza soggetto determinato, ove il discorso ha un'andatura vagante, a zig-zag, mai in linea retta: il *Saggio umoristico* inglese in una parola'.<sup>29</sup> In the same article, Nencioni proposed the translation of the word 'essay' with 'sketch'. He thus had in mind a particular sub-genre of the essay that had emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a re-enactment of the work of Addison, and of which he considered Dickens and Thackeray to be the major representatives.

The sketch was a short text – descriptive or narrative – that became popular in the periodical press in Great Britain during the second and the third decade of the nineteenth century. It was usually associated with an engraved illustration, to which it constituted a commentary (or vice versa), thus stressing the importance of the

<sup>28</sup> Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 259.

<sup>29</sup> Enrico Nencioni, 'Rassegna letteraria. L'ultimo libro di Thackeray -I', *L'Italia Nuova*, 2-3 January 1871.

interaction between word and image. The first sketches originated as descriptions of landscapes, but writers and journalists soon adopted them as a way of depicting aspects of life in the great British and European cities and the people that populated them. The sketch exploited the flexibility offered by the journal without being associated with the dimension of serialisation; ‘rather, it tends toward discontinuity, embodying the constant and disorganised flux of news and consumer interest’.<sup>30</sup>

The difficulty in defining the sketch – also experienced by Nencioni – lies in the plurality and potential infinitude of themes, topics and styles on the one hand (‘senza soggetto determinato’), and the lack of a finite plot and a perceivable trajectory on the other (‘un’andatura vagante, a *zig-zag*, mai in linea retta’). These are features that determine the lack of a ‘unitary concept of form’.<sup>31</sup> The sketch simulated the open-ended and end-stopped form of the periodical. Every article was an independent piece, different from those that preceded or followed, but always part of the same series as a result of its generic identity. Even a single article was potentially an open-ended unity, as the absence of plot did not hamper additions or extensions.

Amanpal Garcha has proposed that this lack of unity allowed authors to concentrate on the ‘phatic function’ of the sketch, namely the way it established contact with the reader. ‘The sketch,’ Garcha maintains, ‘allowed authors to be freely discursive and to experiment with the particular voice or style with which they addressed readers, described characters, and related events’.<sup>32</sup> ‘Style’, in his vocabulary, summarises a particular epistemological mode with which to arrange and process information, which he identifies in stasis. In the plotless structure of the sketch: ‘ideas and events cannot be assimilated into a progressive, local structure [...] but rather can only be apprehended in partial, episodic, and often static scenes whose only consistency is found in the sensibility and style of the author who records them’.<sup>33</sup> For Nencioni, the sketch was able to absorb virtually every subject, without conflicting with the barriers imposed either by the convention of genre or rhetoric. As he explained in the review, ‘Nel saggio inglese, vi è di tutto: narrazione e descrizione, patetico e comico, erudizione e *rêverie*, epigramma e eloquenza’.

<sup>30</sup> Amanpal Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel. The Development of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> Martina Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century. European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830-50* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 30-31.

<sup>32</sup> Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel*, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Conflicting styles, modal extensions, registers and other genres could be mixed together. Therefore, the sketch presented Nencioni with a means to realise his own creative ambitions without sacrificing the primary aim of providing literary information. It offered the possibility of directing information into a new text with full literary qualities and artistic autonomy; Nencioni channelled the cultural article into the container of the sketch.

The common feature of all the 'Roundabout Papers' is thus the avoidance of any argumentative or plotted structure. The sketches usually start with a clue, of any nature, that provides the article with its emotional colouration. This original clue is merely the departure point, and not the central point around which the rest of the material is arranged. Moreover, Nencioni uses a different, unpredictable strategy in each article for the passage from one topic to the other, logical leaps included. Nevertheless, it is possible to divide the nine 'Roundabout Papers' into two categories, according to the macro-areas that set the articles' mood. The first is that of retrospection: the text is organised as a series of recollections from the past, always retrieved with a sense of nostalgia and regret. This is the case for 'A una certa età', 'Resurrezioni fiorentine', 'Nel giardino di Boboli'. The second one is that of circumstance. The inspiration of the article may be the weather or the time of year, as in 'Settembre', 'Capo d'anno', 'Proserpina', 'Donne e romanzi'. The two instances of retrospection and circumstance can occasionally intertwine. In a couple of cases, 'La Domenica delle Palme' and 'La congiura di Macerata', the structure of the 'Roundabout Paper' was used to deliver two book reviews, which were in point of fact personal attacks on the books' authors.

Nencioni's personality and his personal experience is at the centre of every 'Roundabout Paper'. From this point of view, they may be read also as a sort of intellectual autobiography of Enrico Nencioni, the journalist. The constant presence of the authorial personality is underlined by the conversational style that, after *Fanfulla* and Martini, was a constant feature of Nencioni's journalism. But the way he adapted the autobiographical features to the sketch genre is the angle through which to understand the extent of his relationship with the model. Despite his apparent tribute to the source, Nencioni broke the fundamental textual mechanism of Thackeray's *Roundabout Paper* – the use of the journalistic persona. By doing so, he significantly transformed the British sketch.

### 3. Thackeray in Florence

‘Resurrezioni fiorentine’, published in 1884, is an imitation of one of Thackeray’s *Roundabout Papers*, ‘De Juventute’. It was a project that Nencioni had considered in one of his personal notes as being among a list of pieces of Thackeray he wanted to imitate.<sup>34</sup> ‘Resurrezioni fiorentine’ is built around a series of memories of Nencioni’s youth in Florence. He recalled the city before and during the revolutions of 1848 and 1849, and his schooldays and first infatuations in 1854. The structure is the same as that used by Thackeray. In ‘De Juventute’, Thackeray had expressed the feeling of remoteness during his youth, symbolised by ‘the days of George IV’ (1820-1830), before the advent of railroads. Nencioni could take advantage of a similar historical background, as Italy underwent momentous political and technological transformations between the period of his youth and the time he was writing.

Thackeray’s ‘De Juventute’ is one of the ‘retrospective’ *Roundabout Papers*, sketches that concentrated on youth and memories from the past.<sup>35</sup> In his 1871 article on Thackeray, Nencioni had translated some passages from ‘De Juventute’, along with another of the ‘retrospective’ series, ‘Notes on a Week’s Holiday’.<sup>36</sup> The particular interest in the dimension of nostalgia for youth is, according to Richard Sennett, the most common way that personality acquired a public dimension in the nineteenth-century. Only through past retrospection was it possible to offer an acceptable representation of the unveiled self and freely express personal feelings.<sup>37</sup> The theme of retrospection was common among Tuscan authors in the last years of the nineteenth century. Within Nencioni’s circle of friends, both Carducci and Martini had dedicated much of their writing to their memories of childhood and youth in Tuscany before Unification.

However, in his ‘Roundabout Paper’, Nencioni seemed to incorporate particulars from ‘De Juventute’ into his own personal biography. He recalls a ballet

<sup>34</sup> BMF, Carte Nencioni E.10.1, f. 1r. ‘Resurrezioni fiorentine’ was probably the most fortunate of the ‘Roundabout Papers’: it was reproduced many times as an example of Nencioni’s work: in Ferdinando Martini, *Prose italiane moderne. Libro di lettura proposto alle scuole secondarie inferiori* (Florence: Sansoni, 1894), pp. 407-13; in the journal *Cordelia*, y. XIII, nos. 26-27, 1894, pp. 301-302, and ultimately in *I toscani dell’Ottocento*, ed. Pietro Pancrazi (Florence: Bemporad, 1924), pp. 257-66.

<sup>35</sup> Robert A. Colby, “‘Into the Blue Water’: The First Year of “‘Cornhill Magazine” under Thackeray’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 32 (1999), 209-22 (p. 219).

<sup>36</sup> Enrico Nencioni, ‘Rassegna letteraria. L’ultimo libro di Thackeray – II’, *L’Italia Nuova*, 4 January 1871.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 152.

at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence and the sensual figures of the ballerinas that provided plenty of excitement in his youth:

L'ultima delle ballerine, se ci lanciava un'occhiata assassina, stendendo verso noi la punta del piede *carnicino*, ci metteva il fuoco nelle vene; e si facevan per lei dei versi, certo men belli, ma forse anche più ardenti di quelli del povero Prati alla Essler. E dire che l'anno scorso, a Roma, al *Costanzi*, mi sono addormentato nel mio *posto distinto*, mentre dugento Ninfe nudovestite mi scuotevano quasi sul viso i cembali napoletani...<sup>38</sup>

Nencioni had translated the source of this passage from Thackeray thirteen years before. The translation was inaccurate and simplistic, more a summary than a precise rendition of the original – a short rendition was probably demanded by lack of space in the newspaper – but the situation in which Nencioni portrayed himself was identical to that of Thackeray.<sup>39</sup>

The last time I saw a ballet at the opera – oh! it was many years ago – I fell asleep in the stalls, wagging my head in insane dreams, and I hope affording amusement to the company, while the feet of five hundred nymphs were cutting flicflacs on the stage at a few paces' distance. [...] In the reign of George IV, I give you my honour, all the dancers at the opera were as beautiful as Houris.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimamente vidi un ballo all'opera; mi addormentai nella mia sedia, mentre i piedi di trecento ninfe battevano in cadenza sul palco a pochi passi di distanza. Che differenza in altri tempi. Dio buono! come eran belle le ballerine dei tempi miei!<sup>41</sup>

The strategy pursued by Nencioni in 'Resurrezioni fiorentine' of domesticating the source consisted in eliminating the historical references in Thackeray's text. The situation took place in Italy, in two of the most famous Italian theatres of the time and the details, such as the poems written for the dancers, were compared with those written by Prati for the most famous ballerina of the first half of the nineteenth century, Fanny Essler.<sup>42</sup> The mythical Houris as a term of comparison was cut out of the translation, but the detail of the dancing nymphs remained in the source, translation and original text.

<sup>38</sup> Nencioni, 'Resurrezioni fiorentine'.

<sup>39</sup> All the quotations from the original English text are taken from Nencioni's personal edition of the work (BMF, Biblioteca Nencioni, 9.A.VIII.18): William Makepeace Thackeray, *Roundabout Papers*, 2 vols. (Lepzig: Tauchnitz, 1869).

<sup>40</sup> Thackeray, *Roundabout Papers*, 1, p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> Nencioni, 'L'ultimo libro di Thackeray – II'.

<sup>42</sup> It was published in 1846 in Venice: Giovanni Prati, *A Fanny Essler. Carme* (Venice: Naratovich, 1846). The ballerina was hailed as 'tremendo angelo'.

Equally, Nencioni's juvenile readings of the novels of Walter Scott were filtered through a matching account provided by Thackeray in the same Roundabout Papers:

Grande, unico Walter Scott! Quanto ti ho ammirato ed amato! E quanto ti ammiro e ti amo anche oggi – non ostante la triplice crociata bandita contro il glorioso tuo nome in Francia, in Italia, e fino nella ingrata Inghilterra! Chi mi renderà un'ora, un'ora sola, di quelle deliziose giornate, e il cuore e gli occhi con cui allora leggevo ed ammiravo? Con che trepida ansietà seguivo i casi di Lucia di Lamermoor, e di Diana Vernon – di Rebecca e di Ivanhoe! [...] Amo le vecchie edizioni nelle quali lessi in Boboli tutti quei divini romanzi, perfidamente tradotti, stampati perfidamente. Amo le orribili e deliziose incisioni in legno di quei volumetti, la carta sugante, le copertine color di cece...<sup>43</sup>

The invocation to Scott is almost identical in Thackeray, and translated and simplified by Nencioni in 1871:

Then, above all, we had WALTER SCOTT, the kindly, the generous, the pure – the companion of what countless delightful hours; the purveyor of how much happiness; the friend of whom we recall as the constant benefactor of our youth! How well I remember the type and the brownish paper of the old duodecimo "Tales of My Landlord"! I have never dared to read the "Pirate", and the "Bride of Lamermoor", or "Kenilworth", from the day to this, because the finale is unhappy, and people die, and are murdered at the end. But "Ivanhoe", and "Quentin Durward"! Oh! For a half-holiday, and a quiet corner, and one of those books again! [...] It may be the tart was good; but how fresh the appetite was!<sup>44</sup>

Quanto ai libri, più di tutti ricordo quelli di Walter Scott, l'autore gentile, puro, magnanimo, il compagno di tante bell'ore, l'amico, il benefattore costante della mia gioventù. Come ricordo bene i caratteri e la carta bruna delle edizioni in duodecimo dei *Racconti del mio Ostiere!* Non ho avuto più cuore di rileggere *Kenilworth*, *Ivanhoe*, *Quentin Durward*. Oh chi mi rende una mezza-festa, un cantuccio tranquillo, e uno di quei libri, di nuovo! Quei libri, e forse anche quegli occhi, coi quali allora li leggevamo. Il piatto era buono, ma anche l'appetito era fresco!<sup>45</sup>

The general tone of the passage is forged after Thackeray: the happiness experienced while reading Scott's novels together with the regret for the lost carefree period of youth. Nencioni, however, did not forget to be a literary journalist and inserted a comment on the (mis)fortune of the author in the present. But, as in the case of the ballerinas, Nencioni borrowed from Thackeray even the detail about the books' paper.

<sup>43</sup> Id., 'Resurrezioni fiorentine'.

<sup>44</sup> Thackeray, *Roundabout Papers*, 1, p. 124.

<sup>45</sup> Nencioni, 'L'ultimo libro di Thackeray – II'.



Such a dependence on the source for the depiction of a fictional situation casts light on the autobiographical element in Nencioni's 'Roundabout Papers'. Nencioni appropriated situations and details that, in Thackeray's text, were narrated by 'Mr Roundabout', a journalistic persona that harked back to the practice of Addison's 'Isaac Bickerstaff' and Steele's 'Mr Spectator'. In his 'Roundabout Papers', Nencioni used his real name: the voice of every article was identified as the voice of the actual author. Nencioni annihilated the distance between the real author and the narrator, which was a reversal of a fixed generic feature of the sketch.<sup>46</sup> As Nicholas Dames has demonstrated, in Thackeray's sketches the narrator always recalls crucial moments in his personal life against the background of a greater historical occurrence, with the aim of producing a sense of 'collective witnessing of the event'.<sup>47</sup> The same can be said of the particular, collective aspects of life in a particular historical period. In Nencioni's case, the text's emphasis is on the historical person of the real author who becomes at once the protagonist and the filter of a private and privileged experience, of which the 'Roundabout Paper' is the account. The operation is noticeable also from a linguistic point of view. In Thackeray's text, the narrator is always concerned to join his experience with that of his implied readers. There is a continuous passage from the first person singular to the first plural. Common experience is presented in the first plural: 'We *had* Walter Scott [...] the friend of whom *we* recall *our* youth [...]'. The details, in contrast, are given in the first person singular: 'I remember the type and the paper [...]'. Already in his 1871 translation, Nencioni had abolished the difference (Scott was 'il benefattore della *mia* gioventù'), but in his 1884 'Roundabout Paper' the reading of Scott, the emotional involvement it stimulated, and even its appreciation, became a purely private matter. This particular kind of autobiography can be linked to what Philippe Lejeune has defined as 'autobiocopie', a word he used 'pour désigner ce paradoxe d'une écriture de soi littéralement calquée sur l'écriture des autres'.<sup>48</sup> However, as Lejeune pointed out, in the case of *autobiocopie* the text should not be explored in search for originality, but rather with the help of an intertextual analysis, where the autobiographical element is to be sought out in the fact that the author claims to have read other texts. The 'carnet de lecture' ultimately becomes the

<sup>46</sup> Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Dames, 'Brushes with Frame: Thackeray and the Work of Celebrity', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56 (2001), 23-51 (p. 45).

<sup>48</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Signes de vie. Le Pacte autobiographique 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 175.

autobiography, as only within this space “‘lecture de l’autre” et “‘écriture de soi” sont deux activités quasiment indissociables’.<sup>49</sup>

In ‘Resurrezioni fiorentine’, the operation is even more noticeable once the text gains independence from the source. In his sketch, Nencioni invested the space of the city with a series of memories from the past. As Martina Lauster has noted, many European authors (Thackeray included) used the sketch as the privileged genre for their accounts of the main European cities, converting it into a tool for designing ‘the map of Europe in terms of cityscapes and in exploring the changing social body inhabiting them’.<sup>50</sup> However, in Nencioni’s case, the perception of this space was mediated through his emotional inclination. The space of the city of Florence became in the ‘Roundabout Paper’ an ‘espace heureux’, a real space reduced to its ‘geometric’ immanence, and tuned to the internal, private space of the individual.<sup>51</sup> In the article, Nencioni compared the new Florence – the city transformed by public works during the period it was the capital of Italy – to the old Florence of his youth:

Tutte le volte che io torno a Firenze, cerco la Posta in *Piazza del Granduca*, e mi meraviglio che non ci sia più il *tetto dei Pisani*... Cerco *Via San Sebastiano*, dove passò la mia infanzia, una strada già tutta fiancheggiata d’orti e di cascine Tennysoniane, e mi trovo invece in *Via Gino Capponi*, e non c’è più ombra né di cascine né d’orti [...].

The memories offered in the passage are purely autobiographical, as are the literary references attached to them; they are not part of a shared memory, but generated by the particular cultural sensibility of the author, the particular lonely atmosphere of the *flâneur*. This feature has been recognised as one with a distinctive mark. In a note of the *Passagenwerk*, Benjamin wrote of the ‘anamnestic intoxication’ of the *flâneur*, which ‘not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge – indeed, of dead facts – as something experienced and lived though’. This kind of knowledge of previous facts and forms of the city was orally transmitted, but also ‘deposited in an immense literature’:

The study of these books [Benjamin maintained] constituted a second existence, already wholly predisposed toward dreaming; and what the *flâneur* learned from them took form and figure during an afternoon walk before the apéritif. Wouldn’t

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>50</sup> Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l’espace* (Paris: PUF, 1961), p. 30.

he, then, have necessarily felt the steep slope behind the church of Notre Dame de Lorette rise all the more insistently under his soles if he realised: here, at one time, after Paris had gotten its first omnibuses, the *cheval de renfort* was harnessed to the coach to reinforce the two other horses.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, through the pairing of his personal memory of lost places and their literature, Nencioni promoted a new path for the fruition of the literary text.

The abandonment of the device of journalistic persona typical of the sketch made it possible for the historical identity of the journalist to emerge as the protagonist of the text. The author's personal experience was then presented as a privileged approach to cultural experience. The extent of this privilege was the real testing ground of the 'Roundabout Papers'.

#### **4. A privileged experience?**

'Settembre' was Nencioni's second 'Roundabout Paper', published in September 1882. It was also the first 'Roundabout Paper' to be promoted to the front page. As the title suggests, it belonged to the second of the thematic areas (circumstance) as identified before; it consists of a continuous recollection of artistic, literary and musical memories linked with the passage from late summer to early autumn. It begins with a description of two paintings by Greuze and Corot, and proceeds to a September sunset in Rome and the memories it evokes. The text then contrasts September and November and ends with a mention of Verdi's *Requiem* as the music that expresses the desolation of dying nature.

'Settembre', as all the 'Roundabout Papers', is characterised by descriptions of paintings, excerpts from poems or prose and references to music. The interaction of this material with the text is complex and is at the heart of the article's workings. From the standpoint of sheer cultural dissemination, Nencioni is like a tour guide in a museum: he puts together a series of noteworthy works more or less known to his public; the range of authors spans from Virgil to Dante, Schiller, Lamartine, Heine, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne and Carducci. But cultural dissemination is only secondary to understanding the way cultural tradition is inserted into the

<sup>52</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.–London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 417.

'Roundabout Papers'. The texts by Nencioni's authors were completely dismembered and de-contextualised, their meanings ably reset and recreated in the article.

The most recent text in the article was Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse*, published only a few months before, but the quotation of the poem's last line became merely a commentary on the kiss between the two characters in Corot's painting:

Ma nell'attitudine della giovane donna [in Corot's painting] è tutta una storia di futuri dolori; e nel suo magro e bel viso s'indovina una vittima dell'amore. È un bacio passionato, tragico, da Saffo e da Lespinasse...  
*And their four lips became one silent mouth.*

The kiss between Tristram and Iseult, which was the dramatic highpoint of Swinburne's text, almost a reenactment of the Wagnerian *liebestod*, was here extracted from its context in order to ennoble with a sensual image an impression conveyed by a figure in Corot's painting. The line serves as a sort of unauthorised meditation on the painting, reminiscent of the technique of the *ekphrasis*, the description of a painting or a work of art intended as a competition between the poet and the artist. If the aim of the poet in the classical *ekphrasis* was to bring the work of art to life, to animate it, then Nencioni wanted to suggest a fictional animation of the painting, extended in both time and space.

