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Art for the Reader's Sake: An Historical and Textual Study of Emilio De Marchi's *Il cappello del prete* (1888)

Christina Petraglia

“Ma quando io avrò durata l'eroica fatica di trascrivere questa storia da questo dilavato e graffiato autografo, e l'avrò data, come sul dirsi, alla luce, si troverà egli poi chi duri la fatica di leggerla?”

-Introduzione, *I promessi sposi*

(“...but when I have labored through the heroic task of transcribing this ancient story from its defaced and faded manuscript – when I have brought it to the light of day, to use the common phrase – who will labor through the task of reading it?”

-Narrator's Foreword, *The Betrothed*)¹

Alessandro Manzoni's narrator of *I promessi sposi* (1842) grapples with the task of writing throughout the story of Renzo and Lucia. Manzoni's narrator, though omniscient, is certainly not the removed, unbiased observer that the Italian reader will come to know almost forty years later in Giovanni Verga's verismo, which proposes a “studio sincero e spassionato” (“sincere and dispassionate study”)² of individuals struggling in their social milieus. The Manzonian narrator, though loosely employing free indirect style, frequently enters into the story, coloring it with opinionated language and value judgments, and openly addressing his “dear reader.” In the brief citation above, derived from the novel's preface, the narrator explicitly appeals to the reader in first person and presents himself as a kind of “reader” who feels called to decipher a 200-year-old manuscript containing the accounts of the lives of Renzo and Lucia. Not only does he wrestle with his own capability of reading and writing – of transcribing and rewriting an ancient text for a modern audience – he also frets over the reader's ability to labor through it, thereby underlining the double challenge of authorial production and reader reception. As a reader and a writer of a text, he assumes the dual charge of interpreting and constructing meaning; contemporaneously, the readers or the “venticinque lettori” whom he so humbly, yet playfully addresses, accept a parallel endeavor in their own experience with the novel, in their tasks of reading content and writing meaning. The act of reading, like that of writing, becomes an undertaking that demands diligence and causes fatigue on the part of the audience, whose role becomes simultaneously readerly and writerly. This is reinforced by the Manzonian narrator's own characterization of reading as a constantly thoughtful occupation and active effort.³

¹ Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), 6. Translation: *The Betrothed*, trans. Bruce Penman (London: Penguin, 1972), 1.

² Giovanni Verga, *I Malavoglia* (Milan: Edizioni il polifilo), 3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

³ In her study of the narrative pact between author and reader in the novels of Foscolo and Manzoni, Giovanna Rosa highlights Manzoni's attitude toward the task of reading: “l'atto di lettura non è mai sinonimo di evasione divertita o di abbandono incontrollato, si piuttosto è indicato sempre come ‘pensoso mestiere’, ‘fatica di leggere’” (“The act of reading is never synonymous with enjoyable evasion or uncontrolled abandonment, rather it is indicated always as a

While addresses to the reader within the novel proper abound in early nineteenth-century Italian fiction, they generally tended to wane as the novel developed and realist authors such as Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, Federico De Roberto, and Matilde Serao employed the detached omniscient narrator characteristic of *verismo*. While the renowned cult of impersonality and free indirect discourse dominated the last twenty years of the century, Italian writers still demonstrated an attachment to the public, often expounding their poetics and/or narrative pacts with the reader, either in works of literary criticism, or in forewords to their respective novels. The famous preface to Verga's seminal veristic novel, *I Malavoglia* (1881) and the note of the author in Capuana's third realist-fantastic novel, *Profumo* (1890),⁴ are prime examples of the author's intent to construct a relationship with his audience. There are, of course, myriad instances of nineteenth-century novelists, realist and fantastic alike, that pay homage to the reader or call upon her in the negotiation of textual production and reception. The Milanese author Emilio De Marchi (1851–1901) explicitly delineated a particular sort of reader, for he sought to appeal to a mass reading public through the medium of the newly developing serial novel, while many of his contemporaries – *veristi* (Giovanni Verga, Federico De Roberto) and *decadentisti* (Gabriele D'Annunzio) alike – catered to an intellectual or elite audience, publishing their lengthy novels only in volume form. As a professor, journalist, poet, literary critic, and novelist, De Marchi understood that there existed a common reader with a diverse horizon of expectations than her aristocratic or scholarly counterpart, and that the serial novel, or “il romanzo d'appendice” (“appendix novel,” a title that derives from the appearance of the texts in the appendixes of periodicals), could provide an optimal venue for such a popular literary demand.