Similarly, Nencioni proclaimed that the sun in September could be as bright as in July, despite the signs of the coming autumn with the foggy days of November getting closer. He then quoted the first quatrain from Carducci's poem *Per il LXXVIII anniversario della proclamazione della Repubblica francese*:

Sol di settembre, tu nel cielo stai  
Come l'uom che i migliori anni finì  
E guarda triste innanzi: i dolci rai  
Tu stendi verso i nubilosi dì.

Carducci's text was taken from one of the literary novelties of the year. Published for the first time in 1870, the poem had just been printed in 1882 in *Giambi ed epodi*, a book collection of his political poetry. *Per il LXXVIII anniversario della proclamazione della Repubblica francese* had been written by Carducci to celebrate the anniversary of the proclamation of the First French Republic in September 1792. The exhortation to the September sun at the beginning of the poem was meant to

introduce a toast to the old French republic, repressed – in January 1870 – by the Second Empire. In his article, Nencioni used Carducci's lines solely to reinforce his description of the seasonal weather, depriving it of its unity and ultimate political meaning.

The treatment of the excerpts from Swinburne and Carducci represents an extreme case of displacement of pieces of texts, which are not only given a different interpretation, but also a radically different meaning in the context of the article. All the quotations, mentions and allusions mark an absence: they act almost as fetish objects. It would be otherwise difficult to explain why there is such a superabundance of them. Nencioni seems unable to restrain himself: he is a collector who does not have enough space to exhibit his literary harvest. Describing the September afternoon, he declared:

Ci sarebbe da fare un volume di citazioni, andando da Wordsworth a Swinburne, da Goethe a Geibel, da Chénier a Sully-Proudhomme, dal Foscolo a Carducci. Keats e Shelley gli hanno consacrato alcune delle loro più belle poesie. Forse nessuno ha espresso quella divina malinconia meglio di Alfredo Tennyson e di Enrico Heine [...] Senancour, l'uomo che dopo Jean-Jacques ha meglio sentite ed espresse le armonie morali della natura, scrive [...] Queste ultime austere parole ricordano certe pagine di Lucrezio e di Shelley.

In this passage, Nencioni is almost giving away a description of the recipe for his article: 'un volume di citazioni'. He, either deliberately or involuntarily, presents himself as a mere collector of quotations. He is not apparently interested in the texts or the authors he is presenting, but only in parts of texts that, reproduced together, would produce another, bigger text with a different meaning: *his own* text, Nencioni's text. As 'the presence of an absence', the de-contextualised fragments are placed in the article with the aim of alluding to something that he will never be able to possess. That "something", which has the characteristic of being 'immaterial and intangible', is the desire to be an author himself.<sup>53</sup> He could change the quotations, alter the material, substitute the name of the authors with other authors, but the outcome would be the same.

Invested with authorial capacity, Nencioni is thus able to offer a different level of comprehension of works of art. He is not the traditional figure of literary critic, who is charged with the task of explaining the historical context in which the

<sup>53</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas. Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 33.

work of art was created, its main influences and its originality. His idea of literary criticism, as he explained in 1885, had a different programme:

La mia ambizione unica è stata ed è sempre, te lo confesso, di comprendere, con la immaginazione simpatica del poeta, la vita intima delle persone e delle cose, che sfugge ordinariamente ai letterati eruditi. Per *conoscere* bene una cosa o una persona, bisogna simpatizzare con essa, o ricrearla, per così dire, in noi stessi. E che cos'è la vera poesia se non una maggiore intensità di visione che ci rende capaci di interpretare più intimamente la *realtà* della vita e della natura?<sup>54</sup>

Such a fervent statement is a vague recasting of some ideas of the Romantic theory of literature. Intellectual power did not permit understanding of the entire meaning of things: the positivist criticism of the 'letterati eruditi', for Nencioni, was insufficient. It did not reach the dimension of poetry as an instrument capable of revealing the essential features of things that could otherwise not be revealed through a logical argument. Nencioni was putting forward the practice of phenomenological reading, which presumes a fruition of texts that can be traced back to what Gaston Bachelard, in the wake of Minkowski, has defined as *retentissement*: 'Il s'agit en effet, par le retentissement d'une seule image poétique, de déterminer un véritable réveil de la création poétique jusque dans l'âme du lecteur. Par sa nouveauté, une image poétique met en branle toute l'activité linguistique. L'image poétique nous met à l'origine de l'être parlant'.<sup>55</sup> For Bachelard, through a reading based on *retentissement*, readers have the impression that they could have been the creators of the same image and develop a sort of private, personal pride, an 'orgueil en chambre': 'Personne ne sait qu'en lisant nous revivons nos tentations d'être poète. Tout lecteur, un peu passionné de lecture, nourrit et refoule, par la lecture, un désir d'être écrivain'.<sup>56</sup> In other words, reading, for Nencioni, was a continuous discovery that went from art to life and from life to art: the text, the work of art, became a sort of 'redoublement de vie',<sup>57</sup> a tool for understanding and interpreting life, as well as a privileged instrument of the imagination for revealing the real nature of things.

The reading path based on *retentissement* had, in turn, an impact on the writing of the text. From a stylistic point of view, the article keeps the discursivity of the conversation, but the register frequently rises and is invested with a particular

<sup>54</sup> Nencioni, 'Botta e risposta per la Contessa Guiccioli'.

<sup>55</sup> Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

function. When Nencioni describes the ‘ore pomeridiane’ just before dusk in Rome, he deliberately repeats an imaginary *ekphrasis*:

Ma in settembre l’ora più divina è quella che *precede* il tramonto. L’azzurro del cielo si fa più tenero, più delicato, e la massa della città è come spritualizzata, e pare immersa in una liquida luce d’oro. A pochi passi da Roma regna un silenzio profondo. [...] Nell’etere luminoso sembra di veder nuotare il *Pater Ecstaticus* di Goethe e avanzarsi dall’azzurro più profondo e lontano la *Mater Gloriosa*. Il silenzio è solenne. Appena si sente il rumore incerto d’una fontana o il trillo raro d’un uccello.

The general tone of the passage is heightened. Everything, from the time of day to the sky, is ennobled through the use of the augmentative ‘più’: ‘più divina’, ‘più tenero, più delicato’, ‘più profondo e lontano’. The synaesthesia is the dominant figure of speech: ‘ora divina’, ‘azzurro tenero’ and ‘profondo’, ‘liquida luce d’oro’, ‘silenzio profondo’ and ‘solenne’. The text has some hints of a rhythmic structure: the double synaesthesia ‘liquida luce d’oro’ contains an alliteration of the *l*, while ‘Il silenzio è solenne’ is a line, a *settenario*, with an alliteration of the *s*. The sky becomes the poetic ‘etere’, the call of a bird is the equally poetic and musical ‘trillo’. Even the cultural reference is absorbed by the needs of the register. The *Pater Ecstaticus* and the *Mater Gloriosa* are two of the apparitions that escort the celestial ascension of Faust’s soul in the fifth act of the second part of Goethe’s play. Nencioni probably intended to suggest that the solitude and silence of the mountain on which the *Pater Ecstaticus* remains with the other anchorites could be compared to the paradisiacal light and silence that the particular sunset reproduced. The choice may not sound very cogent, but probably both the *Pater Ecstaticus* and the *Mater Gloriosa* are chosen to reinforce the general rhythmic structure of the passage and to suggest the privileged experience of a spiritual and aesthetic discovery at the same time. Nencioni cannot exploit the full extent of the textual structure he has created. The citation is incapable of fusion with the context, while the change in register is not invested with the function of an act of discovery but is, rather, charged with the aim of reinforcing an effect of aesthetic pleasure.

Nencioni’s actual achievement must be considered within the framework of the literary supplement. The original adaptation of the sketch was that of a genre that retained a strong link with the medium. Nencioni never lost sight of the ‘phatic’ function of his texts; to reinforce it, he even eliminated the structural feature of the

journalistic persona, offering himself, Enrico Nencioni, as the speaking voice in his articles. The use of cultural material, as well as languages and register, was maybe imprecise or unscrupulous at times, but it was authorised by the particular regime of the literary supplement's cultural recycling. However, such treatment was never gratuitous. The real value of the 'Roundabout Papers' consisted in their discursive qualities. Organised almost as a sort of intellectual report, every 'Roundabout Paper' registered a reading path suggested to its audience. The article was one of the many possible realisations of this suggestion: Nencioni never hid his cultural references, which could be freely enjoyed by readers through the reading technique represented by *retentissement*. From this point of view, the journalist's privileged cultural experience was only a temporary privilege: Nencioni always shared not only the discovery of the aesthetic identity of a situation, but also the journey he had undertaken to get there.

\* \* \*

Nencioni's contribution was not to go unheeded. Towards the end of the century, his idea of literary criticism was rediscovered by an old acquaintance of his, Gabriele d'Annunzio, along with the main representatives of the Aesthetic movement in Florence. In the obituary he wrote in 1896, d'Annunzio proclaimed that Nencioni had been incapable of solving a 'nodo ritmico' that he bore within himself.<sup>58</sup> The word 'nodo' recalled what Dante, in the twenty-sixth canto of the *Purgatorio*, had said about the poets of the previous generation: it was a limit that those predecessors had not been able to overcome. With the allusion to 'ritmo', d'Annunzio alluded to his ability as a poet to extract unknown signs even from the most common objects and to artistically elaborate them in a pure musical form. Therefore, d'Annunzio suggested that Nencioni did not manage to completely grasp the form in which the sentiment is enclosed, according to the theories professed by both d'Annunzio and

<sup>58</sup> Gabriele d'Annunzio, 'Per la morte di un poeta', *La Tribuna*, 1 September 1896, and reprinted in 1898 as the introduction to a collection of Nencioni's writings on Italian literature: Enrico Nencioni, *Saggi critici di letteratura italiana, preceduti da uno scritto di Gabriele d'Annunzio* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1898), pp. v-xxii. The quotations are taken from Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, eds. Annamaria Andreoli and Federico Roncoroni, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), 2, pp. 252-61.



Angelo Conti in the same period.<sup>59</sup> As a critic, Nencioni was almost, but not yet, the *artifex additus artificii* that d'Annunzio was to envisage in 1900 in the preface to Conti's treatise *La riva beata*. Nencioni came very close to that ideal, which entailed a new role for the critic: to collaborate with the artist in order to reveal the mystery behind the act of artistic creation. Despite his limits, d'Annunzio recognised Nencioni as a 'maestro', a sort of private and personal guide capable of revealing and transmitting to his followers, in a singular, spiritual osmosis, the intimate nature of beauty. No one had recognised such hidden greatness:

Il popolo d'Italia, voltolandosi nella sua miseria come in voluttabro, non s'avvede di coloro che scompaiono: non ha rimpianti per questi estremi custodi fedeli delle idealità ripudiate e delle speranze abbattute; non ha corone per i poeti che trapassano dopo aver rivelato in figure armoniose qualche oscura aspirazione della stirpe.<sup>60</sup>

These words echoed in turn what d'Annunzio had written in January 1895 in the *Proemio* to Adolfo De Bosis review's *Il Convito*. Condemning the moral and artistic abjection of Italy, along with the vulgarity and barbarism of contemporary art, d'Annunzio wished to find someone who 'serba la fede nella virtù occulta della stirpe [...] nel potere indistruttibile della Bellezza, nella sovrana dignità dello spirito, nella necessità delle gerarchie intellettuali, in tutti gli alti valori che oggi dal popolo d'Italia sono tenuti a vile, e specialmente nell'efficacia della parola'.<sup>61</sup> And Nencioni had not only been included as an ideal figure in the group of artists of *Il Convito*. While he was still alive, he was asked to collaborate with a poem, the *Rapsodia lirica*, published between 1895 and 1896.<sup>62</sup> The poem was also Nencioni's last literary effort.

The posthumous inclusion of Nencioni into the universe of the *Convito* was not an act of reverence for the old *maestro* by some students and admirers. In the last years of his life, he had already been recruited by the editors of the reviews gathered around the rising Florentine Aestheticism, from the *Vita Nuova* to *Il Marzocco*. In 1893 Angiolo Orvieto published in his *Vita Nuova* an article drawn from a conference on Poe's *The Crown*, and asked Nencioni to contribute to revamping the

<sup>59</sup> Gianni Oliva, *I nobili spiriti. Pascoli, D'Annunzio e le riviste dell'estetismo fiorentino* (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> d'Annunzio, 'Per la morte di un poeta', p. 252.

<sup>61</sup> d'Annunzio, 'Proemio' to *Il Convito*, 1 (Rome, January 1895), in *Scritti giornalistici*, 2, pp. 283-86 (p. 285).

<sup>62</sup> Enrico Nencioni, 'Rapsodia lirica', *Il Convito. Libro III*, July 1895-March 1896, 552-61.

literary supplement of the Florentine newspaper *La Nazione*.<sup>63</sup> As can be argued from a consideration of the letters of Angelo Conti, Nencioni was numbered among the ‘fratelli’, a sort of private and domestic brotherhood that was inspired by its famous British pre-Raphaelite relatives, that included the future group of the *Marzocco*: Orvieto, Conti, Diego Garoglio and Giuseppe Saverio Gargàno.<sup>64</sup> Gargano, in particular, kept the memory of Nencioni alive not only through a periodic revival of his renown, but also by promoting the reprinting of his work. Such revival was also instrumental in the cultural policy of the *Marzocco* group against the old positivism of Florentine academics on the one hand and the progressively rising influence of Idealism on the other. In 1909 Gargàno wrote a profile of Nencioni’s activity in which he used the late critic as an example of literary criticism guided by sentimental intuition:

so che oggi il giudizio estetico deve scaturire direttamente da principi fissi ed immutabili dettati dall’intelligenza, in forza dei quali le deduzioni appariscano nette e rigorose; ma so anche della nessuna azione che così fatta critica, quando esca dal campo delle teorie, esercita sui nostri particolari sentimenti estetici, e per le manchevolezze di essa mi piace appunto di esaltare l’opera di Enrico Nencioni, nella quale trema quella simpatia umana che si comunica con tanto calore al nostro animo ed eccita in noi i sentimenti più varii e più opposti.<sup>65</sup>

Gargàno, opposing Benedetto Croce’s aesthetic theories, denied that aesthetic judgment could stem from immutable theoretical principles. Croce himself did not deny that the aesthetic approach to the work of art was the prerequisite of the critic but he advocated that, in order to be recognised not as personal, but universal, such judgments should be conducted on solid logical, rational and theoretical grounds. Times were changing, but Nencioni’s lessons had been retrieved and were being kept alive well after his death.

The last ‘Roundabout Paper’ was published in 1887, and from then on Nencioni’s collaboration with literary supplements diminished, becoming only occasional in the last years of his life. The last decade of the century saw a progressive decline in the kind of cultural dissemination proposed by the literary

<sup>63</sup> BMF, Carteggio Nencioni II 227, 1 (Orvieto to Nencioni, Florence 7 April 1883).

<sup>64</sup> In his letters, Angelo Conti numbered Nencioni among his ‘fratelli’, the Florentine enthusiasts of Aestheticism: see BMF, Carteggio Nencioni II 84, 2 (undated [1892]). In a subsequent letter (85, 1 [1893]) Conti addressed Nencioni as ‘maestro e fratello’.

<sup>65</sup> Giuseppe Saverio Gargàno, ‘Un critico indimenticabile: Enrico Nencioni’, *Il Marzocco*, y. XIV, no. 24, 13 June 1909, 3-4 (p. 3).

supplement. Gradually, the task was taken on by the newspaper, which imposed a different type of journalistic practice. The genre of the sketch, in the form experimented with by Nencioni, was revived in 1911 by d'Annunzio, although in a completely different context: that of the *elzeviro*.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE BIRTH OF THE *ELZEVIRO*

The birth of modern cultural industry and the enlargement of the book market at the beginning of the new century fostered a new organisation of cultural demand. With the appearance of the first intellectual groups, the cultural avant-garde found in the journal a tool for an extremely specialised debate, which did not seek contact with the greater public. The literary supplement therefore lost its function as the privileged medium for cultural dissemination. Its role was taken by newspapers, which, from 1901, filled the gap with the elaboration of a new cultural space on the third page (*terza pagina*). The main space was the two columns on the left-hand side of the third page, printed in *Elzevier* type or, in Italian, *elzeviro* – hence the name of the article, *elzeviro*. The new space was originally meant to host all kinds of cultural articles and, in particular, those on literary topics or foreign correspondence. The size of the *elzeviro*, as well as its journalistic destination, required a generation of journalists to find a suitable way to write for it. It was Gabriele d’Annunzio who, in 1911, demonstrated that the *elzeviro* could be a text endowed with literary quality. His ‘Faville del maglio’ published in *Corriere della Sera* set a new standard for journalistic writing and demonstrated that creative drive could be channelled into a genre purpose-built for the newspaper.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first investigates the origin of the third page within the cultural context of Italy at the end of the nineteenth century and its impact on the practice of journalism. The second traces the birth of the *elzeviro* and how it affected journalistic writing. The third analyses Gabriele d’Annunzio’s ‘Faville del maglio’ within the context of *Corriere*.

## 1. The cultural space of the third page

At the end of 1890, the editors of *Fanfulla* decided to merge the political newspaper and *Fanfulla della Domenica*. The idea of an independent cultural section as part of the political newspaper had been experimented with in the past. Even though a comprehensive survey has never been attempted, the newspapers that had daily literary sections included *Il Giornale di Napoli* from August to September 1881 and *L'Elettrico* (Genoa), which in turn had an entire literary page. Other newspapers tried to include one or two literary pages on a weekly basis, such as *L'Italia Reale* (Naples) in 1881 and *La Lega Lombarda* (Milan) in 1886.<sup>1</sup>

The decision taken by *Fanfulla* was dictated primarily by economic reasons and, in particular, by the progressive reorganisation of the book market brought about by paperback editions. For once, Italian readers were in line with the rest of Europe, following a tendency that had started in the 1880s. In spite of some temporary contractions at the end of the previous decade,<sup>2</sup> the increase in the Italian middlebrow book market at the end of the nineteenth century drove production of new and original works along with the canonical classics. The middle-class market was expanding, in parallel with a progressive growth in literacy and expanding access to higher education.<sup>3</sup> As Donald Sassoon has noted, the expansion of the public introduced a new element that began to condition the readers' choice: enthusiasm. The success of a book no longer depended on press promotion, but on word of mouth among readers.<sup>4</sup> The literary supplements saw their impact on the public readership progressively eroded by the readers themselves, who preferred to enjoy the books rather than simply read literary criticism or the various discontinuous literary products provided by journals. A new form of literary supplement emerged at the beginning of the new century in response to this new trend. In 1901 *Corriere della Sera* issued an illustrated monthly supplement, *La Lettura*, edited by Giuseppe Giacosa, which gained immediate and unprecedented

<sup>1</sup> Alessandra Briganti, Camilla Cattarulla and Franco D'Intino, *Stampa e letteratura. Spazi e generi nei quotidiani italiani dell'Ottocento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1996), p. 7. Further data and conjectures in Giuseppe Farinelli et al., *Storia del giornalismo italiano. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Turin: UTET, 1997), pp. 254-55.

<sup>2</sup> Ada Gigli Marchetti, 'Le nuove dimensioni dell'impresa editoriale', in *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. Gabriele Turi (Florence: Giunti, 1997), pp. 115-63 (pp. 148-51).

<sup>3</sup> Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana*, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans*, p. 691.

favour.<sup>5</sup> In 1906 Giuseppe Prezzolini appropriately compared it to a British magazine, and counted it among ‘le tipiche riviste per passare il tempo in ferrovia’.<sup>6</sup> And, in effect, *La Lettura* had the characteristics of a magazine, with a mixture of original narrative texts and easily readable articles on travel, tourism, science and exhibitions, as well as a section on book and journal reviews.<sup>7</sup> The target was obviously the same reading public as *Corriere*, ‘il miglior pubblico d’Italia’, of which the critic Renato Serra in 1915 gave probably the most poignant account:

Tutta la nostra borghesia intellettuale, il pubblico del “Corriere” [...] i professionisti che non hanno rinunciato alla lettura, le signore che non vogliono dimenticare di aver avuto una buona educazione, le signorine e i ragazzi non completamente sportivi, tutta la buona media insomma, non concepisce l’arte, ossia il divertimento mentale in forma elevata, il libro di cui si può dire che è scritto bene, con un certo orgoglio letterario, che fa parer naturale e più distinto il gusto delle storielle piccanti e delle indiscrezioni così precise sul mondo dei *viveurs* e delle *cocottes* – se non sotto le specie di Zuccoli.<sup>8</sup>

Serra encapsulated the readership of the *Corriere* in the work of the Swiss-Italian novelist Luciano Zuccoli, whose middlebrow best-selling novels were the typical product for the new public. But Serra was not disapproving. He recognised that Zuccoli employed well-known techniques of the artistic avant-gardes in order to tailor a product that could give the illusion of possessing artistic qualities: ‘È la maniera; ma non bisogna scordare le facoltà reali che servono allo sfruttamento commerciale, metodico e periodico’.<sup>9</sup> It was a description of what later theorists would define as Midcult – ‘mass products that aim at the production of effects without pretending to be art’.<sup>10</sup>

The progressive disappearance of the literary supplement resulted in a threefold remediation. The magazine on the one hand and the militant journal on the other represented the two extremes of cultural dissemination that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. The link between the two was provided by the

<sup>5</sup> Simona Colarizi, ‘Il Corriere nell’età liberale. Profilo storico’, in *Storia del Corriere della Sera*, ed. Ernesto Galli della Loggia, 4 vols. (Milan: Rizzoli-Fondazione Corriere della Sera, 2011), 3, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, *La coltura italiana*, 2nd edn (Milan: Corbaccio, 1930), p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> See the indexes of the magazine published by Elisabetta Camerlo, *La Lettura, 1901-1945. Storia e indici* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Renato Serra, ‘Le Lettere’, in *Scritti letterari morali e politici*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), pp. 361-482 (p. 430).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

<sup>10</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘The Structure of Bad Taste’, p. 189.

political press, which performed a mediating function. But the alternative that started to be outlined was deeply intertwined with the cultural and political crisis that enveloped Italy at the end of the nineteenth century.

The spirit of communication and collaboration that had characterised the most advanced sectors of cultural production and the dissemination guaranteed by the literary supplements began to disappear. Journals like *Fanfulla della Domenica* were the expression of an identity and an accord between the ruling class and the cultural foundations established during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The discourse that informed the cultural debate was firmly grounded in liberalism and positivism and in the literary field the conflict, if it was a genuine conflict, was fought between classicism and naturalism. The social crisis occurred at the end of the century, summed up by the 1898 riots in Milan and the disastrous colonial policies of Italy, showed that the ruling class was incapable of dealing with new cultural instruments for interpreting and managing the changing situation. Its culture simply had not moved with the times: it had been unable to grasp the substance of Decadentism, Symbolism, Mysticism, Spiritism –the movements that characterised the cultural ambitions of the younger generation. Lucia Mangoni has noted that, if both the younger and older generations converged in recognising the crisis, nevertheless ‘si andavano aggregando in modo diverso le possibili risposte’.<sup>11</sup> And from a material point of view the answers were articulated in a different form than in the past. Preceded by Angiolo Orvieto’s *Il Marzocco* in 1896, and followed by Giovanni Papini’s *Leonardo* and Benedetto Croce’s *La Critica* in 1903, the younger generations began to rally around journals with the aim of elaborating the ground for a cultural renewal and a concrete social intervention.

The new gatherings were the expression of the first attempt to organise an intellectual movement in Italy. The rapid spread of the neo-Idealism promoted by Croce entailed a progressive need for specialisation. In contrast with the tendency of the positivists to expand their specialism from the social to the human sciences, cultural discourse could be engaged in only by those with expertise.<sup>12</sup> Culture, and the cultural debate, became a highly specialised field of cultural production. The new intellectuals wrote only for a restricted élite of their peers. This tendency also

<sup>11</sup> Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi di fine secolo. La cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), p. 218.

<sup>12</sup> Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘La cultura’, in *Storia d’Italia*, eds. Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti, 6 vols (Turin, Einaudi, 1972-76), 4. *Dall’Unità a oggi* (1975), pp. 821-1664 (p. 1136).

expanded to the literary field. According to a definition coined by Giacomo Debenedetti, the people that gathered around a journal could be defined as ‘gruppi-piloti’.<sup>13</sup> the cultural avant-garde did not care for immediate contact with the public, and grew separately from its needs. The nineteenth-century literary supplement thus had no alternative but to become, if not an obsolete publication, then one representation of the cultural rearguard.

The progressive specialisation of culture did not appeal to the ‘borghesia intellettuale’ described by Serra. In 1891, *Fanfulla*’s editors wished to lead the readers ‘a una medesima mèta: la conoscenza cioè meno imperfetta possibile del movimento politico e intellettuale della nazione’.<sup>14</sup> The intention still reflected the organisation of culture based on an accord between the political and cultural discourses that was about to face a crisis. In such a context, readers continued to make a distinction between the functions of the political newspaper and those of the literary supplement. Towards the end of the century, many political newspapers started to pledge more space to literary information.<sup>15</sup> Such a tendency, which continued in subsequent years, was probably the ‘substitute’ function that Castronovo has attributed to the twentieth century Italian political daily newspaper. It was the ‘riluttanza [...] ad abbandonare le funzioni di appoggio alla circolazione delle idee, volte ad accreditare presso il grosso pubblico la cultura militante e a sopperire insieme alla mancanza o alla limitata diffusione nazionale delle riviste specializzate’.<sup>16</sup> The newspaper made the link between culture and the wider bourgeois public, offering a popularisation and promotion of the findings of higher culture. But the deep connection between journalism, politics and the main industrial trusts that financed the press also had an impact on the cultural choices of newspapers. Alessandra Briganti has demonstrated how, through the acceptance and praise of the new economic order based on the rules of industrial production, the intellectual searched for and gained integration with the daily press. The work of the cultural journalist underwent its first radical change: from a previous position as an independent cultural operator, the intellectual who became a cultural journalist found himself enclosed ‘in un rapporto di dipendenza, che va dalla semplice accettazione

<sup>13</sup> Giacomo Debenedetti, *Il romanzo del Novecento* (Milan: Garzanti, 1971), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Fra un anno e l’altro’, *FdD*, y. XII, no. 52, 28 December 1890.

<sup>15</sup> See Alessandra Briganti, *Intellettuali e cultura*, pp. 38-39 (although Briganti claims that the union of the two *Fanfullas* took place in 1899 instead of 1891).

<sup>16</sup> Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, p. 157.



del lavoro culturale come professione fino alla rivendicazione di un “mandato sociale”, di un tipo di impegno [...] di managers dell’opinione pubblica’.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the political newspaper found itself involved in the necessity of providing a link between militant culture and its public. Despite the progressive economic advancement and incipient industrialisation of the country, as well as the growth of an organised working class, political participation was still restricted and determined by census. Until the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1912, the trend of Italian politics was to avoid, as Cammarano has argued, a nationalisation of political culture based on overt and plural competition.<sup>18</sup> But the increase of the pressure for inclusion was instrumental in promoting a growth of political interest among the bourgeoisie, which had been characterised by political apathy during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Also, the appearance of an organised movement in the shape of the Socialist Party at the end of the nineteenth century forced the bourgeoisie to revive its interest in public life. An increase in the readership figures was accompanied by the second major reorganisation of the Italian press after the taking of Rome: the public started to assemble around a restricted number of liberal newspapers that were being circulated nationwide: *La Stampa* (Turin), *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), *La Tribuna* and *Il Giornale d’Italia* (Rome).<sup>20</sup> The reduced dissemination of economic resources also allowed the modernisation of technologies for the production and printing of newspapers. From 1904 onwards, newspapers increased the number of their pages from four to six or eight, keeping the six-column division of each page in the broadsheet format.<sup>21</sup> Greater space and a larger public: the political newspaper was ready to offer its services to bridge the gap between the cultural avant-garde and the reading public. The space provided for the purpose was situated in the third page, between politics and crime news (*cronaca nera*).

The subsequent practice of Italian journalism, especially after the First World War, has identified the cultural section of the newspaper with the third page. *Terza pagina* acted as a sort of metonymy to signify a whole page devoted to cultural debate. This, however, is inaccurate. The *terza pagina* as a physical entity entirely

<sup>17</sup> Briganti, *Intelletuali e cultura*, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Cammarano, *Storia dell’Italia liberale*, p. 300.

<sup>19</sup> Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana*, p. 521.

<sup>20</sup> Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, p. 151.

<sup>21</sup> Farinelli et al., *Storia del giornalismo italiano*, pp. 251-52.

composed of cultural articles only came into existence after the Second World War. When discussing newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is necessary to remember that cultural articles occupied only part of the third page. Over and beyond the boundaries of this section, the newspaper continued its business – usually crime or judicial news. The position of the cultural section between the politics and news sections was merely a fact of topicalisation. Moreover, at least until the end of the Great War, and especially during the conflict, the presence of the cultural section was not to be taken for granted. The great national newspapers followed their primary nature of providing political news. Any material that could help to interpret an important transition of political life or the account of an extraordinary event was likely to replace cultural articles at any moment.

According to scholarly narratives, it was Alberto Bergamini, the editor of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, who “invented” the third page in 1901 – or, rather, found a technical and practical solution for embedding a cultural section in newspapers.<sup>22</sup> Bergamini was the founder of *Il Giornale d'Italia*. Previously, he had been editor-in-chief of *Corriere della Sera*. Bergamini had established the new daily newspaper in 1901, based on the conservative programme sponsored by Sidney Sonnino, with a focus on reformist policy in the rural areas of southern Italy in opposition to the industrial policies promoted in the north by Giolitti.<sup>23</sup> In a short memoir written in later life, Bergamini claimed responsibility for the institution of *terza pagina*. The occasion was the Roman première performance of *Francesca da Rimini*, a play by d’Annunzio, in 1901. The day after the play, 11 December 1901, the third page of the *Giornale* was completely monopolised by the event, covered from four different points of view: literary, musical, dramatic and socialite.<sup>24</sup> As Roberta Gisotti has rightly claimed, the novelty of the approach trialled by Bergamini was not in the insertion of literary matter into the newspaper: he was just following ‘esigenze tecnico-grafiche d’impaginazione’, and not ‘una consapevole scelta redazionale, da ripetersi secondo un programma editoriale’.<sup>25</sup> The programme was purely

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of the literature on Bergamini’s supposed first *terza pagina* see Roberta Gisotti, *La nascita della terza pagina. Letterati e giornalismo 1860-1914* (Lecce: Capone, 1986), pp. 98-99.

<sup>23</sup> Rosario Villari, *Conservatori e democratici nell’Italia liberale* (Bari: Laterza, 1964), pp. 43-85.

<sup>24</sup> The articles of that first original *terza pagina* have been recently reprinted in *Giornalismo italiano 1860-2001*, ed. Franco Contorbia, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2007-2009), 2. 1901-1939 (2007), pp. 29-48.

<sup>25</sup> Gisotti, *La nascita della terza pagina*, p. 101.

informational. Theatre criticism, and the coverage of the main performances, was very common in a society for which theatre was a social pastime. It was a central and constant presence in every newspaper, whether in the major or provincial cities or in local towns. Bergamini's chronicle of the cultural event was, however, invested with crucial importance because the playwright was one of the most highly regarded Italian authors in the world and the lead actress was the international star Eleonora Duse. In spite of the (posthumous) sensation, Bergamini himself revealed in his memoir that the event was still a product of the old organisation of culture that had dominated before the crisis at the beginning of the new century:

L'Italia era tranquilla, non era ancora turbata da scioperi, agitazioni, guerre e altre diavolerie: era un'Italia placida, aveva il gusto atavico della cultura, si interessava a un nuovo scrittore che si affermasse, si accendeva di entusiasmo per l'ultima ode di Carducci, per le *Myricae* di Pascoli, per la *Pioggia nel pineto* di D'Annunzio, leggeva avidamente un romanzo di Giovanni Verga, di Antonio Fogazzaro, di Matilde Serao. Si compiaceva che un volume italiano, il *Cuore* di Edmondo De Amicis, arrivato ad un milione di copie, vicesse nel mondo il *record* librario [...] amava la toscana finezza letteraria di Ferdinando Martini [...] La tragedia di D'Annunzio, che in quel clima affrontava il giudizio del pubblico, era un grande avvenimento: richiedeva una degna relazione che superasse i maggiori precedenti delle cronache teatrali.<sup>26</sup>

'L'Italia era tranquilla': the situation was the apparent restoration of order after the Milan revolts and the assassination of King Umberto I in 1900. Bergamini was erecting a monument to the cultural world that he evoked when, later in December 1903, he decided to devote the third page of his newspaper to cultural dissemination. As he recalled in his memoir, Bergamini gathered around the journal all the 'stato maggiore' of Italian culture: the names that had contributed to the fame of the main literary supplement since the 1880s appeared again in the *Giornale d'Italia*,<sup>27</sup> beginning with the now old patriot, scholar and journalist Alessandro D'Ancona, who was invited to work for the *Giornale* as early as October 1901.<sup>28</sup>

Bergamini's intuition was to ask his writers to contribute political articles. D'Ancona obliged from the first issues. Croce sensed that association with

<sup>26</sup> Alberto Bergamini, 'Nascita della terza pagina', in Enrico Falqui, *Nostra "Terza pagina"* (Rome: Canesi, 1964), pp. 250-268 (pp. 251-52). The article was originally published in *Nuova Antologia* in 1955, but Bergamini published other accounts in the *Giornale d'Italia* (16 November 1951) and *Il Resto del Carlino* (3 May 1956).

<sup>27</sup> For a complete list see Bergamini, 'Nascita della terza pagina', p. 254.

<sup>28</sup> SNS, Fondo Alessandro D'Ancona, Carteggio Bergamini 1 (Bergamini to D'Ancona, Rome, 1 October 1901).

Bergamini's newspaper could be a springboard for securing the diffusion of his ideas among the bourgeois public. The alliance between Bergamini and Croce resulted in the *Giornale* previewing all the key articles that Croce would subsequently publish in *La Critica*, in the form of excerpts or interviews on those aspects of cultural and intellectual life that he deemed worthy of consideration. With Croce's involvement in 1902, and the association with *La Critica*, the political newspaper began to act as a mediator between the proposal of neo-Idealist philosophy and its spread among the wider public of non-specialists. In the new role of freelance philosopher, as Giuseppe Galasso has defined him, Croce could propose his all-encompassing interpretation of the world and maintain a direct, regular contact with the modestly equipped readers who wanted to interact with his ideas without being forced to climb the rigorous theoretical heights of *La Critica*.<sup>29</sup> From a cultural point of view, the first highlight of Croce's contribution was the simultaneous publication in both periodicals of his *Note sulla letteratura italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XIX*, which began in 1903. In his memoirs, Croce considered his reinterpretation of contemporary Italian literature to be the exemplification of his aesthetic thought, rather than a historical survey.<sup>30</sup> The extent of Croce's double plan of action can only be appreciated by following its full deployment in *La Critica*. As a matter of fact, Croce's articles had an intimate political meaning: the cultural battle that he fought in *La Critica* was directed against nineteenth-century positivism. The inspection and judgement of the literature of that period was also the critique of an entire generation from the point of view of a philosophical system that proposed itself as the new guiding principle for the regeneration of Italian society.

In a few years, political newspapers were able to cover the mid-market of cultural offering, and differentiate it into a range of products from magazines to the cultural articles placed on the third page. From their first appearance in the *Giornale d'Italia*, these articles were the direct continuators of those that had appeared in nineteenth-century literary supplements. The framework had changed, although the writers commissioned by Bergamini were the same as those of the Roman literary supplements: as Serra claimed in *Le lettere*, 'la distinzione era di generi e non di persone'.<sup>31</sup> The same people who were professionally engaged in scholarly work,

<sup>29</sup> Giuseppe Galasso, *Croce e lo spirito del suo tempo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002), p. 244.

<sup>30</sup> Croce, 'Contributo alla critica di me stesso', p. 1155.

<sup>31</sup> Serra, *Scritti letterari morali e politici*, p. 460.

such as D'Ancona or D'Ovidio or Villari, could still write in the literary supplement and later the newspaper, alongside literary journalists of the same generation such as Enrico Panzacchi. The format of their articles, however, had to change. The drastic reduction in space imposed by the newspaper caused some perplexity, but the practice of the cultural article on the third page was eventually established; and a new generation of contributors would acquire the skills to be able to implement it.

## 2. Two columns 'in elzeviro'

The long march towards the third page as an acknowledged communicational space may be said to have begun in the early 1880s. It may be interesting to note that originally, rather than the third page, it was the first and the second to be earmarked for the article on literary and broadly cultural matters.

In 1882 the editor of *Corriere della Sera*, following probably the example set by *Fanfulla*, moved the literary and the wider cultural debate out of the *appendice*, establishing one or two daily columns for it on the second page. Occasionally, when the cultural news was particularly important, an article could begin on the first page and continue onto the second, in which case it acquired the technical name of *articolo di risvolto*.<sup>32</sup> The article, whether the *risvolto* or on the second page, was printed using a different typeface, slightly wider and more spacious than that adopted for regular articles, named *Elzevir*. As early as 1902, the Sicilian writer Federico De Roberto wrote to the editor of *Corriere*, Luigi Albertini, suggesting the best way to print two articles he had sent:

Tu potrai, secondo che crederai e che le circostanze di tempo e di spazio di consentiranno, pubblicare insieme i miei scritti, facendo comporre con caratteri piccoli il biografico e in elzeviro l'altro, oppure dare il primo subito, con la notizia della morte e il secondo domani.<sup>33</sup>

The distinction between 'caratteri piccoli' and 'elzeviro' was instrumental: the main article, the more important piece, was printed in *Elzevir*. The other items of news (in

<sup>32</sup> Moroni, *Alle origini del "Corriere della Sera"*, p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> Federico De Roberto, *Federico De Roberto a Luigi Albertini. Lettere del critico al direttore del "Corriere della Sera"*, ed. Sarah Zappulla Muscarà (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), p. 91 (De Roberto to Albertini, Catania, 11 September 1902).

this case the biography, alternatively a book or theatre review or some other cultural news of minor interest) were to be published in a minor font. But there was no fixed rule, as transpires from another letter from De Roberto to Albertini of 1904:

Alternerò le quinte colonne con gli articoli-rassegne, che tu del resto, come mi dici, potrai stampare in elzeviro e in prima pagina quando ne avrai bisogno. Componendoli in corpo 7 e mettendoli nel capo del giornale [...].<sup>34</sup>

By ‘quinte colonne’ De Roberto meant the article that occupied the two left-hand columns of the second page, the fifth and the sixth, printed in *Elzevir*. The ‘articoli-rassegne’ were reviews of the latest books, which could be printed either in *Elzevir* or the smaller font and placed on either the first or second pages depending on the available space.

*Corriere*’s practice of dedicating the ‘quinta colonna’ to culture and printing it in *Elzevir* was quickly adopted by the main political newspapers. However, after the attempt at gathering the cultural articles in the third page experienced with the report of the première of d’Annunzio’s play, it was the *Giornale d’Italia* that was the first to progressively structure its third page in a fixed way. In early issues, in November 1901, it followed the model of *Corriere della Sera*. The cultural article occupied the last two right-side columns of the second page, in a mise-en-page that counted six columns per page. The length of the article varied: in some cases, it was very short (one, or even half a column); if it was too long, it overflowed onto the first column of the third page. Only in 1903 did it start to appear in the first two left-columns of the third page.<sup>35</sup> But its position was defined from the beginning of 1904 and, in 1906, the *Giornale d’Italia* began structuring a third page to accommodate a complete cultural report. The article in *Elzevir* occupied the first two columns on the left; the length was an average: the size of the article could vary from one and a half to three columns. The other columns were printed in the newspaper’s regular font: the standard size for the latest cultural news (art, music, theatre, science), and a smaller one for the book reviews, the listings for the main theatres in the city in which the newspaper was printed, and the gossip column. Crime news followed the

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 255 (De Roberto to Albertini, Zafarana, 8 September 1904).

<sup>35</sup> Oreste Antognoni, ‘L’arte nella scuola’, *Il Giornale d’Italia*, 20 September 1903, followed shortly by Carlo Paladini, ‘La musica di “Madame Butterfly”’, 27 September 1903; Diego Angeli, ‘Lettera dai Giardini di Venezia. Il fallimento della critica’, 29 September 1903; Gino Bandini, ‘Il centenario di Alfieri’, 6 December 1903.

cultural section. The structure of third page as conceived by the *Giornale d'Italia* was adopted by all the other rival newspapers in 1907: *La Stampa*, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Tribuna*. By 1907, then, the article in *elzeviro*, intended as the first article encountered on the third page, with an average length of two columns and printed in *Elzevir*, was the main and most recognisable feature of the *terza pagina*.

There are no historical studies on the use of fonts in newspapers in Italy – nothing comparable to Stanley Morison's history of *The Times* and the font he invented for it, "Times New Roman".<sup>36</sup> Equally, there are only later musings on the use of the *Elzevir* rather than a different font for the 'quinta colonna' and for the *elzeviro* later.<sup>37</sup> An explanation for the reason of its use has never been attempted.