Emilio De Marchi initially gained notoriety as a journalist and contributor to the Milanese periodical *La Vita Nuova*, in which he published pieces of social commentary, literary reviews, poetry, and his first and third serialized novels between 1876 and 1877: *Il signor dottorino* (Mister Little Doctor) and *Due anime in un corpo* (Two Souls in One Body).⁵ Like one called to a vocation, he consciously strove to improve and eventually reform the serialized fiction developing in post-unification Milan and that, much to his chagrin, proved to be artistically and morally vacuous imitations of the French feuilleton. In a critical article printed in *La Vita Nuova* following the publication of his first two novels, De Marchi defended the relatively new practice (in Italy) of the serialized novel⁶ by underlining its ability to enthrall a vast and diverse public, and highlighting

‘thoughtful occupation’ or an ‘effort of reading’”). See *L'identità di una metropoli. La Letteratura della Milano moderna* (Turin: Aragano, 2004), 37.

⁴ In the conclusion of his note to the reader in the fourth edition of *Profumo*, released ten years after its initial publication in volume form, Capuana declares: “Tanto è vero che nell’opera d’arte, quando è sincera, s’infiltra sempre qualcosa di più che l’autore non ha intenzione di mettervi e che, spesso, i lettori scorgono assai prima di esso” (“It is very true that in a work of art, when it is sincere, something more than the author intended to put there always infiltrates it, and that often the readers notice [it] before him”). See *Profumo* (Milan: Morganti, 2008), 16. Capuana’s keen observation of the reader’s ability to make meaning underlines her essential involvement in the artistic process.

⁵ Alessandra Briganti, *Introduzione a De Marchi* (Rome: Laterza, 1992), 108; De Marchi’s second novel *Tra gli stracci* (Amidst the Rags), subtitled “un racconto popolare” or story for the masses, appeared during the same year (1876) as *Il signor dottorino*, though in the journal *La famiglia e la scuola*. Spinazzola characterizes it as a traditional feuilleton, meant to intrigue and entertain the common reader, yet devoid of an intent to morally or civilly educate. See Vittorio Spinazzola, *Emilio De Marchi: romanziere popolare* (Milano: Edizioni di comunità, 1971), 35.

⁶ In contrast to France and England where serial novels exploded in the 1830s and 1840s, Italy began to publish serial fiction in the late 1870s and to a lesser extent. Literary and cultural journals flourished during the late eighteenth century in Italy, yet they contained public interest pieces, social commentaries, and creative sketches and were not necessarily venues for the novel.

its pedagogical potential as ethically and culturally edifying.⁷ For De Marchi, the modern literary audience consisted of the majority of literate, though not erudite individuals, while the duty of the writer should involve pleasing and bettering the multitude by facilitating the comprehension – or at least veneration – of moral, civil and aesthetic ideals.⁸ Though his first three novels met with commercial success, with two of them published in volume form almost immediately following their final installment, De Marchi spent the next decade composing short stories, literary criticism, sketches, and social commentary for various Italian periodicals. He also maintained his positions as a professional writer, professor of stylistics, and administrator at the Accademia Scientifico-Letteraria in Milan, yet the desire to witness an improvement in the quality and quantity of Italian literature for the masses remained. Early in 1887, a wager from fellow journalist Dario Papa, director of the Milanese magazine *L'Italia del popolo*, incited De Marchi to return to the composition of serial novels in hopes of rivaling the appeal and the success of the French feuilleton that had been appropriated, translated, and printed in Italian newspapers.⁹ Papa claimed that a reform of the *romanzo d'appendice* in terms of good taste and respectable content would prove impossible; given its commercial nature, he argued that it could not achieve literary and moral value.¹⁰ De Marchi accepted the challenge and beginning on June 17, 1887, his fourth serial novel entitled *Il cappello del prete* (The Priest's Hat) saw its first installment in *L'Italia del popolo* and met with immediate commercial success in Italy and later abroad.¹¹ In the preface to the novel's 1888 first edition in volume form (published with Treves), De Marchi explicitly establishes a poetics hinging on the moral and artistic ennoblement of popular literature, a credo that informed his subsequent novelistic oeuvre until his untimely death in 1901. The foreword reads like a manifesto for his “romanzo d'esperienza” (“novel of experiment”) and culminates with the declaration: “L'arte è cosa divina; ma non è male di tanto in tanto scrivere anche per i lettori” (“Art is a divine thing; but it is not always bad to write also for the readers”).¹² De Marchi's assertion of