The *Elzevir* was a font that originated from the print shop of the Dutch firm Elzevier in the seventeenth century. It became commonly used in Italy in the late 1870s. In 1877, the publisher Zanichelli launched two books that would mark an era in the history of Italian poetry: Giosuè Carducci's *Odi barbare* and Olindo Guerrini's *Postuma*. These were the first volumes of a series with a distinctive layout. Very small (in duodecimo format), printed on ivory paper, decorated with wood engravings and typeset in *Elzevir*. Soon, by way of a synecdoche they became simply known as 'elzeviri'.<sup>38</sup> In a few years, Zanichelli added other collections by Carducci and Guerrini (in 1880, for example, Nencioni's *Poesie* were included in the same series), while other publishers, starting with Angelo Sommaruga, began to use the same format to produce elegant books and Sommaruga typeset his periodical *Cronaca Bizantina* in *Elzevir*. Soon, *Fanfulla della Domenica* followed the same practice, printing the front page in the same font. *Elzevir* was, then, probably adopted in *Corriere* because it was the font in which the most sophisticated works by the most famous authors of the 1880s and 1890s were printed, and because it was the font used by the most popular literary supplements. In the plastic organisation of the newspaper, the adoption of the font used in well-designed literary books and journals would instantaneously convey the nature of the article. At the same time, because

<sup>36</sup> *The History of The Times*, ed. Stanley Morison, 4 vols (London: The Office of The Times, 1935-1952).

<sup>37</sup> Enrico Falqui, *Inchiesta sulla terza pagina* (Rome: Edizioni Radio Italiana, 1953), pp. 9-10.

<sup>38</sup> Capuana devoted an article to them in *Corriere della Sera* ('Elzeviri e non elzeviri', 27-28 November 1880), while Policarpo Petrocchi, in the first edition of his dictionary, listed them under the entry 'elzeviro': 'un libro composto con questo carattere. *Gli elzeviri dello Zanichelli*'. See Policarpo Petrocchi, *Novo Dizionario Universale della Lingua Italiana*, 2 vols (Milan: Treves, 1887-91), 1 (1887), p. 815.

*Elzevir* was a different font, larger than usual and printed with extra line-spacing (leading), it broke the rhythm of the newspaper, denoting a pause or interruption in the reading of the news material.

If the practice of printing the cultural article over the last two columns of the second page and in *Elzevir* began with *Corriere della Sera* in 1882, the practice of printing such articles in *Elzevir* over the first two columns of the third page can be attributed to *Il Giornale d'Italia*, starting in 1903. The use of *elzeviro* as the name of the article was introduced at some point between 1904 and 1910. In 1910, De Roberto, writing to Alberto Albertini (Luigi's brother), claimed:

Ricevetti i due volumi, e ne ringrazio te e Gigio. Sto leggendo quello sullo Chateaubriand, e credo ne caverò un elzeviro.<sup>39</sup>

In this letter, the passage from the earlier instruction 'in elzeviro' to 'un elzeviro' discloses confidence in the use of the word. Apparently, in six years the word *elzeviro* had become a common part of the technical jargon in journalistic practice. It is possible that close scrutiny of newspaper archives may unearth earlier testimony of the word. To date, no earlier occurrences of the word *elzeviro* appear in printed documents; even the main dictionaries are elusive. The *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* records only one late appearance of the word in some autobiographical memories by Lorenzo Montano, one of the founders of *La Ronda*, published in 1956.<sup>40</sup>

The articles 'in elzeviro' of the *Giornale d'Italia*, and later those of other newspapers, were dedicated to the latest events in the cultural world. The coverage of theatre (drama, opera, music) formed the largest part of the third page programme. As Paolo Di Stefano has pointed out,

sin dagli inizi, l'elzeviro si definisce tale, più che per una specificità o uniformità di genere, per la sua collocazione e il suo inconfondibile aspetto grafico, congeniali alla recensione libraria e artistica come alla rassegna di varia umanità, al reportage sociologico, alla corrispondenza culturale, alla notazione di costume, al resoconto

<sup>39</sup> De Roberto, *Federico De Roberto a Luigi Albertini*, p. 307 (De Roberto to Alberto Albertini, Rome, 2 March 1910).

<sup>40</sup> 'Cecchi e Baldini avevano da badare anzitutto ai loro impegni giornalistici, soddisfacendo ai quali erano stati tra i principali creatori di un genere letterario, l'elzeviro di terza pagina': Lorenzo Montano, *Carte nel vento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1956), p. 124. See *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, eds. Salvatore Battaglia and Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, 21 vols (Turin: UTET, 1961-2002), 5 (1968), s.v. *elzeviro*.



scientifico, all'intervista, al commento di giornata, alla polemica, al saggio, al racconto di viaggio e al frammento libero.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, the space of the cultural article was perceived in journalistic practice as the space for an article printed 'in elzeviro', and therefore its content was flexible. It was a multi-purpose space, and the function was signalled by the use of a particular title with a generic or rhematic function, according to Genette's classification: the two titles that formed the largest part were the literary chronicle and correspondence. The former, always entitled 'Cronaca letteraria' or 'Cronache letterarie', was a super-title, placed above the proper, thematic title of the article. The latter was rather a subtitle, which was identical in virtually all the newspapers: '(Nostra corrispondenza particolare)', always between brackets. But the same space could equally host literary texts: a *novella*, or a specially commissioned short story for the short space available – a humorous, paradoxical or indulgent article, usually seasoned with witticisms and jokes.<sup>42</sup>

The use of the *elzeviro* space for literary criticism on the one hand, and correspondence on the other, ushered in a major renovation in the journalistic profession. Within a few years, the model of the literary supplement was abandoned, as the requirements of *terza pagina* proved far more flexible, and the latter required a new set of skills that a younger generation of journalists was ready and willing to provide. This new generation was attracted by the possibilities of permanent jobs offered by journalism. In 1909, Croce intervened in person in *La Voce* on the new possibilities offered by a career in the press sector. He noted that there were two alternatives for the young humanities graduate: teaching in schools or becoming a journalist.<sup>43</sup> The increasing complexity of journalistic practice and the subsequent growth of press firms required more specialised personnel, capable of autonomous work in the complicated machinery of newspaper production. As the recent publication of a series of documents from the editorial office of *Corriere della Sera* has demonstrated, a progressive differentiation was taking place within the newspaper firm. The majority of contributors to the cultural section were not direct

<sup>41</sup> Paolo Di Stefano, 'Prefazione', in *La critica letteraria e il Corriere della Sera* (Milan: Fondazione Corriere della Sera, 2011), vol. 1 (1876-1945), ed. Bruno Pischetta, pp. IX-XXXIII (p. XV).

<sup>42</sup> On this aspect of the early *terza pagina* see Patrizia Zambon, *Letteratura e stampa nel secondo Ottocento* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1993), pp. 168-69.

<sup>43</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'I laureati al bivio', *La Voce*, y. I, no. 8, 4 February 1909, 29.

employees, although *Corriere* imposed a lock-in contract that prevented them from writing for rival newspapers. Ettore Janni was permanently hired in 1903 as the editor of the cultural section.<sup>44</sup> His counterpart at *Il Giornale d'Italia* was the young Goffredo Bellonci<sup>45</sup> and Emilio Cecchi was hired by *La Tribuna* in 1910 in the same role. The skills demanded of the new literary journalist at the beginning of the twentieth century were incomparably greater than those of his nineteenth-century counterpart. The new professional was no longer a *letterato*, but rather a worker in a cultural industry and, as such, was expected to observe the rules of industrial production. He had to be up-to-date with publishing houses and the main personalities in the cultural field, to be informed about the dominant trends and to summarise them in the pages of the newspaper. The new journalist was not a trendsetter; he no longer decided or influenced the taste of his public. Instead, he had to maintain the daily interest of a larger, anonymous public, even when this meant adapting to its tastes or preferences.

But there was also a different figure that had started to acquire prominence at the beginning of the new century: the foreign correspondent. The need to regularly keep in touch with the main European capitals and the desire to know details about life in other countries was driven by public demand. It was an appeal dictated by the recent Unification: the bourgeoisie of the new state wanted to be informed about the forms of sociability and the customs of its counterpart in the other European nations. Judging by the vast amount of correspondence in newspapers since the beginning of the new century, foreign news greatly appealed to the readership, and newspapers were forced to invest in this branch of their activity.<sup>46</sup> The foreign correspondent had to be able to tackle any aspect of the profession: he was expected to write about a whole range of subjects, from diplomatic relations to culture and sport to the humble press review, and had to be present in the theatres of the main events. The space for these reports was variable: foreign news articles could occupy the first or second page in the case of particular events that required political or economic details; but the regular correspondence was published on the third page, in the space of the article 'in elzeviro'.

<sup>44</sup> Lorenzo Benadusi, *Il «Corriere della Sera» di Luigi Albertini. Nascita e sviluppo della prima industria culturale di massa* (Rome: Aracne, 2012), p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Arnaldo Bocelli, 'Bellonci, Goffredo', *DBI* 7 (1970).

<sup>46</sup> On this particular aspect of the correspondence see Luca Clerici, 'Introduzione', in *Scrittori italiani di viaggio. 1861-2000* (Milan: Mondadori, 2013), pp. xxx-xxxvii (p. xxxv).

At the beginning of the new century, Luigi Albertini began to replace the old correspondents with a new generation of professionals. Pietro Croci, as *Corriere's* London correspondent, completely reorganised the correspondence service and, with his dominion over the communication media, revolutionised the transmission of news from abroad.<sup>47</sup> The work of the foreign correspondent also constituted a great training opportunity for the ambitious journalist, as it allowed for sojourns abroad with a regular stipend. A number of literary journalists grasped this opportunity. The most famous of them was arguably Ugo Ojetti, who started his career as a contributor to *Fanfulla della Domenica* and other Roman literary supplements. Within a few years, he had reinvented himself as a foreign correspondent: in 1898 he was hired by *Corriere* and sent to the United States. Upon his return in 1901, he left after some disagreements with Albertini and was immediately hired by Bergamini as Paris correspondent.<sup>48</sup>

Despite its flexible and seemingly accommodating nature, the *elzeviro* was in fact becoming an increasingly demanding endeavour for anyone wishing to abide to its rules, or rather to its rapidly changing faces and purposes. Indeed the practice of writing an article 'in elzeviro' went through a series of developments and even the most technically endowed journalists experienced problems in meeting the task.

### 3. Writing the article *in elzeviro*

The letters that Bergamini exchanged with Alessandro D'Ancona constitute a precious record of the process of remediation that a cultural journalist of the old school had to undertake in order to adapt his writing for the newspaper. In the first years of the collaboration, Bergamini urged D'Ancona to intervene on many cultural and political matters; on the other hand, Bergamini tactfully helped D'Ancona to refashion his first articles and adapt them to the scant space allowed them in the newspaper. Two months into D'Ancona's association with the *Giornale*, Bergamini had to warn him:

<sup>47</sup> Lorenzo Benadusi, 'Il Corriere nell'età liberale. Documenti 1900-1925', in *Storia del Corriere della Sera*, vol. 4, pp. 410-14.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Cerasi, 'Ugo Ojetti', *DBI* 79 (2013).

Ma poiché è impossibile ridurre, né io oserei più insistere, si contenti che io divida in due parti l'articolo; le darò a breve distanza l'una dall'altra. Creda, illustre e caro Professore, che la distribuzione della materia in un foglio quotidiano ha tirannie veramente feroci: e non me ne voglia per la divisione.<sup>49</sup>

Even the *mise-en-page* had to be justified. A rare and most revealing example of the proofs of an article 'in elzeviro' that was published in August 1904 survives in the unpublished Bergamini-D'Ancona correspondence. A manuscript note from Bergamini informed D'Ancona of the changes to be made: as another sacrifice to the dictates of space, the article had to be divided into two parts. But Bergamini, in order to render the article more readable, broke it into blocks introduced by inter-titles ('*tanti tioletti americani*') – which were later cut out for reasons of space.<sup>50</sup> Writing for the newspaper was not an easy task even for a former journalist like D'Ancona who had himself been the editor of a political newspaper, *La Nazione* in 1859-60, and had throughout his life been a prolific contributor to political and cultural journals of every kind. However, even the old professor soon noticed that the kind of culture promoted in the third page had a particular feature: it did not allow for any in-depth analysis, and was ill designed for specialism. Bergamini confirmed:

Ha ragione di dire (ed è detto tanto bene) che in un giornale quotidiano le questioni scientifiche vanno in seconda linea; e ciò avviene per dolorosa, inesorabile tirannia delle notizie che il pubblico cerca con maggiore avidità. Quanti propositi miei, letterari e scientifici, si infrangono contro imperiose necessità della cronaca!<sup>51</sup>

The space reserved in the *Giornale d'Italia* was limited. The tyranny of space, as Bergamini called it, constituted a problem even for the most confident new journalists.<sup>52</sup>

The article 'in elzeviro' requested journalists to adapt not only the length of the articles, but also their writing style. In an unpublished review of two monographs on d'Annunzio written in 1910, Serra gave a description of the new prose developed by cultural journalists. Lamenting the penetration of journalistic writing into books,

<sup>49</sup> SNS, Fondo Alessandro D'Ancona, Carteggio Bergamini 11 (Bergamini to D'Ancona, Rome, 25 December 1901).

<sup>50</sup> SNS, Fondo Alessandro D'Ancona, Carteggio Bergamini 66, proofs without date, 'Petrarca, Galilei, Leonardo, Mazzini e la Crusca nelle Edizioni Nazionali'. The article appeared in *Il Giornale d'Italia* on 17 August 1904.

<sup>51</sup> SNS, Fondo Alessandro D'Ancona, Carteggio Bergamini 20 (Bergamini to D'Ancona, 13 February 1903).

<sup>52</sup> For example, as a result of a series of editorial interferences with his articles and reports, Ojetti left *Corriere* in 1900: see Benadusi, 'Il Corriere nell'età liberale', pp. 308-9.

Serra argued that the two practices should be kept distinct. Journalists needed to listen and repeat the words used by their readers, or at least words that readers would expect them to use; that device was instrumental for stimulating and entertaining a reader with only a few minutes to dedicate to the article, and had a dramatic effect:

Così accade che tutte le potenze dello scrittore sono adunate, per così dire, alla superficie; disposte sopra un piano solo e con la stessa tensione: tutto è ingrossato, dilatato, caricato; corrono le parole a furia come le note della fanfare sulla piazza; ogni periodo, ogni momento del discorso, sentendo il bisogno di un appoggio quasi materiale e visibile, le metafore più dozzinali e i luoghi comuni e le rime obbligate si mischiano senza riguardo con le immagini smisurate e fastose. Immagini e antitesi e figure sorgono stridule ed esplosive, come i colori su quei cartelli murali, destinati a fissarsi con la loro sfacciataggine cruda e piatta dentro la pupilla vaga del passeggero, in quell'attimo che il tram elettrico trapassa sobbalzando e vibrando alla cantonata.<sup>53</sup>

Serra's conclusion is that the main characteristics of journal articles were emphasis and amplification. He was not condemning journalism; and although his words did not indicate admiration, he did understand the reasons for such a necessity. As Ezio Raimondi has underlined, Serra appreciated that journalism could restore the figure of the nineteenth-century *letterato* in a new role of contemporary intellectual. However, at the same time, Raimondi noted that, for Serra, 'questo implica un mutamento profondo dell'idea della letteratura, per cui lo scrittore non "conversa" più "con se stesso in silenzio", secondo il moto libero e puro del "suo dire": la parola viene invece calcolata rispetto a un pubblico, sentita "sulla bocca e negli occhi e nella mente di quel lettore un istante", con la retorica inesorabile della frase fatta, suggello linguistico dell'arbitrio con cui nel giornalismo [...] l'attualità si arroga il dominio sulla cosa'.<sup>54</sup> Serra's comparison was revealing: the newspaper article bore relation to another medium typical of the consumerist society, the advertising poster. The imagery of the poster was common at the time, in the writings both of critics of industrial modernisation and those of its supporters.<sup>55</sup> Just as the painter exaggerated fine art techniques to persuade the passerby to buy a product, the journalist had to

<sup>53</sup> Serra, 'Di Gabriele D'Annunzio e di due giornalisti', in *Scritti letterari morali e politici*, pp. 219-43 (p. 226).

<sup>54</sup> Ezio Raimondi, *Un europeo di provincia: Renato Serra* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993), p. 185.

<sup>55</sup> Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile. Media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni novanta*, 4th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2009), pp. 102-104.

produce a similar effect in the reader: he was a publicity agent, a person tasked with promoting a product he had not written.

In his critique, Serra was addressing Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, a critic for whom he had a great (and conflicted) admiration. In 1909, the latter had published a monograph on d'Annunzio, but his fame as a literary critic had grown with his collaboration with *La Stampa* from 1907.<sup>56</sup> Borgese was probably the first renowned literary critic to make his career in the daily political press, and he became famous because of his contributions to political newspapers. Luciano Parisi has noted that, in spite of his main academic commitment, Borgese clung to his journalistic activity throughout his life. The necessity to be constantly on the lookout for the new made him the best informed and up-to-date critic of his generation in Italy. As Parisi pointed out, the limited space of the article 'in elzeviro' forced Borgese to spurn any temptation to build an original theoretical system in support of his judgment. On the contrary, Borgese 'dà ai lettori qualche informazione generale sull'autore e il testo di cui parla; riassume la trama di molti romanzi immedesimandosi nel loro spirito e riprendendone divertito o ispirato i modi narrativi; individua con occhio sicuro le parti migliori e i limiti di ogni opera; ne descrive il carattere in maniera non dispersiva, insistendo su ciò che è tipico di ogni singolo autore'.<sup>57</sup> But Borgese's practice had some characteristics that went beyond the structure of the article, and elaborated a particular set of strategies to address the reader. His last article of 1909, at the time that his monograph on d'Annunzio was being published, is a good example of Borgese's journalistic style. Borgese aimed to address his readers by adopting their point of view. In his development of the article, he took the reader by the hand and involved him in the progressive discovery of the work. It was the recovery of the old device of conversational journalism: the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed were, once again, those devised by *Fanfulla*. The association with the reader, in particular, was obtained through the use of the allocutive in the first person plural, and suspense was created through a series of rhetorical questions. The examples are drawn from an article on Pascoli's *Canzone del Paradiso* in

<sup>56</sup> Castronovo, "La Stampa" 1867-1925, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> Luciano Parisi, 'La critica militante di Giuseppe Antonio Borgese', *Italian Studies*, LIV (1999), 102-17 (p. 105).

1909.<sup>58</sup> Firstly, the critic shared the discovery of the structure of the work with his reader:

E via via che i nuovi canti vengono alla luce intendiamo più chiaramente l'intenzione del poeta.

[Pascoli] invece ci descrive i birocci colmi di covoni, l'alba di San Zuanne, i canti delle spigolatrici [...]

Or, when the statement is too strong, Borgese prefers to take responsibility and to guess the reader's opinion:

Ma credo di esprimere il sentimento che inquieta quasi tutti i lettori di Pascoli, quando dico che da alcun tempo s'è affievolita in questo amato e venerato maestro [...] la facoltà di connettere i fantasmi poetici [...]

Secondly, the article is interwoven with questions, a common characteristic of Borgese's pieces:

Ma che può mai importarne al lettore, se il lettore non ha mai assistito ad un solo di costesti patimenti? Chi volete che si commuova al risorgimento d'Italia, se non sa nulla delle miserie e delle vergogne, entro le quali l'Italia decaduta affogò?

The noteworthy characteristics of the work are underlined through the use of exclamation: 'Quale meraviglioso contrasto!' But the presentation of the material, in line with Serra's observations, is really obtained through an overuse of figures of permutation, as in the complex sequence of parallelisms, chiasmus, and cleft sentences:

Dagli spiragli della sua prigione vede re Enzo [...] drizzarsi contro all'autorità di diritto divino la divina ed umana eguaglianza di quelli che non maneggiano la spada, ma il vomero e gli arnesi, e, se brandiscono la spada, la brandiscono per difendere gli arnesi e il vomero; se fanno la guerra e la rapina, la fanno per proteggere il lavoro e la pace.

The most technical annotations were resolved in comparisons and metaphors. In the case of Pascoli's symbolism, Borgese proposed a trite comparison between poetry and music:

<sup>58</sup> Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, 'Cronache letterarie. La Canzone del Paradiso di Giovanni Pascoli', *La Stampa*, 2 November 1909.

la poesia, che è la più concreta e precisa delle attività spirituali, non procede per *leit-motive* come la musica; e tanto meno per *leit-motive* rudimentali che si ripetono all'infinito, senza fondersi e senza generare nell'urto l'organismo della sinfonia.

In a different instance, Borgese hints at current affairs in an attempt to be complicit with the reader:

Il podestà Bonaccursio somiglia – mi si conceda l'irriverente paragone – all'onorevole Giolitti che annunzia la Riforma tributaria.

The same characteristics were typical of Borgese's correspondence from Germany between 1906 and 1908. He had spent two years in Germany, sending weekly letters to *La Stampa* on the most diverse manifestations of German life, in the tradition of foreign correspondence.<sup>59</sup> The articles spanned accounts of art exhibitions, theatrical shows and music, to political and social considerations. In an analysis of the articles collected in the book *La nuova Germania* in 1909, Parisi has noted how the reports were full of stereotypes and were ultimately inspired by a rejection of German civilisation. They were the expression of a 'mentalità passiva', an almost instinctive mental refusal to understand other cultures, typical of many Italian foreign correspondents at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup>

In terms of writing, the correspondence offered significant freedom. When there was no important political, social, economic or cultural news, the journalist was at liberty to choose a subject. The topic of the article could be personal experience, an anecdote or an impression. In this case, there was no pattern to follow and stylistic liberty was virtually boundless. The journalist could show off his literary ability. In a correspondence published in *La Stampa* on 31 May 1907, Borgese described his arrival in Hamburg. The article was organised as a series of impressions of the city's harbour. However, the impressions conveyed in the two columns of the *elzeviro* are transfigured in a type of imagery that prevents the argument from arising. Borgese's intention is to provide a description of the remarkable achievements of the Germans in a hostile climate such as that of Northern Europe, and to foresee the dominion of the German nation in the North

<sup>59</sup> Id., *La nuova Germania* (Turin: Bocca, 1909), pp. 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Luciano Parisi, 'I libri di viaggio di Giuseppe Antonio Borgese', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 14 (1996), 326-40 (p. 328).



Sea. The article is almost dominated by descriptions that are built on a constant germination of metaphoric images. Right from the beginning, Borgese's article abounds in descriptive terms:

La Germania del Nord si descrive con le quattro parole in cui Pierre Loti racchiuse la desolata immensità del deserto: *un grain de sable, deux grains de sable, trois grains de sable, l'infini*. Dovunque la vicenda delle maree smussa il dente dell'aratro, dovunque la zappa mette a nudo le radici dell'erica per far fiorire dal solco l'avena, o il piccone schianta le vecchie fondamenta per dar posto alle torri fumanti degli opifici, la sabbia bionda e rossa come le capigliature delle fanciulle nordiche brilla al sole, rivelando l'instabilità di questa misera scorza di *humus*, che gli industri figli del Settentrione fanno fiorire di azalee e di lillà.<sup>61</sup>

The initial quotation from Loti sounds almost out of context, because the comparison is not explained. Moreover, the long catalogue of vague and unrelated things that follow is made of words chosen to give an atmospheric rendition of the landscape. And the language used is highly literary. The words that belong to the semantic area of agriculture may recall georgic poetry ('il dente dell'aratro', 'far fiorire dal solco l'avena'). The factories become 'opifici', the earth is '*humus*', while the Germans are hailed through the heroic 'industri figli del Settentrione'. The article revealed a desire to offer, beyond a purely informative article, a product with some literary quality. The result, however, was a blurred and redundant attempt to put a literary gloss on a product that had another, radically different, function: to convey a certain amount of information. But the result, in this case, is always on the brink of *pastiche*, as the author's intention is to suggest a possible discovery and interpretation of a place through the use of undifferentiated poetic images. Twenty years earlier, Nencioni had used the same procedure in his 'Roundabout Papers'.

The codification of the *terza pagina* and its diffusion in all the main national newspapers in the first decade of the twentieth century corresponded to the codification of the article 'in elzeviro'. In the same period, the space of the two columns on the left-hand side of the third page was still used for a variety of articles, even though the article of literary criticism and the foreign correspondence progressively began to dominate. However, in 1911, *Corriere della Sera* introduced into its articles 'in elzeviro' a new series of texts written for the purpose by Gabriele d'Annunzio. The 'Faville del maglio' were to break the routine of the third page.

<sup>61</sup> Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, 'Tristi orizzonti e gloriosi anniversari (nostra corrispondenza particolare)', *La Stampa*, 31 May 1907.

#### 4. The article as a work of art: the *Faville del maglio*

From the advent of the third page, newspapers maintained a firm distinction between literary texts and cultural articles. The established format of the newspaper, with the *appendice*, did not disappear: the *appendice* was simply moved to the internal pages, usually the end pages. Sometimes, instead of the cultural article, the editor would elect to publish a short story, a *novella*. However, in 1911, a series of twenty-two hybrid pieces began to appear in *Corriere della Sera*. These were neither texts with an organised narrative nor cultural articles. Most importantly, they were written by the period's most celebrated Italian writer, Gabriele d'Annunzio and therefore could not be ignored.

As well as a novelist, a poet and playwright, d'Annunzio was a journalist, and his return to journalism in 1911 was dictated by economic needs. In March 1910, he moved to France in order to flee his creditors, while the furniture in his luxurious villa in Tuscany, as well as all his belongings, were sold to settle crippling debts.<sup>62</sup> Luigi Albertini, in order to help and to secure d'Annunzio's continuative contribution for his newspaper, suggested a collaboration with *Corriere della Sera*. From 23 July 1911 to 24 September 1914, d'Annunzio submitted a series of very short pieces, which were published under the title, 'Le faville del maglio. Memoranda'.<sup>63</sup> The metaphor in the title alluded to the sparks produced by a trip hammer beating heated metal; it alluded to the writer as a craftsman, whom Carducci had described as a 'grande artiere', a blacksmith. The 'Faville' were, then, the pieces that had not been included in the great works: but the title was not meant to be an understatement. They preserved all their dignity: they were not waste from the forge, but purpose-written, fully-fledged literary works. D'Annunzio made use of some of his old notes, but all the texts were expressly written for the occasion, despite claiming in the introductory warning to the reader: 'Poiché in certa prontezza e spontaneità d'espressione è tutto il loro pregio, mi guardo dal raccorciarle'.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Annamaria Andreoli, *Il vivere inimitabile. Vita di Gabriele d'Annunzio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), pp. 472-74.

<sup>63</sup> For an overview of the composition and chronology of the texts, see Clelia Martignoni, 'Le prime "Faville del Maglio" (1911-1913)', in *D'Annunzio notturno* (Pescara: Centro Nazionale di Studi Dannunziani, 1977), pp. 63-81.

<sup>64</sup> Gabriele d'Annunzio, 'Le faville del maglio. Memoranda. I', *Corriere della Sera*, 23 July 1911.

The letters exchanged between d'Annunzio and Albertini shed light on the nature of the work. In 1911, they agreed on a production of two articles a month (against d'Annunzio's wishes, though he nevertheless complied):

Esprimendo il desiderio che le mie prose fossero pubblicate a distanza di una settimana, restringevo il desiderio alle prime tre, perché i lettori si convincano che la "rubrica" continuerà e perché prendano interesse alla materia. L'attesa dei lettori, in genere, eccita il mio cervello.<sup>65</sup>

The definition of the articles offered by d'Annunzio was that they were of 'una specie di "giornale" saltuario non senza interesse [...] Ogni articolo è di circa tre colonne'.<sup>66</sup> The structure and length of the pieces had thus been determined from the beginning. Even when they bore a past date, d'Annunzio's articles did not have a narrative content – as he explained to Albertini, who had proposed a different arrangement of the pieces, 'non li compongo cronologicamente, ma con un semplice criterio di "varietà"'.<sup>67</sup>

The 'Faville' were written for the public, whom d'Annunzio constantly had in mind. As proof of his autonomous editorial insightfulness, he wanted to submit more complex pieces as soon as the readers 'si saranno un poco abituati al nuovo sapore'.<sup>68</sup> However, d'Annunzio had to accept that his most sensual pieces would not be published, and – as Albertini wrote – that the most successful articles were the most accessible:

Le *faville* hanno grande successo, specie quelle che, richiedendo minor coltura per esser comprese, riescono di più facile lettura. Vedo in esse la possibilità di una collaborazione continuata. Cioè, finiti lo spoglio dei Suoi appunti, nuove sensazioni, nuovi avvenimenti potranno fornire continua materia d'articoli.<sup>69</sup>

And, in effect, the 'Faville' published in *Corriere della Sera* are 'di più facile lettura', as d'Annunzio always strove to meet a criterion of readability. The difference in the way the texts are interpreted today derives from the fact that d'Annunzio selectively collected them between 1924 and 1928, and included under the same title many other pieces composed at different times and for different

<sup>65</sup> Franco Di Tizio, *D'Annunzio e Albertini. Vent'anni di sodalizio* (Altino: Ianieri, 2005), p. 67 (d'Annunzio to Albertini, Arcachon, 26 July 1911).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64 (d'Annunzio to Albertini, Arcachon, 28 June 1911).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65 (d'Annunzio to Albertini, Arcachon, 22 July 1911).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65 (22 July).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81 (Albertini to d'Annunzio, Milan, 25 September 1911).

occasions.<sup>70</sup> The texts will be considered here in their original form, namely as they appeared in *Corriere della Sera*, to understand their function according to their destination.

The 'Faville' were genuinely successful: a success that was confirmed in 1912, when d'Annunzio started a second series, after a pause for the publication of his poems on the war in Libya. Albertini was convinced that the format of the 'Faville' could be freely used and adapted beyond the original programme of pieces drawn from d'Annunzio's personal notes. The last texts, published in the summer of 1914, were organised as a series of reports from France, a recollection of the atmosphere of Paris the day before the beginning of the Great War and of the battlefield during the first Battle of the Marne.

The texts were written at a particular moment in d'Annunzio's literary career. In his monograph on d'Annunzio, published in 1909, Borgese noticed that after composing the first three books of the *Laus Vitae*, the writer's work was beginning to lack structure. According to Borgese, despite the quality of the matter he was handling, d'Annunzio had lost the capacity of structuring a text, and seemed unable to produce a coherent work: 'Difetta, per dirla retoricamente e orazianamente, di principio, di mezzo e di fine'.<sup>71</sup> Annamaria Andreoli has underlined how the 'Faville' came at a stage when the experience of the interior monologue and the *roman-poème* had halted d'Annunzio's programme of renewing his novelistic prose experienced with *Le vergini delle rocce*.<sup>72</sup> After the publication of *Forse che sì forse che no* in 1910, d'Annunzio never wrote another novel.

The best working definition for the 'Faville del maglio' is that of a series of sketches.<sup>73</sup> D'Annunzio's short writings were free from any genre constraints, and were not associated with the dimension of serialisation. On the contrary, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the sketch played on the dimension of discontinuity in accord with the structure of the periodical, in which every article was an independent

<sup>70</sup> Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Le Faville del maglio*, 2 vols (Milan: Treves, 1924-28). The first volume bore the subtitle *Il Venturiero senza ventura e altri studii del vivere inimitabile*; the second *Il Compagni dagli occhi senza cigli e altri studii del vivere inimitabile*.

<sup>71</sup> Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, *D'Annunzio* (Naples: Ricciardi, 1909), p. 139.

<sup>72</sup> Annamaria Andreoli, 'Le faville del maglio', in Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Prose di ricerca*, eds. Annamaria Andreoli and Giorgio Zanetti, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), 2, pp. 3298-3329 (p. 3300).

<sup>73</sup> I would not consider the 'Faville' as an example of 'unfinished' work, as the most recent critical survey suggests: see Manuele Marinoni, 'D'Annunzio "notturmo" e il "non-finito". Strutture, temi e motive delle prime "Faville del Maglio"', in *Non finito, opera interrotta e modernità*, ed. Anna Dolfi (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2015), pp. 213-29.

piece different from the preceding one, but of the same series. In a memorable description of the ‘Faville’ included in *Le lettere*, Serra noted: ‘È D’Annunzio che prende una cosa qualunque e la scrive. [...] È un pretesto per scriverla. Quel che importa è soltanto lo scrivere’.<sup>74</sup> The centrality of writing was characteristic of the ‘phatic function’ of the sketch, according to the definition given by Garcha. The author addressed the public through his freedom to experiment with styles and voices – and, as in a sketch, d’Annunzio’s style was that of stasis.<sup>75</sup> The plotless structure of the sketch allowed the channelling of undetermined events and ideas in static scenes whose consistency lay in the particular writing style adopted for the occasion. The range of topics of the first ‘Faville’ spanned from erudite dialogue about the glaze found on Greek bronze statues to an account of a visit to the American sculptress Miss Macy in Venice, from reflections on Carducci as a spiritual guide to the notes and impressions of a trip to Assisi.<sup>76</sup>

D’Annunzio’s approach to the sketch was different from that of Nencioni. If Nencioni had demonstrated the potential of the sketch to capture and direct personal cultural experience, his texts still had the characteristic discursivity of the journal article. As has been suggested earlier on, Nencioni addressed his readers as a tourist guide would: in showing them the beauties of a museum, he merely suggested an approach to the work of art based on *retentissement*. Only occasionally did his ‘deictic’ attitude give way to an acknowledgement of the aesthetic nature of the situations he wanted to write about. D’Annunzio eliminated the discursive moments typical of the cultural report. He presented himself and his personal experience as the only historical starting point for the ‘Favilla’. The space that Nencioni devoted to explanation of the characteristics of an artistic or literary masterpiece, to the preparation of the effect on the reader, was completely absorbed and used in a different manner. While Nencioni felt the need to trace his cultural experience in a sort of fetishistic attempt to create a new work of art from quoted texts, for d’Annunzio the cultural experience was taken for granted. The real cultural act, so to say, was the article itself.

The ‘Faville del maglio’ were not gratuitous digressions. Rather than simply being frivolities put on the *terza pagina* to ennoble it, they shared in the mechanism

<sup>74</sup> Serra, *Scritti letterari morali e politici*, p. 397.

<sup>75</sup> Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel*, p. 49.

<sup>76</sup> All the mentioned articles were published in *Corriere della Sera* on 23 and 30 July, and 6 August 1911.

of the newspaper. The subject matter behind every text was already part of the cultural section's repertoire: the archaeological landscape of Rome, the figure of Carducci, the work of Luca Della Robbia, the city of Florence, the seasons, a journey. But the difference lay in the treatment of these subjects: they were completely reinvented. With the 'Faville', d'Annunzio wanted to offer a series of pieces in which he experimented with varieties of language to try and recreate the connection between the inner life of the poet, and showed his assumed ability to grasp and reveal the intimate nature of things described, or rather evoked and even transfigured. This aim was clearly expressed by d'Annunzio in a letter to Albertini: 'i lettori s'abituano a riflettere su certe movenze e apparizioni della vita quotidiana, a cui non badavano'.<sup>77</sup> Visionary ability was a result of exercising the faculty of 'attention', which d'Annunzio described in a 'Favilla' published in September 1911. 'Di tutte le mie facoltà – he wrote – quella che più assiduamente stimolo e aguzzo è l'attenzione [...] tutte le cose sono piene di segni, tutte sono significative di verità, di passioni, di eventi'.<sup>78</sup> The exercise of attention became in his hands a magically creative tool, capable of extracting unknown meanings even from the most common objects, and to transpose them in a pure musical form or, as d'Annunzio called it, an 'impeto lirico'.

The central feature of the 'Faville' was their writing style. As Gian Luigi Beccaria has demonstrated, the 'Faville's' writing must be read as 'una sorta di valorizzazione di un *segno*, o *significante ritmico-sintattico* congruente all'interno legame istituito tra due realtà direttamente permeabili: le cose descritte e le immagini suscitate'.<sup>79</sup> In other words, d'Annunzio's aim is to create distance from the conventional character of the object. This results not in a combination of auditory or visual imagery intended to restore the dominion of external reality (Nencioni, as we have seen, had tried something of this kind), but rather in a recovery of the experience of European symbolism. The object described is merely the occasion that triggers a series of analogies with no logical coherence, and that do not convey any

<sup>77</sup> Di Tizio, *D'Annunzio e Albertini*, p. 118 (d'Annunzio to Albertini, Arcachon, 15 April 1912).

<sup>78</sup> Gabriele d'Annunzio, 'Le faville del maglio. Memoranda. III', *Corriere della Sera*, 24 September 1911. On the cultural background of the psychological theory of attention in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century see Marinoni, 'D'Annunzio "notturno" e il "non-finito"', pp. 221-22.

<sup>79</sup> Gian Luigi Beccaria, *L'autonomia del significante. Figure del ritmo e della sintassi. Dante, Pascoli, D'Annunzio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), p. 285.

information based on any notion of rational discourse. The message is communicated on an emotional basis, and is the product of a visionary ability to attach unperceived symbolic value to even the most ordinary objects. As Beccaria has demonstrated, d'Annunzio broke the existing literary structure, committing textual meaning to a series of recurrent syntactical patterns entrusted with a rhythmic value. This escape from traditional prose also overcame the structures of poetry, creating a third way that is the ultimate rupture of the logical unity of thought and language, and is summarised 'nella pura virtù d'intonare segmenti ritmico-sintattici'.<sup>80</sup>

The adaptability of the 'Faville' both to the size and the genres usually hosted in the *elzeviro* – the cultural article and the foreign correspondence – showed that a link between experimentation in the field of literary creation and the informative needs of the newspaper was possible.

\* \* \*

At the beginning of the 1910s, some criticism arose of the established practice of the article 'in elzeviro'. This came not only from outside the profession, as in Serra's case, but also from inside and, in particular, from those employed in the literary section. Some journalists complained about the poor quality of the third-page article's writing and content. Dissatisfaction with the *elzeviro* was mainly voiced by a group of journalists seeking their identities as writers, and their criticism came from the field of literature, from the group gathered around the journal *La Riviera Ligure* and, after 1915, around *La Voce* under the editorship of Giuseppe De Robertis. Their research was inspired by the quest for an art based on a principle of pure lyrical creation, deliberately lacking in content and simply following the energy that emanated from linguistic associations.<sup>81</sup> The theoretical perspective of the group came from Mallarmé, with the annihilation of the formal distinction between prose and poetry and the centrality of the signifier over the signified, while d'Annunzio had furnished them with the linguistic instrument. The new textual dimension of these writers was the *frammento*, a fragment of text, which was thought to express the freedom of the creative act against the constriction of the structure imposed by

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>81</sup> Donato Valli, *Vita e morte del frammento in Italia* (Lecce: Milella, 1980), p. 11.

traditional literary genres. The theoretical elaborations of the group of the *frammentisti* had an impact on literary criticism. For De Robertis, who in 1915 theorised the new critical approach, it was ‘critica frammentaria di momenti poetici’.<sup>82</sup> It was a way of reading texts that, as Giacomo Debenedetti has noticed, consisted in the systematic elimination of all the discursive moments, intended as the art’s contamination by the empirical world.<sup>83</sup> De Robertis had thus provided the theoretical basis to annihilate the distance between literary creation and criticism.

In 1912 a young contributor to the journal *La Riviera Ligure*, Giovanni Boine, wrote to a friend who was cultural editor of the Roman political newspaper *La Tribuna*: ‘Pensavo la collaborazione mensile ad un giornale quotidiano perché l’“articolo” di tre colonne nei momenti quieti lo tiro giù facilmente. Ma vedo bene che è una vigliaccheria’.<sup>84</sup> The friend was Emilio Cecchi, who transcribed this passage of the letter into his diary and added: ‘E ha ragione, completamente; l’articolo è una vigliaccheria; anche quando si fa, anzi, forse, specialmente quando si fa seriamente, tormentosamente, come lo facciamo noi’.<sup>85</sup> The article ‘in elzeviro’ was, then, suspended between literary criticism, foreign correspondence and the sketches of d’Annunzio. It was Emilio Cecchi who channelled these disparate tendencies into a coherent direction and, with the elaboration of *Pesci rossi*, offered not only a synthesis but also the first handbook for how to write the *elzeviro*.

<sup>82</sup> Giuseppe De Robertis, ‘Saper leggere’, *La Voce*, y. VII, no. 8, 30 March 1915, 488-98 (p. 498).

<sup>83</sup> Debenedetti, *Il romanzo del Novecento*, p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> Giovanni Boine and Emilio Cecchi, *Carteggio (1911-1917)*, eds. Margherita Marchione and S. Eugene Scalia (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1983), p. 5 (Giovanni Boine to Emilio Cecchi, [Porto Maurizio], 21 March 1912).

<sup>85</sup> Emilio Cecchi, *Taccuini*, ed. Niccolò Gallo and Pietro Citati (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), p. 61.





**CHAPTER 6**  
**THE *ELZEVIRO* VINDICATED.**  
**TOWARDS EMILIO CECCHI'S *PESCI ROSSI***

The career of Emilio Cecchi (1884-1966) was characterised by a conflicted relationship with journalism. Cecchi originally embraced it as a temporary job alternative to a literary career. Between 1918 and 1919, while he was in London as a foreign correspondent for the newspaper *La Tribuna*, Cecchi developed a consideration on the foundation of journalism and literature that allowed him to experiment with a new kind of article. The reports he sent from Great Britain can be regarded as the very first *elzeviri*, as they became known in forthcoming years. In 1920, Cecchi collected these articles, along with other texts, in a book entitled *Pesci rossi*. The editing process, while it provided the first codification of the *elzeviro*, also carried the potential risk of dissolving the still fragile identity of the article, but its foundation had been laid.