⁷ From a contemporary standpoint, De Marchi's view that serialized fiction and the journals that host it should function as educational tools through which morality and culture could be conveyed to the masses is no doubt a paternalistic stance with normalizing undertones; however, his desire to appeal to a popular audience through literature respectable in form and content should not be interpreted as negative insofar as a mass literature could produce a culturally and linguistically unifying effect in a country which, despite its political unification in 1861 (and procurement of Rome and the Papal States in 1871), was still attempting to build a national culture and language. De Marchi's quest to educate the masses may be seen as proto-Gramscian to a certain extent insofar as he consciously sought to create a literature that would express the demands and sentiments of the masses; however, his quest was more for a cultural leveling and enrichment of the middle and lower middle classes, as opposed to Antonio Gramsci's objective of socially and politically empowering the lower classes through a national-popular literature as an instrument of protest, struggle, and historicization of the proletariat and subproletariat.

⁸ Briganti, 67.

⁹ Though there were certainly Italian writers that composed feuilleton and short stories for the popular reader, much of the “letteratura di consumo” (“consumer literature”) and other mass culture phenomena were imported from France (Spinazzola 12).

¹⁰ Mario Monteverdi, *Emilio De Marchi: romanziere* (Milan: Gastaldi, 1963), 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55. After the novel's publication in volume form in 1888 with Treves, it was also reprinted in the Italian journals *Patria italiana* in Buenos Aires and *L'Italia* in Chicago. The novel enjoyed further success beyond Italy and its diasporas. It was translated into Hungarian in 1891, German in 1894, French in 1902, Danish in 1903 and then English in 1925. Before 1913, seven more Italian editions of the novel were published (Sergia Adamo, “Il cappello del prete: romanzo giudiziario e romanzo della giustizia” in *Atti del convegno: Emilio De Marchi: un secolo dopo* [Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2005] 125 – 157, 128). Treves published another edition of *Il cappello del prete* in 1913 and Universal Cine produced a film version in 1945 (Monteverdi 55).

¹² Emilio De Marchi, *Il cappello del prete* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006), 4.

the value of art and his contemporaneous belief in writing specifically for the reader – in this case a mass, middle-class public – illustrates a narrative pact with his audience for whom he will provide quality literature capable of pleasing, entertaining, and conveying an ethical message. Writing for a specified public also imbues the reader with an active role in the production of the text and consequently the author’s concern for its reception. The reader’s role in the construction of a literary text, at the levels of both production and reception, recall the Manzonian narrator’s preoccupation with the task of the reader. Although De Marchi celebrates the positive reception of his novel after its initial serial publication and does not fret over its success, he, like Manzoni before him, calls the reader to an active role in the life of the text. The engaged reader who approaches the inaugural novel of modern Italian fiction, or the De Marchian romanzo d’appendice, or any other literary text for that matter must, like Manzoni’s own reader-writer narrator and reader-writer reader, establish parameters (or an amalgam of parameters) of interpretation. The present study employs both a limited “distant” reading¹³ of the specific socio-cultural milieu anticipating and surrounding the publication of *Il cappello del prete*, and a close reading of the various texts woven into the narrative in order to demonstrate how De Marchi’s fourth serialized novel emerges not only as a diegetic portrayal of madness incurred from transcending morality, but also as a metatext that invites reader reflection on texts themselves.