This chapter investigates Cecchi's involvement in journalism between 1910 and 1919, and considers his reflections about journalistic practice. It then analyses Cecchi's correspondence from Great Britain in order to single out the features of the first *elzeviri* and their subsequent collection in *Pesci rossi*.

**1. Journalism as an intellectual activity**

Before the period spent in London as foreign correspondent for *La Tribuna* between 1918 and 1919, journalism had represented for Cecchi both a constraint and a necessity. Unhappy with his job as a bank clerk and difficulties encountered after taking charge of the family business, Cecchi secured a more comfortable position for

himself by becoming a full-time journalist for *La Tribuna* in 1910.<sup>1</sup> For him, this remained a provisional settlement, a waged activity that meant not losing contact with the world of cultural production, an interlude in the preparation of a worthwhile literary career. As such, Cecchi felt it was a burden, an obstacle that subtracted time from his real work of forging an intellectual and artistic identity. The delegated place for this research was the journal, not the third page. As demonstrated by the case of the association between Croce and *Il Giornale d'Italia*, the newspaper could be the mouthpiece of a particular intellectual group, but the journal remained the only medium capable of critically engaging in cultural debate and the exchange of knowledge. The atmosphere around the third page was still one of distrust and suspicion, and Cecchi was to be affected by it.

Cecchi was a regular collaborator to the Florentine journal *La Voce*, but as his commitment with the newspaper grew, his association with the journal began to slow and then stopped.<sup>2</sup> In 1915 Giovanni Papini wrote a particularly violent, outrageous article against Cecchi, branding him a man as voluble as a woman and nothing more than a hack – or rather, nothing more than a journalist:

Molti anni fa il Cecchi si dava l'aria d'essere il più puro ed austero anacoreta dell'arte e andava dicendo che non avrebbe mai sputtanato il suo ingegno, come gli altri, su per i giornali e per le riviste e si bucinava ch'egli volesse aspettare più anni in silenzio per uscir fuori col capolavoro in mano. [...] In Firenze una sera Soffici l'incontrò per caso e discorrendo del più e del meno [...] Cecchi venne fuori a dire che non desiderava altro che d'entrare a sfogarsi nel gran giornalismo [...] Ad un tratto il silenzioso parlò, il romito s'imbrancò: dentro un anno o poco più cominciò a spargere articoli dappertutto dove gli capitava [...] Il purissimo e moralissimo Cecchi si offriva a chiunque lo pagasse. Cercava un posto, voleva entrare in un giornale. [...] Giornalista era nell'anima e giornalista diventò più che mai: né carne né pesce, né esse né enne, né canaglia né santo.<sup>3</sup>

The accusation, if read from a sociological point of view, points to the unchanging relationships of the aspiring writer with the problem of earning a living ('Cercava un posto'). But Papini described Cecchi's solution using a strong vocabulary that

<sup>1</sup> All data about Emilio Cecchi is drawn from the best and most reliable biography, that compiled by Margherita Ghilardi in the form of a chronology in the introduction to Emilio Cecchi, *Saggi e viaggi*, pp. XXXI-LX. This edition contains also a full bibliography on Cecchi's work from 1910 to 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, *La Voce 1908-1913. Cronaca, antologia e fortuna di una rivista*, eds. Emilio Gentile and Vanni Scheiwiller (Milan: Rusconi, 1974), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Papini, 'La Sor'Emilia', *La Voce*, y. VII, no. 6, 26 February 1915, 339-61 (p. 359).

alluded to the mercenary practice of prostitution ('sputtanato', 'chiunque lo pagasse'). Journalism was, by Cecchi's own admission, a necessity. In 1910 he had written to Prezzolini: 'io [...] non tollero che nessuno venga a dirmi che fo il mercenario. È facile vivere alle venerabili altezze della coltura quando ci si chiama Casati o Croce; è difficile non diventare mercenari quando ci si chiama Cecchi'.<sup>4</sup>

Papini's animosity is revealing about how one of the leading voices of Italian culture at the time perceived journalism. Cecchi had made Papini's acquaintance at the beginning of the century when he started to write in *Il Leonardo*. Since then, he had participated in all the enterprises promoted by Papini and Prezzolini and had received credit from them. Papini felt that Cecchi's withdrawal from *La Voce* in 1915 was tantamount to a personal betrayal, as well as a question of principle. His accusation towards Cecchi was twofold: it concerned his status as a cultural operator and the role performed by newspapers in the cultural debate.

Firstly, according to Papini, Cecchi had always been a journalist; and a journalist, as he maintained, was 'né carne né pesce, né esse né enne, né canaglia né santo', an irrelevant figure with no specific identity. It followed that Cecchi, in Papini's view, was not an intellectual. Papini could proudly claim to have transformed the typical nineteenth-century figure of *letterato* into that of the modern intellectual – a completely new role in the field of cultural production. As such, he could present himself as a distinct and autonomous person, detached from political praxis but provided with those hermeneutical tools that entitled him to direct and shape the cultural debate within the broadest conceivable remit. Benedetto Croce's Idealism, a philosophical system that predicated the 'impossible separation' between theory and praxis and between politics and culture, was the theoretical foundation of Papini's convictions.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the same Croce declared in an article published in *La Voce* in 1909 that journalism could not be regarded as proper intellectual activity, since its insufficiently meditated outputs offered no guarantee of originality or of a firm theoretical base. On the contrary, journalism represented a veritable dissipation of intellectual forces:

<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, "'Gli anni che verranno...'", *Nuova Antologia*, y. XCIII, no. 1892, August 1958, 491-504 (p. 500).

<sup>5</sup> Eugenio Garin, 'Benedetto Croce o della "separazione impossibile" fra politica e cultura', in *Intelletuali italiani del XX secolo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1974), pp. 47-67 (p. 61).

Il giornalismo, coltivato per mestiere, distrae le menti degli aspiranti scienziati e artisti; le disabilita dalla considerazione attenta e scrupolosa della verità; rafforza in chi vi è disposto e svolge in chi non vi sarebbe disposto, la tendenza all'unilateralità, alla imprecisione e al sofisma (nella scienza) e alla ricerca dell'effetto e del successo (nell'arte): costringe all'improvvisazione e, perciò, più o meno, al ciarlatanesimo.<sup>6</sup>

Papini, for his part, was even more disillusioned and bitter than Croce when, a few weeks after the latter's article, he addressed the same topic. According to Papini, the modern world of cultural production offered no job that would free the intellectual from the burden of hack writing, which meant for him 'imputtinarsi scrivendo roba qualunque per piacere alla gente'.<sup>7</sup> The continual use of the vocabulary of prostitution purports to rely on an ethical stance, as striving for success in journalism stems, Papini says, from self-debasing ambition: 'O esser già celebri o diventar celebri a forza di strisciature, leccature, finzioni, bassezze, e simili lordure'. The solution he proposed was radical. Papini admitted in theory that young writers could support themselves by finding occupations such as, for example, professional jobs. In reality, however, he insisted that, in order to produce work of the highest quality, 'bisogna essere liberi, liberi, liberi, bisogna aver tempo di fantasticare, di riflettere, di oziare e di studiare'.<sup>8</sup> It has been observed that both Croce and Papini are still subscribing to an ethically informed notion of *otium*, and that, in so doing, they appear to ignore the relationship between the individuals and their specific relationship to the world of labour.<sup>9</sup> There is no space left for a compromise: *otium* is the real condition for intellectual activity. Therefore, according to their criteria of judgment, Cecchi could only either be a sell-out or a failed writer – neither an intellectual nor an artist. He had undertaken a career that was destined to undermine his intelligence as well as his credibility.

Over and above personal animosity, a political issue divided the contenders. Not only was Cecchi 'a journalist' – he was a journalist on *La Tribuna*, the political newspaper which, after a number of setbacks and resurrections, in 1901 had become the house organ of the parliamentary and economic forces that was to support Giovanni Giolitti.<sup>10</sup> Papini portrayed *La Tribuna* in no flattering terms:

<sup>6</sup> Croce, 'I laureati al bivio', p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Giovanni Papini, 'Il giovane scrittore italiano', *La Voce*, y. I, no. 10, 18 February 1909, 37-38 (p. 37).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Acciani, 'Dalla rendita al lavoro', p. 442.

<sup>10</sup> Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, pp. 175-78.

Del resto in quel giornale di siderurgici, di zuccherieri e di giolittiani, in quel giornale di cui è nota l'amicizia colla *Banca Commerciale* e colle diverse società di navigazione controllate dai tedeschi [...] un Emilio Cecchi è anche troppo di lusso. Ma è doloroso, a pensarci, ch'egli vada strapazzando e mordicchiando gli scrittori italiani col salario pagato dai protezionisti trivellatori e intedescati.<sup>11</sup>

The reference to German businesses in Italy reflected the national mobilisation against the Triple Alliance at the beginning of 1915, but the really important element in Papini's allegation was his reference to the system of power established by Giolitti. Papini and Prezzolini warned the younger generations rallied round *La Voce* to stay away from the moral and political degeneration represented by Giolittian politics. Alberto Asor Rosa was the first to hypothesise that the political programme of *La Voce* aimed at highlighting the difference between two Italies: on the one hand, the 'party of the intellectuals' sponsored by Papini and Prezzolini, united with the 'forze operanti del paese', the people with the abilities to tackle the economic, social and cultural problems of the country. In the enemy camp were the politicians and bureaucrats of the liberal and democratic ruling class, whose reformist policies were perceived as a sign of corruption and inadequacy, easy prey for unscrupulous profiteers. The men of *La Voce* believed they represented the healthy part of the country and, based on this assumption, they launched an attack against the state.<sup>12</sup> Cecchi was thus seen as an example of the corrupted part of the country and, consequently, a representative of the Italy that the group of *La Voce* was trying to tear down. He was therefore listed among those who would allegedly oppose the spiritual, moral and cultural rebirth of Italy.

Cecchi chose to become a journalist because, as he had already declared and would repeat many years afterwards, journalism provided an opportunity that did not exist for those who followed the path of the *otium* suggested by Croce and Papini. When in 1953 Enrico Falqui interviewed him about the importance of the *terza pagina* for his generation, Cecchi replied that it had been the equivalent of a scholarship:

<sup>11</sup> Papini, 'La Sor' Emilia', p. 360. On the backers of *La Tribuna* see Castronovo, *La stampa italiana*, p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> Asor Rosa, 'La cultura', pp. 1260-61.

Per molti di noi la “terza pagina” è stata la sola forma di “borse di studio” che ci è stata accessibile; ed erano “borse di studio” che ci eravamo guadagnati col nostro lavoro; perché se i giornali ce le concedevano, facendoci viaggiare, era anche perché ciò tornava utile a loro.<sup>13</sup>

The answer poses in turn a further question. While journalism offered money, it did want something back: ‘ciò tornava utile a loro’; newspapers wanted young writers to acquire the journalist’s professional skills. But they could offer something invaluable for the young Italian intellectual: contact with the rest of the world. As Cecchi recalled,

queste forme di giornalismo hanno aperto anche da noi la strada ai viaggi, alle esperienze di civiltà lontane. Le nostre generazioni hanno cominciato a viaggiare, a vedere il mondo, con le guerre e con i giornali: c’è poco da fare.<sup>14</sup>

The conclusive ‘c’è poco da fare’ seems a decisive answer to the debate that had troubled Cecchi’s professional beginnings. In the end, Cecchi underlined, no one was forced to write in the *terza pagina*, and the *terza pagina* did not force the writer to write second-rate stuff. The privilege of travelling correspondents was to be able to measure themselves against national and international standards. As we have seen in the previous chapter, a young Italian person could afford to spend a period of time abroad, probably for the first time, which allowed for a complete immersion in the political, cultural and social life of a different country.

This opportunity met the desire of the new generations of intellectuals in the first years of the twentieth century to experience the rest of Europe. The sojourn abroad and the association with other European writers and artists were considered landmarks in the formation and cultural development of the young intellectual. In spite of attempts made after the Unification, geographic fragmentation still had an impact on Italy’s cultural life. It favoured the formation of circles and cliques in virtually every Italian city, each fighting to gain a national audience while at the same time refusing to compromise or negotiate their positions with rival groups. While the ambition to create a ‘party of the intellectuals’ urged Papini and Prezzolini to find a remedy to national fragmentation, their efforts involuntarily exposed the scarcity of intellectuals in the national context. Italian cultural proposals were still

<sup>13</sup> Falqui, *Inchiesta sulla terza pagina*, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

struggling to gain European resonance, let alone engage in a constructive dialogue with the rest of Europe. When in 1909 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had his *Manifesto del Futurismo* published in *Le Figaro*, it became evident that it took a foreign capital— a ‘substitut externe’, as has been observed – to advance his powerful suggestions for a renewal of Italian culture and radical political change.<sup>15</sup> Marinetti’s manifesto, repeatedly published in various Italian newspapers in the weeks before its publication in *Le Figaro*, had had virtually no impact.

In November 1918, Cecchi was sent to London *La Tribuna*’s British correspondent. While learning how to do his job as a journalist in the political correspondence and notes he sent his newspaper, he also had opportunity to reflect on the relationship between his practice as a journalist and his intellectual identity. As soon as he arrived in London, Cecchi began his correspondence with an *elzeviro* entitled ‘Il giorno della vittoria’, published in *La Tribuna* on 20 November 1918. In his introduction to the article, Cecchi stressed the new state of mind he experienced when he entered London as the Armistice was being ratified. He explicitly declared that he wanted his correspondences to be entitled ‘Lettere di un provinciale’. The proposal was not accepted – the series of correspondences were more formally entitled ‘Lettere dall’Inghilterra’ – but it was suggestive of the articles’ nature. His primary interest was in viewpoint that his proposed title suggested:

Allora ci si decise ad adottare, ad abbracciare, questa disposizione ostinata. A farci, delle nostre povere origini, dei nostri poveri limiti, della nostra corta esperienza, un elemento di scoperta, una forza d’amore. A lasciarci essere, caramente, provinciali.<sup>16</sup>

Such an apophasis served to cover the existential and cultural disadvantages of the Italian intellectual before the rest of the world, which Cecchi ably presented as a positive force through which the world could be explored without cynicism or prejudice. But it was, at the same time, a claim that invested journalism with a new cognitive dimension, which was also the acknowledgment of a superior intellectual task. Cecchi’s point of view was not the traditional one of the foreign correspondent, that of Ojetti or Borgese, for instance. He was neither a curious reporter of the

<sup>15</sup> Christophe Charle, *Les Intellectuels en Europe au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Essai d’histoire comparée*, 2nd edn (Paris : Seuil, 2001), p. 294.

<sup>16</sup> Emilio Cecchi, ‘Lettere dall’Inghilterra. Il giorno della vittoria’, *La Tribuna*, 20 November 1918.



original details of social life in other countries, nor a mature interpreter of the civilisation of another country and its political, economic or cultural ideas and expectations. On the contrary, after the publication of this first article he confessed in a letter to his wife: ‘Così credo di fare un’esperienza formativa; di uomo e di vero giornalista, nel senso nobile e ricco della parola’.<sup>17</sup> Leonetta Cecchi was perplexed by her husband’s determination and, especially, by the sudden and unprecedented enthusiasm for journalism. Her reply was deflating:

Ti ringrazio di tutti i resoconti che mi fai della tua vita. Vita molto ricca di sensazioni e imparamenti, ma che non ti formeranno, voglio sperare, unicamente giornalista. Non che io disdegni il giornalismo: tutt’altro. Soltanto io so che la tua vita più intensa è quella di scrittore lirico, di poeta, insomma; sia pure poeta in prosa. E all’esperienza di vita giornalista per il tuo bene, non ci credo. Scusami tanto, ma è così.<sup>18</sup>

Leonetta’s perspective was still grounded in the Italian context: with ‘scrittore lirico’ and ‘poeta in prosa’ she alluded to Cecchi’s experimentations within the literary trend of *frammentismo*. And, behind the ‘voglio sperare’, there was still a suspicion about the value of journalism as an intellectual activity. In his reply, Cecchi protested: ‘Non avere impazienze e cerca di capirmi. Io voglio essere un uomo, non un esteta. Un santo, se mi riesce, un diavolo, un bolscevico, ma non un esteta’. The denial of previous experience was complete: the approach of the aesthete did not make it possible to know the real world. Leonetta did not understand that her husband had already overcome the Italian perspective and had found in journalism a way to channel his authorial identity. In the same letter, he claimed:

Anche quando io dico “giornalista”, non credo di spiegarmi bene, forse. Già, io adopro questa parola con cinismo voluto. Poi io intendo: un uomo capace di dare delle forti sintesi della vita, in uno stile suo. Intendo, cioè, conseguire una sempre maggiore ampiezza di esperienza; e una forma di commento sempre più libera. Se tu pensi al mio lavoro di sei o sette anni fa, tu vedi come era pedestre, e meno lirico [...].<sup>19</sup>

The ‘cynicism’ to which Cecchi alluded harks back to a diary entry he wrote between 1912 and 1913, in which he endorsed the vision of journalism based on that

<sup>17</sup> ACBF, Carteggio Emilio Cecchi – Leonetta Cecchi Pieraccini, 285 (Emilio to Leonetta, London 30 November 1918).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 286 (Leonetta to Emilio, Florence 5 December 1918).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 287 (Emilio to Leonetta, London, 13 December 1918).

given by Balzac in *Un grand homme de province à Paris*: ‘Giornalismo non può essere inteso veramente che come lo intendeva Balzac, come mezzo a: cfr. *Un grand homme*. Se uno lo intendesse in sé, sarebbe un idiota, *dupe*’.<sup>20</sup> However, by the end of 1918, journalism had become for Cecchi the means to develop and realize – and support – his full human and artistic potential.

Cecchi had therefore demonstrated to himself that the stance of *La Voce* had proved insufficient, and that he had superseded Croce and Papini’s position on the allegedly impossible compromise between culture and journalism. The definitive self-appointment of Cecchi as a journalist operated on a dual level: the superior intellectual task with which he invested journalism involved the idea of journalism itself and the utilisation of journalism as an instrument for interpreting every manifestation of contemporary life.

## 2. A different idea of journalism

The first question that Cecchi had to confront in order to put his programme into practice concerned the foundations of journalism. In 1923, in the Milanese journal *I libri del giorno*, Antonio Baldini published an article, ‘Dello scrivere bene nei giornali’, in which he heralded the improvement in journal article writing since the institution of the *terza pagina*. The articles of his friend Emilio Cecchi, Baldini wrote, were exemplary in every respect:

Certi articoli di Cecchi [...] comprano tutto un vagone di produzione contemporanea; e si tratta di veri articoli di giornale, fatti pel giornale, nati del giornale, intonati al giornale, che non avrebbero saputo nascere così animati e correnti né come capitoli d’un libro, né come saggi d’una rivista, né come appunti lirici, né come racconti; perché altro non sono che [...] articoli, o comunque li vogliate chiamare, di giornale.<sup>21</sup>

After pointing to Cecchi’s pieces as representative of the finest newspaper writing, Baldini concluded that the best articles were those generated within and in line with the professional practice of journalism itself. Cecchi may only have partially shared

<sup>20</sup> Cecchi, *Taccuini*, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Antonio Baldini, ‘Dello scrivere bene nei giornali’, *I libri del giorno*, y. VI, no. 1, January 1923, 3-6 (p. 6).

his friend's assumptions. At the beginning of 1924, he wrote an article in *La Stampa*, 'Dell'articolo di giornale', in which he explicitly recalled Baldini's 'Dello scrivere bene nei giornali' and expressed some reservations about contemporary journalism. Recalling with a sense of nostalgia the famous eighteenth-century British journals, *The Spectator* and *The Rambler*, Cecchi praised 'la qualità affatto poetica o personale di un giornalismo non ancora tanto infastidito dalle "notizie", e raccomandato al genio degli scrittori'.<sup>22</sup> He had made a similar claim in a controversial article published in 1919, 'Dello stare a sedere', in which his notion of 'scrittore' coincides with that of journalist.

One of the advantages of being in London as a correspondent was, for Cecchi, the possibility to closely observe the functioning of the British press and its values. Upon his return to Italy in October 1919, he confessed in a political note that he had dedicated his time in London to refining his 'professionalism': 'Essendo giornalista, cercai il giornalismo; tanto più che si trattava di quella cosa famosissima ch'è il giornalismo inglese'.<sup>23</sup> The first outcome of this scrutiny of the contemporary British press was the *elzeviro* entitled 'Dello stare a sedere'. Cecchi wrote it in London in February 1919, but the article caused a great deal of embarrassment in the editorial office of *La Tribuna* in Rome. The editor, Olindo Malagodi, decided to publish the article in a local edition of the newspaper on 22 February 1919 so not to compromise the paper's relationship with its London correspondent.<sup>24</sup>

In 'Dello stare a sedere', Cecchi put forward his own alternative programme of journalism. He compared himself with the youngest journalist in London, who had upset 'i più canuti e navigati redattori di Fleet Street' because he found out that the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 would start a few days later than the established date.<sup>25</sup> He was right about the day but, as Cecchi ironically pointed out, had the wrong month. In the fictional treatment imagined by Cecchi two different ideas of journalism were portrayed. On the one hand, there was the dashing young British journalist obsessed with the task of chasing the latest news item, leading a frantic life

<sup>22</sup> Emilio Cecchi, 'Dell'articolo di giornale', *La Stampa*, 11 January 1924.

<sup>23</sup> Emilio Cecchi, 'Liberalismo di classi e liberalismo di Stato', *La Tribuna*, 23 October 1919.

<sup>24</sup> For the reconstruction of the vicissitudes of the article see Emilio Cecchi, *Pesci rossi*, ed. Margherita Ghilardi (Florence: Vallecchi, 1989), pp. 280-85.

<sup>25</sup> Emilio Cecchi, 'Lettere dall'Inghilterra. Dello stare a sedere', *La Tribuna*, 22 February 1919. The only surviving copy of the article is a clipping preserved in Cecchi's archive at the ACBF, but it can be reconstructed thanks to the critical apparatus provided by Ghilardi, pp. 295-97.

in order to ‘get there first’ and secure the scoop. In a state of was continuous unrest, his existence seemed to depend on the latest telegrams from news agencies or on the train schedule. On the other hand, Cecchi pictured himself as a sedentary person, convinced that all the news had already arrived:

È chiaro che noi partivamo da punti di vista affatto diversi. Secondo lui il giornalista era essenzialmente un uomo che corre. E secondo me il giornalista era essenzialmente un uomo che sta a sedere. Secondo lui tutti i telegrammi importanti dovevano ancora arrivare. Secondo me tutti i telegrammi importanti erano già bell’è giunti. Egli credeva alle notizie che vengono dal di fuori. E io non credevo che alle notizie che vengono di dentro.

At the heart of the article is the contrast between stillness and motion and the opposition between the inside and outside. Paradoxically, the contradictions recalled Croce’s claim against journalism, that it distracted young people from serious and quiet studies, forcing them to adapt to the frenetic rhythm of the outer world. In other words, Cecchi was transferring Croce’s humanistic model of study, *otium*, to journalism. To a journalism characterised by speed and conflict with the present, Cecchi counterposed a journalism based on a humanistic ‘order of silence’, since only patience and reading could allow one to gain maturity and the right to interpret life.<sup>26</sup> The reference to reading and contemplation occurs in Cecchi’s text when the young journalist, states before the tools of the old culture (books) that they could transform a man into a humanist, but not into a journalist:

Egli studiava le tariffe telegrafiche e gli orari ferroviari. E scoteva la testa, vedendomi uscire dal British Museum, o dalla bottega di un libraio, con un pacco di libri sotto il braccio. – Badi, mi diceva, con cotesto sistema, lei diventerà uno storico, un controversista; diventerà, e glie l’auguro di cuore, uno scrittore e un polemista. Non diventerà mai quel che si chiama un vero e proprio giornalista.

Cecchi’s rejoinder is a reversal of the journalist’s role: he does not chase the news – he deliberately runs from it. According to Cecchi, his young friend ‘caccia disperatamente la notizia, l’informazione, perché fugge disperatamente l’idea, l’opinione’. Opinion is thus central to journalistic practice, and even individual news

<sup>26</sup> George Steiner, ‘The Uncommon Reader’, in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 1-19 (p. 15).

items depend on it. But opinion is not just simply an interpretation of the news, it is part and parcel of it:

nella società capovolta, ch'è la società moderna, a forza di moneta e a forza di uomini, si può sempre procurarsi quella cosa costosa e che viene di lontano, ch'è la notizia. Ma inarrivabile e rara rimane quell'altra cosa casalinga, e che non costa nulla: l'opinione. [...] La notizia ha infiniti gradi di verità, infinite sfumature di adattamento alla verità; e, cioè, si trova sostanzialmente fuori della verità. È la continua posposizione, il continuo aggiornamento, di quel fatto unico che è l'opinione. È il continuo rimettere all'alternativa, al bilanciamento, al laborioso ritardo dell'astratto e astruso macchinario tecnico, ch'è il macchinario della notizia, di quel momento infinitamente semplice, sano e chiarificatore, ch'è il momento dell'opinione.

In the book edition of the articles included in *Pesci rossi*, Cecchi removed the sentence 'si trova sostanzialmente fuori della verità'.<sup>27</sup> The statement may have been judged too strong, as it destabilised the very nature and function of newspapers in the eyes of the readership. Malagodi's scruples probably lay behind this claim; by denying the news an ontological existence, as it were, Cecchi had criticised the way knowledge was handled in newspapers.

Cecchi's contact with British journalism allowed him to look closely at a journalistic practice based on different values: the centrality of the news and the professionalism of the reporter. Although fascinated by Fleet Street, he was worried by the prospect that the practice of contemporary British (and American) journalism, essentially based on 'fact-centred discursive practices',<sup>28</sup> could penetrate Italian journalism and undermine its constitutive features, as well as diminish its appeal and the significance of its cultural mission. Michael Schudson has reconstructed the debate that took place among American journalists after the First World War. In the sources he examined, journalists expressed their discomfort that the complexity of modern reality required a greater degree of interpretation of news by the reader – a practice that was felt by many professionals to be a typical European feature.<sup>29</sup> As far back as 1919, critics like Walter Lippmann regarded this practice of the commentary as a risk for western democracies because it was the basis for propaganda; instead proposing the need for a scientific method to obtain objectivity

<sup>27</sup> Cecchi, *Pesci rossi*, p. 297.

<sup>28</sup> Chalaby, 'Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention', p. 310.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News. A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 147.

in journalism. Schudson has noted, in considering the mixed reception for Lippmann's goal, that journalists were forced to believe in objectivity because they needed to, they 'were forced by ordinary human aspiration to seek escape from their own deep convictions of doubts and drifts'. There was a reaction, he maintained, to 'the disappointment in the modern gaze' created by the general mistrust of democratic institutions in the post-war period.<sup>30</sup> Journalists discovered that truth did not derive from the discovery of facts, but was controlled by corporations driven to address a mass audience to gain profit. Cecchi himself hinted at the cost of news items, and the inhumane nature of the news, perceived as a machine (the 'macchinario della notizia'). As the young journalist's mistake demonstrated, reality cannot be controlled. Schudson's conclusions may thus be said to coincide, at least in part, with Cecchi's own conclusions in his mildly satiric portrait of his young and restless reporter. The solution, in Cecchi's eyes, was still that of the opinion. In the article's conclusion, Cecchi proposed a continuity between the old and new journalisms, and finally identified the writer with the journalist:

E il giornalismo moderno della notizia, se è qualche cosa, non è altra cosa che lo stesso giornalismo antico dell'opinione. E il giornalista in sé e per sé non è nulla, almeno non consenta ad esser qualcosa come uno storico e un controversista, uno scrittore e un polemista.

The list of literary qualifications ('storico', 'controversista', 'scrittore', 'polemista') is the same as that originally put forward by the young journalist to object to Cecchi's "un-journalistic" approach to journalism.

Cecchi had blurred and abolished the distance between journalism and literature, and renegotiated the meaning of this association. The new journalist was neither the professional figure of cultural journalist or foreign correspondent that was emerging in mainstream journalistic practice, nor a writer, but a figure half way between the journalist as intended in the Anglo-American tradition and the travelling humanist of the Italian Renaissance, employing the culture found in books as an instrument for exploring and understanding the experience of other civilisations. The cultural experience of the individual and his personal history became not only a means of comparison, but also the principle around which journalism as Cecchi saw

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

it made its intellectual discoveries. In a diary entry written at the end of 1918 in London, he claimed:

un uomo [...] è molto più modesto se dice “io”. E un uomo è sempre sicuro di poter sinceramente interessare come privato. Un uomo descrive le sue impressioni in Westminster e una intervista con Henderson e col segretario di Lloyd George. Ma ha sempre più esatti documenti su se stesso.<sup>31</sup>

Cecchi's task was to find a way to convey the experience of the 'privato' within the structural possibilities offered by the newspaper.

### 3. The origin of the *elzeviro*

The *elzeviri* that Cecchi sent to *La Tribuna* during his stay in London were nominally foreign reports. The practice of foreign correspondence, as we have seen, had become increasingly frequent in the first decade of the twentieth century, but in during the Great War it almost overshadowed the more cultural *elzeviri*. The two or three columns of the third page were almost always taken by foreign correspondents from the main Italian or European cities reporting on the most important theatres of the war or the trenches.<sup>32</sup> These articles, which appeared in every newspaper, augmented the chronicle of the main events with commentaries on the political, social and even moral atmosphere of the main cities, and accounts of minor details or events that could convey an emotional experience of the war. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the last 'Faville del maglio' sent by d'Annunzio in 1914, was a communication from Paris and the French battlefield. After the war, the radically new European political arrangement established at the Paris Peace Conference increased demand for first-hand accounts from all around the continent. It is in this context that Enrico Falqui, in 1959, suggested Cecchi's correspondences from Britain – the main body of text included in *Pesci rossi* – should be read: 'Il bello di codesti scritti – he wrote – [...] resta quello di essere, per una buona metà,

<sup>31</sup> Cecchi, *Taccuini*, p. 304.

<sup>32</sup> Oliviero Bergamini, *Specchi di guerra. Giornalismo e conflitti armati da Napoleone a oggi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2009), pp. 56-61.

corrispondenze di giornale, con tutto quanto di attuale e rapido, ma non di improvvisato, comporta per solito un simile tipo di articolo'.<sup>33</sup>

The word 'attuale' used by Falqui implied that Cecchi, along with his work as a political journalist, was expected to send reports that focused on the various aspects of social life in Great Britain. Upon his arrival in London, in November 1918, Cecchi had to virtually restart his journalistic activity from the beginning. He had written very little since 1916.<sup>34</sup> His silence, which was partly due to his commitment to the war effort, was also a sign of the profound crisis that had invested his work as a writer. The literary perspective that had inspired his view of art and literature in Italy was, as we have seen, that of *frammentismo*, based on aesthetic theories that exalted the lyrical character of art. But Cecchi had also applied the idea to his literary criticism. In his opinion, the critic's task was to collaborate on the same ground as the artist, to reveal between them the mystery behind the act of artistic creation.<sup>35</sup> Cecchi was, as one of the best critics of his generation noted, still in the lands of Aestheticism. Reviewing Cecchi's first critical effort, *Storia della letteratura inglese nel secolo XIX* (1915), Alfredo Gargiulo went so far as to admit that Cecchi considered the identity of lyricism and art to be not only an aesthetic, but also an ethical standard against which to judge a writer's skill. His criticism could be summarised as 'un'effusione lirica nel tono dell'artista esaminato', in which the critical effort resulted in processes that we have already encountered in Nencioni's work:

Si hanno prevalentemente da lui, in luogo delle citazioni e dei relativi commenti, figurazioni spontanee, che [...] sorgono, per simpatia, dal fondo comune delle opere. E creano una specie di atmosfera, costituita tutta dalla sensibilità dell'artista, passata per simpatia profonda nel critico: un'atmosfera, nella quale le opere sembrano meglio vivere, e che, bene spesso, è di più efficace conforto al lettore che non il processo, diciamo così, discorsivo.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Enrico Falqui, 'Emilio Cecchi. Per una storia dei "Pesci Rossi"', in *Novecento letterario. Serie seconda* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1960), pp. 319-35 (p. 323).

<sup>34</sup> See in particular Giuliana Scudder, *Bibliografia degli scritti di Emilio Cecchi* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1970), pp. 43-47.

<sup>35</sup> Paolo Orvieto, *D'Annunzio o Croce. La critica in Italia dal 1900 al 1915* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1988), p. 167.

<sup>36</sup> Alfredo Gargiulo, review to Emilio Cecchi, *Storia della letteratura inglese nel secolo XIX* [...], *La Critica*, 16 (1918), 372-78 (p. 373).



According to Gargiulo, the results of Cecchi's critical efforts were the same as the criticism developed in the last spell of the nineteenth century in the circles of Aestheticism, although on a different theoretical level: the hermeneutics of sympathy and the aesthetics of atmospheres. Cecchi himself felt this point of arrival to be both a theoretical and practical deadlock.

What Cecchi needed, at this point, was to find a suitable dimension in his work as a correspondent with which to recover the 'processo discorsivo' that he had previously discarded. He needed to account for the contingent elements the correspondent needed for his task and, mostly, he needed a mediator between the lyrical instance and the requirements of the medium. Once in London, Cecchi seemed to find an answer to his search in the British essay. He wrote in his diary, in January 1919:

il "saggio", come forma d'arte-critica: arte che ha una materia critica, non possibile a sbalzarsi in fuori, in una sostanza corposa, fantastica, popolare, e accetta la limitazione e miscela critica. C'è qualcosa di bello, molto bello in questo, piuttosto che la pretesa "creativa" dell'ottanta per cento dei poeti.<sup>37</sup>

The essay, for Cecchi, represented a genuine instrument of knowledge rather than a literary genre. It was a way of overcoming not only the theoretical merging of art as lyricism, but also the last remnants of Aestheticism. The essay was characterised, as Cecchi immediately realised, by the boundaries of its remit ('limitazione'). It was not a place where the self could be the measure – through its own harmony – of the harmony of other creatures or things with the rest of the world. The essay represented the meeting point of the self with the object (the 'sostanza corposa, fantastica, popolare'), but possessed the 'discursive' width that had been lost in the idea of lyricism. As Thomas Harrison has noted, in the European culture of the first three decades of the twentieth century the essay represented a tendency to discard 'subjective certainty' while prompting instead 'an encounter between subject and object, or between an intuitive possibility and the constraints of the language in which it is expressed'. Its role was not to convey convictions, but rather to record 'the hermeneutical situation' in which they were reached.<sup>38</sup> The process is the same

<sup>37</sup> Cecchi, *Taccuini*, p. 307.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Harrison, *Essayism. Conrad, Musil and Pirandello* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 4.

as that described by Cecchi in ‘Dello stare a sedere’, where the news item is denied the possibility of conveying truth, and the real moment of knowledge acquisition is the opinion. In other words, Cecchi had found in the essay an answer to the cognitive dimension with which he had entrusted journalism.

On this theoretical premise, Cecchi entrusted the *elzeviro* with the cognitive thread he found in the essay. But the kind of approach he proposed was the convergence of two points of view. Firstly, the knowledge of everyday reality advocated by Cecchi was not that provided by philosophical systems, which are determined to give full account of the essence of things and of human actions. Secondly, the cognitive path was conveyed through a full integration of the instruments provided by literature in the journalistic text.

In the letters Cecchi wrote to his wife after the publication of his first correspondence, he insisted in defining his new articles as ‘buffonerie’ or ‘imbecillità’:

Oltre l’articolo su Cambridge, ieri ne ho spedito un altro alla Tribuna: una piccola buffoneria, che forse ti piacerà.<sup>39</sup>

Ho quasi finito un’altra buffoneria, che spedirò alla “Tribuna”. La prima è intitolata: “Dello stare a sedere”, questa: “Delle lettere di presentazione”.<sup>40</sup>

Io ho cominciato a scrivere delle imbecillità che mi divertono molto: la “Tribuna” ne ha già una, e domani ne spedisco un’altra, in grande: ‘Delle lettere di presentazione’.<sup>41</sup>

The insistence with which Cecchi seems to undermine his own articles ought not necessarily to be read as understatement. In order to understand the meaning of the word ‘buffonata’, it is necessary to recall the figure of the ‘buffone’, the clown, that appeared in an article published in *La Tribuna* in April 1919 and was later included in *Pesci rossi*. The article was about the English comedian George Robey, whom Cecchi saw in London that same year. Even if Robey’s revue was ‘una concimaia di roba senza forma’, Cecchi admired his acting style and, in particular,

<sup>39</sup> ACBF, Carteggio Emilio Cecchi – Leonetta Cecchi Pieraccini, 306 (Emilio to Leonetta, London 4 February 1919).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 307 (London 6 February 1919).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 310 (London 21-22 February 1919).

his ability to make the public laugh at the most standard comic sketches imaginable.

In the article, Cecchi noticed:

Baudelaire osservava che l'estetica del ridicolo, del buffonesco è ancora quasi tutta da fare. E, disgraziatamente, i contributi forniti, da quando egli giudicava così, a tutt'oggi, per quanto non disprezzabili, non son tali da permettermi di seguire tutte le manifestazioni di Robey con la padronanza di commento necessaria. Mi sentirei più a mio agio, se dovessi improvvisare un saggio sulle bellezze dell'*Iliade* o del *Paradiso perduto*. Non tenterò dunque la vostra pazienza pretendendo di essere filosofico, profondo. Ma, nei pochi periodi che mi restano, mi contenterò di essere modestamente riassuntivo, lasciando alla vostra fantasia i quadri di un Robey in giro fra le tentazioni notturne di Londra [...].<sup>42</sup>

The exploration of the aesthetics of the 'buffonesco' made Cecchi uncomfortable, because it apparently had nothing to do with the dignified seriousness of an essay on the great masterpieces of Western literatures. The 'buffone' as a writing genre had apparently nothing theoretical or philosophical in it. It was an ephemeral and humble writing about such an unimportant thing as a comic actor who, as Cecchi claimed at the beginning of the article, could pass unnoticed to a tourist or a traveller interested in getting to know London, its celebrated museums and famous places. But the denial of philosophical depth in the analysis of Robey's revues was not reticence, hidden behind the excuse of doing a favour to the reader. It was, instead, a real interpretation. After having described a number in which Robey fell from a rickety chair, particularly loved by the public, Cecchi concluded that:

Il suo gran giuoco era di pigliarsi giuoco del giuoco; di fare aspettare, di maturare un giuoco, eppoi non fare nessun giuoco, ma rotolare nella comune legge. Perché una legge si sfida, solo quando si è solidamente legati a un'altra legge nascosta e più forte. Ma un artista vero preferisce non sfidare nessuna legge e mostrare come si tombola di piana terra nelle evidenze più naturali.

The very dimension of the 'buffone' was a paradox: the paradox of doing nothing – or, at least, nothing exceptional, unusual or remarkable: 'direi che facesse la cosa più meravigliosa, la cosa più incredibile di tutte: *non faceva nulla*'. The attitude of the 'buffone' was that of arousing wonder through the obvious, the insignificant, the uninteresting; or, in other words, something that could never constitute a news item. It was, again and again, the same metaphor of the 'stare a sedere'. The general rule

<sup>42</sup> Emilio Cecchi, 'Lettere dall'Inghilterra. George Robey', *La Tribuna*, 5 April 1919.

introduced by Cecchi was illustrated with another example, which revolved around the same imagery:

E può essere che sia difficile tenersi in aria sur un trapezio. Ma è certamente più difficile saper cadere in terra da seduti sopra una seggiola. Lo spiritoso da salotto, quando gli chiedono quanto fa due più due, quasi sempre risponde che fa cinque. Rispondete invece che fa quattro. E direte la cosa più brillante e inaspettata.

The paradox, which is also the force of ‘buffonesco’, consists in the systematic refusal of all-engaging interpretations that remove the possibility of enjoying the fragments of knowledge placed in ordinary things.

The privileged talent of the ‘buffone’ to interpret the useless items or situations of everyday life is confirmed by the source of the *elzeviro*, which has never been acknowledged. This is an essay by Charles Lamb on another famous English comedian of his time, Joseph Munden, originally published in 1819 and included in the *Essays of Elia*. According to Lamb’s Elia, Munden, like no other actor, was able to ‘throw [...] a preternatural interest over the commonest daily-life objects’ – chairs included:

A table, or a joint stool, in his conception, rises into a dignity equivalent to Cassiopea’s chair. It is invested with constellatory importance. [...] His pots and his ladles are as grand and primal as the seething-pots and hooks seen in an old prophetic vision. A tub of butter, contemplated by him, amounts to a Platonic idea. He understands a leg of mutton in its quiddity.<sup>43</sup>

The objects were then invested with the philosophical qualities that, in the tradition of Western philosophy, were the expression of truth: prophecy, the Platonic ideas and the ‘quiddity’ of Scholasticism. But the importance of Munden’s operation was not in the kind of knowledge he could extract from the common order of things – but rather, in his attitude of wonder towards them: ‘Can any man *wonder* like him? [...] He stands wondering, amid the common-place materials of life, like primeval man with the sun and stars above him’.<sup>44</sup> Just as for Lamb’s Munden, for Cecchi, wonder was the emotion that guided intellectual discovery. In ‘Il giorno della vittoria’, Cecchi gave his ‘provinciale’ a gaze of wonder:

<sup>43</sup> Charles Lamb, ‘On the Acting of Munden’, in *The Works of Charles Lamb*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), pp. 656-58 (p. 658).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

E ci s'era illusi tante volte d'aver ucciso la meraviglia! La nostra facoltà di stupirci, d'appassionarci, insomma la nostra facoltà d'amare ciascuna volta rinasceva come un gaio serpente dal troncone della propria coda.