The historical context of the nineteenth-century Italian novel is indeed an interesting one, for Italy only became a unified nation in the latter half of the century; just as it had been occupied by foreign political powers, it had also been bombarded by foreign letters as the demand for realist, sentimental, and romantic novels exceeded the supply by Italian authors,¹⁴ who were producing mostly historical novels directed towards an upper-class readership of patriots during the Risorgimento years.¹⁵ While English and French narrative generally thrived throughout the nineteenth century, Italian prose lagged behind in quantity and marketability in comparison with that of its European neighbors. As Franco Moretti notes, the common literary market arose in Europe between 1750 and 1850, yet it remained quite imbalanced insofar as England and France acquired a stronghold on novelistic production and distribution on the Continent, encouraging writers abroad to merely imitate their literary output.¹⁶ In the first chapter of his *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Moretti charts the rise (and the fall) of the novel in various nations, and while England and France already had a robust novelistic production in the early eighteenth century, in Italy the novel surfaces only around 1820 and with significantly fewer texts.¹⁷ If the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the prolific production of English writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontës, Charles Dickens, and French authors including Honoré de Balzac, the definitive version of *I promessi sposi* appeared only in 1842, with Manzoni writing no other novels afterward.

Though Manzoni’s historical-Romantic masterpiece remained an object of pride and veneration for subsequent generations of authors and readers, the nineteenth-century literary scene

¹³ The term “distant” reading is used loosely here and is therefore placed in quotation marks. Franco Moretti’s distant reading offers an approach to literary history wider in scope than the traditional one; however, while distant reading’s primary utility seems designed for a holistic or sweeping historical study of world literatures, it also lends itself to the more specific examination of texts within their national contexts. Some of Moretti’s works will therefore serve as references in the present study insofar as the comparative historical data they provide proves useful in situating the Italian novel in its historical and cultural context of fin de siècle Italy and its editorial market.

¹⁴ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998), 187.

¹⁵ Sergio Pacifici, *The Modern Italian Novel: From Capuana to Tozzi* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 7.

¹⁶ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 187.

¹⁷ See Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London: Verso, 2005), 6-11.

in Italy faced substantial challenges: the lack of a quality, widely-appealing national literature in the wake of Unification, and the demand and subsequent vast production of foreign – mostly French – novels throughout the century.¹⁸ Furthermore, at a quantitative level, Italian printers faced a very restricted market in Italy due to the country's economy and the inabilities of publishing houses to produce large quantities of books in the years immediately following the Risorgimento.¹⁹

The question of a national literature was inherently problematic in nineteenth-century Italy. Indeed, upon Unification in 1861, only about two-and-a-half percent of the population could speak Italian in addition to their native dialect, and of that proportion, sixty-six percent lived in Tuscany.²⁰ This is only compounded by the extremely high number of illiterate Italians. During the Restoration period, Italian literacy trailed tragically behind other European countries such as England and France; the average number of literate Italians in northern and central Italy alone did not exceed twenty percent, compared to the European average which was greater than fifty percent.²¹ At the end of the 1830s in Austrian Lombardy, only forty percent of the population between ages six and twelve attended an educational institution, and in Naples and its Bourbon southern provinces, only 1 out of 150 children learned to read and write in school. Those who attended elementary school received a limited education, with access mostly to prayer books and almanacs.²² Even in 1881, about sixty-four percent of children between the ages of six and twelve and fifty-four percent of youth between the ages of twelve and twenty were still illiterate.²³ Reading and writing obviously remained privileges of the upper and middle classes well into the final decades of the nineteenth century; however, illiteracy was not the only impairment to the rise of the realist novel that would appeal to a wide, middle class readership. The politically-charged historical novel proved the dominating genre of the turbulent Risorgimento years.

Between 1825 and 1850, the Italian historical novel enjoyed popularity because of its engagement with contemporary uprisings and political struggles,²⁴ yet the timeliness that certified its success also ensured its eventual decline, as particular issues relevant to the liberation and subsequent creation of an Italian State became either moot or were addressed and surpassed. After the first Risorgimento war in Italy in 1848, narrative production declined drastically, by ninety percent, with only three novels published in 1849, as compared to forty-three in 1842,²⁵ suggesting that a fall of the novel in Italy may be attributed to violent political upheaval. As Unification efforts and nationalist sentiments intensified in the 1850s and 1860s, the historical novel gained new

¹⁸ English novels were also imported into Italy, yet in the mid-nineteenth Century the ratio of French to English novels in Italy was about eight to one (*Atlas* 184). Moretti also notes various critics who discuss the influx of foreign literature in Nineteenth-century Italy, and claim that a history of the novel in Italy could be written without even mentioning Italian novels (*Ibid.*).