Wonder, 'la meraviglia' (or 'stupore', in the same article), became therefore the hermeneutical situation, a moment that, in its continuous renewal (as the tail of the snake), represented an instrument for the discovery and the revelation of hidden aspects of things that were otherwise normal, regular and ordinary to the observer. But wonder was also the antidote to another kind of knowledge. While walking towards G. K. Chesterton's house in Beaconsfield, Cecchi found himself musing over the landscape of the British countryside. But he stopped himself at the very moment a theory began to appear:

Abbozzavo una teoria per spiegare come questo paesaggio, così indefinito, intimo, musicale, per il popolo inglese possa veramente tenere luogo di musica. Ma quando mi fui accorto che non mi venivano idee per la mia teoria; e non trovavo la casa di Chesterton, per giustificarmi di non trovare le idee mi decisi a fermare un altro passante.<sup>45</sup>

The rebuttal was not only of the kind of knowledge that stems from theory, but also of a lyrical insertion (and effusion) on the landscape in the style of a fragment, as the words 'indefinito, intimo, musicale' suggest.

The sort of *occupatio* on the landscape had a rhetorical implication. In the passage, the sole idea of a lyrical effusion is immediately stopped and the paragraph concludes with the description of a very common situation in very common words (the house, the pedestrian). All the correspondence from London is characterised by a systematic refusal for the gratuitous change of register to create the effect of art. And, when the lyrical register appears, it is always invited by the subject but interspersed within an otherwise discursive structure, as, for example, in his description of the Cambridge colleges. The geometric sequence of apparently identical quads conveys a sense of geometry and emptiness to the scene, which is described by Cecchi in a lyrical crescendo ending with the definitive loss of concreteness by the real objects:

<sup>45</sup> Emilio Cecchi, 'Lettere dall'Inghilterra. Visita a Chesterton', *La Tribuna*, 28 December 1918.

Quel giorno, una sfumatura di nebbia sottile dava l'ultima patina alla pittura. I cristalli della brina, sul ciglio dei prati, aggiungevano al senso di immobilità e di astrazione, come se anche le erbe tendessero alla geometria. Ogni tanto nel cielo bianco scoccavano i rintocchi d'un *carillon* lontani come le campane del *Parsifal* ed estendevano quel paese di raccoglimento fino agli estremi confini.<sup>46</sup>

The description, however, is not – as it would have been in Nencioni or d'Annunzio, or in a *frammento* – a temporary dissolution of the bulk of images into a series of analogies organised in a musical sequence. It would be, if read in isolation. But within the article, the recovery of the argumentative structure allowed by the essay gave the passage a completely different meaning. Cecchi wanted to contrast the colleges' sense of solitude and the lofty idea of culture they seemed to stimulate with what he believed to be the alternative college, the greatest and toughest one: 'il collegio della vita':

E per conto mio vorrei sempre optare per quell'altro, terribile, collegio. Per il metodo dello scoraggiamento, invece che per quello dell'opportunità. [...] credo più stringente la volgare critica della vita. In materia d'arte e di umanità, non so pensare, insomma, che in Oxford e in Cambridge, in maniera incantevole, e realizzando tutte le squisite capacità liriche di questo difetto, non si debba finire con l'esser tenuti discosti dalla vita. Non si debba finire, in materia d'arte e di umanità, in un superiore estetismo.

The lyrical fragment acquired in the article, therefore, a structural function and even a justification. It was stimulated by the process of discovery of the real nature of the place, which only generated lyrical images ('non so pensare... realizzando tutte le squisite capacità liriche'). This spontaneous generation of lyricism, in turn, was ultimately defined as 'superiore estetismo', an activity that Cecchi had condemned since, compared with journalism, it did not accumulate any form of knowledge. The recovery of the literary dimension is functional to the argument (the effectiveness of Oxford and Cambridge as educational centres), and is a realisation of the 'limitazione e miscela critica' that Cecchi had envisaged in the possibilities offered by the essay.

The new third-page journal article offered by Cecchi was the very first *elzeviro*. Firstly, Cecchi's texts were journal articles, because the text preserved its

<sup>46</sup> Id., 'Lettere dall'Inghilterra. I collegi', *La Tribuna*, 6 February 1919.

original function of disclosing information. But the way this new information was obtained was played almost to the verge of paradox. Journalism was trying to abolish the mediation of the journalist's subjectivity in order to put the alleged objective dimension of news first. Cecchi, on the contrary, proposed the subjectivity of the private individual as the privileged filter to not only decide what was deemed to be news, but as the cultural interpreter of the experience of reality put into the journal article. Secondly, the new discursive dimension allowed writing to regain the particular and privileged cognitive instruments provided by literature. In Cecchi's *elzeviro*, the full range of registers and languages dispersed by the theory of lyrical writing is completely rescued and used to serve the interpretive and informative drive of the article. In other words, the article is the vehicle of information, not of a fortunate and unique aesthetic experience. Cecchi retrieved the colloquial style codified by *Fanfulla* and made of it the discursive foundation around which his *elzeviro* was organised.

With his 'Lettere dall'Inghilterra', Cecchi delivered a completely new and unprecedented dimension of cultural experience to the newspaper: the *elzeviro*. Already in 1919, Cecchi realised that the new texts that he had published in the newspaper needed to be codified and, therefore, extracted from the framework of the *terza pagina*. But this operation, even while it contributed to the collection of a heterogeneous series of texts under the same label, also contained within itself the seeds of its possible self-destruction.

#### **4. The (posthumous) nobility of the journal article**

Cecchi had revolutionised the idea of the article 'in elzeviro'. And only six years after his British correspondences, and four years after *Pesci rossi*, he began turning to the literary side of his third-page journal article. The occasion for the codification, as already seen, was a belated reply to an article written by his friend Baldini, 'Dello scrivere bene nei giornali'. Cecchi's 'Dell'articolo di giornale' appeared in 1924, at the very moment of the definitive consecration of the *terza pagina* as an institution of Italian journalism. Echoing a famous catchphrase, Cecchi's article could be defined as a case of the invention of a literary tradition. Cecchi's aim was to find a lineage for the journal article and, in particular, for the *elzeviri*. Cecchi returned to

the language of heraldry to make fun of the method used by his friend Antonio Baldini in retracing the sources of the third-page articles:

[...] più che a lavorare con metodo, scientificamente, Baldini pensava ad arraffare, di qua e di là, certi quarti nobiliari, e a metterli in bella mostra, sotto specie di genealogia ed araldica dell'articolo.<sup>47</sup>

In trying to unearth the tradition of the 'articolo di varietà', Baldini saw its roots in the sixteenth-century literary genres of the *capitolo*, *satira* and *cicalata*.<sup>48</sup> Cecchi expanded and systematised the quest in a serious, but also a facetious way – which would be taken very seriously in years to come. The results of this inquiry were destined to establish both the history and the normative standard for identifying the *elzeviro* and, in turn, an Italian essay tradition, since Cecchi hinted at an equation between his particular form of journal article and the genre of the essay.

In the article, Cecchi maintained that the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church with their letters were the first journalists, while Pindar was to be considered the inventor of the 'soffietto', articles explicitly written to flatter famous personalities. Horace's *Iter Brundisinum* and the seventeenth-century missionary Jesuit Daniello Bartoli's reports from the Far East were archetypes of the articles by national and foreign correspondents respectively. The third-page article was linked to the essay tradition from Addison to Lamb and, in turn, returned to the tradition of Horace's *Epistles* and, in particular, their Tuscan reception in Berni's *capitoli*. For Cecchi, the difference between the informational and the third-page article could be understood as the contrast between two ancient Italian texts. The first text was a *sirventese* composed by the fourteenth-century Florentine poet Antonio Pucci dedicated to the 1333 flood in Florence. In his text, Pucci plainly narrated the disaster in the city and its outskirts. The second text was a *capitolo* by Francesco Berni on the flood in the Tuscan region of the Mugello in 1521. Berni described the calamity through a parody of Dante and Petrarch's styles, and told a story of two

<sup>47</sup> Cecchi, 'Dell'articolo di giornale'. The article was revised and published in 1927 under the same title in the collection of essays *L'osteria del cattivo tempo*. In the volume edition, Cecchi dropped all references to Baldini and his article: see Cecchi, *Saggi e viaggi*, pp. 119-28.

<sup>48</sup> Baldini, 'Dello scrivere bene nei giornali', p. 5.



men saved by a tree in the shape of a cross, in a sort of parody of the ritual of redemption.<sup>49</sup>

Cecchi's genealogy of the journal article was reckless, to say the least. Such a reconstruction was arbitrary and anachronistic, insofar as it did not take into account the fact that the two texts had been written in an era before journalism existed. He used these texts to postulate an unlikely continuity between Berni's *capitoli* and the work of the twentieth-century European essayists, notably Belloc, Chesterton and Beerbohm. According to Cecchi, the three authors 'lavorano sempre su quello schema, probabilmente senza rendersene conto'.<sup>50</sup> When Cecchi made Addison, Johnson, Swift, Pope and Lamb the repositories and heirs of the sixteenth-century Italian tradition of the *capitolo*, he was probably alluding to the fortunes of Italian burlesque poetry in seventeenth century England. However, as Dionisotti has demonstrated, this tradition had almost completely vanished by the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> In Cecchi's opinion, however, the eighteenth-century British essayists may have absorbed the burlesque tradition, but its trace could still be detected in the work of his contemporaries.

The operation, in 1924, was probably aimed at finding a stable literary dimension for *Pesci rossi*, the book in which Cecchi had collected, amongst other articles, his correspondences from London. The twenty texts proved difficult to classify even for one of the most acute critics.<sup>52</sup> Cecchi's idea and genealogy of the essay quickly spread into critical and academic works, and was accepted and disseminated by a young and, at the time, relatively unknown expert in English literature, Mario Praz. His introduction to the first Italian translation of a selection of Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, published in 1924, was deeply indebted to Cecchi's article, especially the part dedicated to the connection between Lamb and the Italian Renaissance burlesque tradition.<sup>53</sup> 'Dell'articolo di giornale' was, then, a

<sup>49</sup> Francesco Berni, 'Rime', ed. Silvia Longhi, in *Poeti del Cinquecento*, eds. Guglielmo Gorni, Massimo Danzi, Silvia Longhi (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 2001), pp. 623-890 (p. 673).

<sup>50</sup> Cecchi, 'Dell'articolo di giornale'.

<sup>51</sup> Carlo Dionisotti, 'Antologie inglesi della letteratura italiana', in *Scritti di storia della letteratura italiana. I. 1935-1962*, eds. Tania Basile, Vincenzo Fera, Susanna Villari (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2008), pp. 461-477 (p. 464 in particular).

<sup>52</sup> See Gianfranco Contini's comments in 1932 about Cecchi's genre, 'arduo a una traduzione critica [...] però fissato, definito': 'Emilio Cecchi o della Natura', in *Esercizi di lettura sopra autori contemporanei* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), pp. 98-111 (p. 107).

<sup>53</sup> Carlo Lamb, *Saggi di Elia*, traduzione, introduzione e note di Mario Praz (Lanciano: Carabba, 1924). In 1936, he virtually proposed, word by word, Cecchi's genealogy in his entry on the

posthumous attempt to establish a link between the pieces published in *Pesci rossi* and the journal article, and probably to offer the former as a model for the latter. But, if *Pesci rossi* must be considered the starting point for the contemporary tradition of the essay in Italy, it represents a later development: a late refashioning of articles printed in the third page, written in diverse moments and with diverse aims.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, ‘Dell’articolo di giornale’ must be read with caution, as a posthumous theoretical claim about Cecchi’s personal journalistic practice, and not as a piece of scholarship on the history of Italian journalism or the foundation of the essay.

The label that Cecchi applied to his production in 1924 probably served to provide unity to *Pesci rossi*. As we have seen, Cecchi only fully understood his involvement with journalism in 1918-19, during his British sojourn, and found a new dimension for his activity in journalism. Of the twenty texts later collected in *Pesci rossi*, only eight were composed from material originally written in Britain and published in *La Tribuna* between November 1918 and April 1919. But in the book Cecchi revised and included five texts that had been written earlier, between February 1916 and September 1918: among them, the eponymous ‘Pesci rossi’, originally published on 23 August 1917. The latter texts were then revised and adapted according to the conclusion Cecchi had come to after 1919. Of the seven new texts that were added, all written from May to December 1919, only four had been published in *La Tribuna*. Three came from the journal *La Ronda*, which Cecchi had helped to establish in Rome in 1919.<sup>55</sup>

Cecchi presented *Pesci rossi* as a development of some of the possibilities offered by the journalistic space of the third page. He thus included in the book articles he had published before his return from London. Editing the new texts, he probably wanted to demonstrate that almost any third-page journal article could become an *elzeviro*, even if it had been written for a different occasion. The texts that appear in *Pesci rossi* can be identified as obituaries (‘In dilectissimum’), war correspondences (‘Passi sulla neve’, ‘È nata una bambina con una rosa in mano’),

‘saggio’ in Giovanni Gentile’s *Enciclopedia italiana*: Mario Praz, ‘Saggio’, in *Enciclopedia Italiana di scienze, lettere e arti*, 36 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1929-37), 30 (1936), pp. 434-35.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Göschl, ‘Der italienische Essay. Entwicklung und Typologie einer modernen Kleingattung’, *Erstausgabe der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz*, 3 (2010), 45-54.

<sup>55</sup> The data is drawn from the table compiled by Ghilardi in Cecchi, *Pesci rossi*, pp. 146-47. For further details on the textual history of the first edition of the book, see pp. 157-78.

book reviews ('Pesci rossi', 'Iddio ironico'), the so-called *cronache letterarie* ('La commedia come danza'), and foreign correspondence ('Dello stare a sedere', 'La penna di pavone', 'D'un bambino, d'una vecchia e d'un soldato', 'Visita a Chesterton', 'Cambridge', 'George Robey', 'La lettera di presentazione'). However, the revisions struck a deathblow to the journalistic quality of the texts in two ways.

Firstly, the systematic elimination of the referential function in every text corresponded in many cases to the elimination of the discursivity that had been regained through the essay. Consequently, the recovery of texts written in 1916 and 1917, still under the influence of *frammentismo*, updated the lyricism that Cecchi had worked into a functional feature of his articles. Cecchi discovered that the articles written before his British sojourn contained something of the movement of discovery that he experimented with in his correspondence. In dropping all reference to the context, Cecchi updated the reasons for lyricism. It is the case of 'Pesci rossi', for example, where the subject of the article, the review of a book of Japanese poetry, is eliminated and the initial image becomes the starting point for a series of analogies:

Di profilo eran piccole triglie e sardelle purpuree. Di faccia erano vecchi mostri arcigni dell'epoca dei Han; draghi millenarî imbronciati.<sup>56</sup>

Cecchi is thus forced to lower the register by inserting the context of the supposed revelation about the meanings of the goldfish: 'a banco di pasticciere, aspettando un caffè', followed by the comment: 'Ma io non ho mai badato a' luoghi quando si trattava di accrescere la mia coltura'. It is a patch, a local humorous insertion stitched to the text for stylistic reasons, which has no connection with the argument of the text, and does not affect it at a structural level. It is not a narrative, as in the reports from London. Even though there are no studies on the passage of the *elzeviri* from newspaper to book, Margherita Ghilardi has noted that the main area of Cecchi's intervention during re-editing was in punctuation. She attributes the drastic elimination of punctuation marks to Cecchi's will to simplify the text.<sup>57</sup> But, as Beccaria has noted in the case of d'Annunzio, this is a feature of a prose less

<sup>56</sup> Cecchi, *Pesci rossi*, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

interested in its value as a communicational vehicle than attributing meaning to its rhythmic structures.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, the attribution of the particular literary genealogy exposed in ‘Dell’articolo di giornale’ blocked the free development of relationships with other affine models and, paradoxically, with the essay itself. When Cecchi made burlesque poetry the great foremother of the ‘articolo di terza pagina’ he insinuated – perhaps unconsciously – that the latter must have burlesque qualities. He seemed to superimpose the burlesque qualities onto the particular phenomenology of the ‘buffone’ he had envisaged. The *elzeviri* he wrote after his return from London, ‘I centesimi e i soldi’, ‘La casa di campagna’ and ‘Sermone di Natale’, were published in *La Tribuna* under the title of ‘Fantasie e discussioni’. Their unity lay in a series of themes that were only casually related to both burlesque poetry and some of Lamb’s essays, such as ‘A Dissertation upon Roast Pig’ or ‘Old China’. The equation, however, had an unintended and unforeseen effect: as in burlesque poetry, the playful attitude towards the common objects of everyday life – from food to furniture – became proof of stylistic virtuosity and therefore purely a question of plays on rhetoric. The cognitive drive of the London correspondences had been lost – momentarily, for Cecchi, because as soon as he undertook another trip, he immediately found the original dimension of his British experience – but he had created a wonderful technical tool for those who had nothing to say.

<sup>58</sup> Beccaria, *L’autonomia del significante*, p. 286.



## CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis, we were only able to give a negative definition of the *elzeviro*. The lack of inquiry into its origin made it difficult to understand what it was when it appeared. At the same time, the number of contradictory definitions accumulated during its history was based only on a consideration of the texts from a purely literary point of view; the only provisional characterisation of the *elzeviro* was that of a newspaper article. And the recovery of the *elzeviro* to its original journalistic dimension has demonstrated that, at its first appearance, it was a newspaper article indeed – and it continued to be *only* a newspaper article. Even when collected and edited in a book, the *elzeviro* had been originally published in the newspaper. But, if it was certainly possible to collect a number of *elzeviri* in a book, it was impossible to write a book of *elzeviri* (and, in fact, there are no specimens of this kind).

The *elzeviro* is a newspaper article that originates as the answer to the modernisation of journalism that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the primacy of news began to undermine the legitimacy of the subjective moment of the opinion. The foundation of the *elzeviro* lies in claiming a territory that was felt to be the province of opinion: literary journalists demanded that subjectivity not be discarded, and proved that the operation could be undertaken through an alternative instrument for the interpretation of reality: that of literature and culture. Literary journalists carved out their own personal space within the newspaper, where they were not forced to comment on news but could instead decide what constituted news and how to comment on it. The *elzeviro* is the account of the discovery of this news: for this reason, its discursive and colloquial dimension is the basis on which that type of article is organised, as the textual organism is bound by the aim of communicating news values.

On the grounds of this definition, it is now possible to admit that all the designations of the *elzeviro* concocted by critics and journalists over the last eighty years in various ways were not erroneous. Put simply, they considered it at a certain

moment of its life, or considered only certain temporary realisations of it. In various moments of its history, the *elzeviro* has indeed been presented as a lyrical fragment, as a piece of artistic prose or as an essay. These were all elements that contributed to the definition of its identity, but they did not determine it. On the contrary, they were either stylistic or modal choices, which could be applied from time to time within the code of practice of the individual author. The reason why it appears so difficult to provide a univocal portrait of the *elzeviro* is that it is neither a journalistic nor a literary genre with a finite range of subjects, values, moods and styles. Of the genre, it keeps only to the limits imposed by the newspaper: the external structure and the length. As Cecchi demonstrated in *Pesci rossi*, virtually every journal article could be channelled into the scheme (albeit at times only by forcing the issue). And this is possible because at the foundation of the *elzeviro* there is an epistemological hypothesis, the validity and limits of journalistic knowledge, as well as an assertion of the cognitive possibilities offered by literature as the instrument for managing the textual material.

From Cecchi's reports from Great Britain to the last articles that appeared in the 1970s, the *elzeviro* never lost this journalistic dimension – not even when, as in Ridolfi's *elzeviro* on the *elzeviri*, for example, it was just the expression of a 'mestiere'. The history of the *elzeviro* ought to be rewritten from the new starting point developed in this research: that of having an autonomous identity as an article that – like every other journal article – passed through the hands of millions of Italian readers every day for fifty years. The real impact of the *elzeviro* must be measured on a greater scale than has hitherto been the case: it must be studied, on the one hand, in its relationship with the newspaper and with journalistic practice over the fifty years of its existence; and, on the other, in its relationship with literature – as an assessment of its adaptability to the evolution of changing literary trends would be desirable. But the history of the *elzeviro* is, most of all, that of an article which, for millions of readers, represented a virtually unique opportunity for contact with literary production. It was probably an exception (or perhaps a solution) to the old problem of Italian literature failing to reach a wider readership. Nevertheless, the *elzeviro* contributed to shaping the literary imaginary of those who read it and – now that it has been recovered to its original dimension – it is ready for its social history to be written.

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