¹⁹ France, Germany, and England printed thousands of copies of their books, often in many editions, thanks to the vastness of their internal markets, state support, and the existence of international demand for their works. While these countries also possessed an international market, Italy, because of lack of demand and the incapability of large-scale production, was restricted to its national market. Emilio Treves, founder of the homonymous, successful Milanese publishing house declared that: “the Italian market will always remain restricted to Italy, while the market of French, English, and German books is the world.” See: Gabriela Turi, *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milan: Giunti, 2007), 120.

²⁰ Pacifici, 3.

²¹ Turi, 104.

²² *Ibid.*, 105.

²³ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁴ Pacifici, 2.

²⁵ Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 9.

traction as a vehicle capable of reflecting the nation's long struggle for independence.²⁶ After the Unification, the historical novel again waned in popularity as the sentiment of patriotism also declined, due in large part to post-Risorgimento disillusionment brought on by various factors.²⁷ By the 1880s, the genre had lost considerable ground to verismo in which the historical component plays a marginal role and the angst of the individual in an evolving, supposedly "progressive" society occupies the forefront; however, in the decades before Luigi Capuana's *Giacinta* (1879) and Giovanni Verga's *I Malavoglia* (1881) marked the advent of verismo, Italy experienced a lull in novelistic output.²⁸ French narratives filled the void and continued to be imported into Italy both in book form and serial form in periodicals, much to the chagrin of many Italian intellectuals who desired a post-Unification Italian novel that would address the ideological and social challenges of the newly formed nation-state, thus promoting a sense of unity among a culturally and economically fragmented country. Manzoni's great novel, though still revered, had been published decades before and its explicitly Northern setting and romantic notions of love and providential salvation seemed outdated and over-idealized in the multifarious and socially changing new country, circumscribed by the era of industrialization and positivism.

As the novel emerged as the "symbolic form of the nation-state" that "[did] not conceal the nation's internal divisions, but manage[d] to turn them into a story,"²⁹ post-Risorgimento Italy needed novels that portrayed such diversity as part of its unity and dealt with social, psychological and ideological questions relevant to modernity. Italian critics and authors such as Antonio Fogazzaro lamented the absence of quality and quantity in Italian letters in the decade following the Unification. Before developing an epistolary friendship and professional relationship with Emilio De Marchi in the 1880s, Fogazzaro delivered a lecture on the dire state of the Italian novel entitled "Dell'avvenire del romanzo in Italia" ("On the Future of the Novel in Italy") in 1872,³⁰ in which he praises other European nations such as Germany and England for their novelistic output, while concurrently lamenting his own country's estrangement from the modern artistic vehicle par excellence. After citing such model authors as Goethe, Dickens, Thackeray, Disraeli, Collins, and Charlotte Bronte, he declares that, in comparison, the previously popular Italian historical novels are "quasi sempre ombre senza vita" ("almost always shadows without life"), and that an Italian psychological and social novel relevant to current issues does not exist.³¹ Underlining the novel as the optimal narrative form for the still relatively newfound nation, Fogazzaro exclaims:

Se è vero che il romanzo è la forma prevalente del sentimento poetico nel nostro tempo, la povertà dell'arte italiana è ben grave. È duro dover chiedere agli stranieri il pane quotidiano, poco adatto al nostro palato, anche quando non è affatto insalubre, mentre potremmo assai bene provvedere a noi col nostro. Infatti, o Signori, dai fianchi giganteschi delle nostre montagne ai lidi poetici dei nostri mari, quante scene incomparabili non ci profuse la natura da collocarvi ogni sorta di fantasie, dalle più austere alle più ridenti!

²⁶ Pacifici, 6.

²⁷ Salvatore Guglielmino, *Guida al Novecento* (Milan: Principato, 1971), 17-22.

²⁸ Pacifici, 8.

²⁹ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 20.

³⁰ Fogazzaro delivered his lecture entitled "Dell'avvenire del romanzo in Italia" on May 21, 1872 at the Accademia Olimpica di Vicenza and it was later published in the conference proceedings. It now appears in *Scene e prose varie*, ed. Piero Nardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1945).

³¹ See p. 347-349.

(If it is true that the novel is the prevalent form of the poetic sentiment of our time, the poverty of Italian art is very grave. It is hard to have to ask foreigners for our daily bread, little suitable for our palate even when it is not at all unhealthy, while we could very well provide ourselves with our own. In fact, oh sirs, from the gigantic sides of our mountains to the poetic shores of our seas, how many incomparable scenes does nature lavish upon us in order to connect to them every kind of fantasy, from the most austere to the most pleasant!)³²

Although he expresses respect for foreign writers, Fogazzaro admonishes his contemporaries to provide a “daily bread” to a starving reading public, specifically fit for the Italian “palate,” and emphasizes the plentiful natural (and national) resources as possible ingredients of the creative recipe. His reference to the novel as a comestible recalls similar metaphors by other writers such as Thackeray and Trollope whose characterizations of novels as “raspberry open-tarts” or “jam and honey” respectively, “place novel-reading in the emergent category of mass consumption.”³³ However, unlike his English counterparts, Fogazzaro’s “daily bread,” though undoubtedly an image that reflects the taste and consumption inherent in novelistic production and reception, contains no negative undertones. While desserts and condiments exemplify superfluous gustatory indulgences, bread “made in Italy” remains a staple of life, a food of sustenance for the fledgling nation; hence, Fogazzaro’s use of this particular image reinforces the base necessity of a new Italian novel capable of providing moral and ideological nourishment to its people. In the following decade, while Italian authors dedicated themselves to filling the artistic void of novelistic production (Capuana, Verga, Fogazzaro, Serao), Italian editors sought to fortify the manufacturing of books and periodicals.

The phenomenon of mass literary production began to make its mark on post-Risorgimento Italy in the 1870s and 1880s as the country – primarily the cities of Milan, Turin, and Florence – experienced a rapid growth in industry and technological improvements in the printing process, paper production, inks and typesets. The rise in the printing of books in Italy (from 3,314 in 1836 to 15,973 in 1872),³⁴ and the founding of many periodicals brought the written word and socio-cultural issues to a greater number of Italians than ever before, and publications both Italian and foreign alike became an inextricable element of the country’s developing material culture. Milan immediately took the lead as the most prolific producer of books and periodicals in the new Italian State, having already established itself as a chief force in the editorial market well before Unification. In the decades following the foundation of the Italian nation, Milan also showed the greatest increase in print production in respect to other Italian industrial centers and its success continued throughout the century with rising literary and journalistic distribution.³⁵ In 1836, nineteen periodicals were in circulation in Milan and by 1871 this number rose to ninety. Only two years later in 1873, Milan produced 137 periodicals.³⁶ Milan housed the most publishers in Lombardy and of the 10,578 publications produced in the country in 1889, over 2,000 of them

³² Fogazzaro, 349.

³³ Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 11.

³⁴ These totals include also works by foreign authors and books in general, not only novels. See: Gabriela Turi, *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milan: Giunti, 2007), 116.

³⁵ Turi, 151.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

came from Milan and such leading publishers as Treves,³⁷ where both Fogazzaro and De Marchi eventually found a home for their respective novels.

While Antonio Fogazzaro was interested in reviving the Italian novel in its traditional volume form and ultimately succeeded beginning with the unexpected commercial triumph of his first novel *Malombra*, (begrudgingly published by Treves in 1881)³⁸ Emilio De Marchi found his niche in the production, moral improvement, and Italianization of the romanzo d'appendice, the serialized fictional pieces found in the appendices of periodicals. Along with book production, newspaper and magazine production was skyrocketing in fin de siècle Italy, with Milan at the forefront also of the journalistic editorial market. In 1836, only 185 periodicals existed in the entire country and by 1873 that number had risen to 1,127 publications.³⁹ Of the 1,606 national periodicals printed in 1887, 172 of them were Milanese and many daily newspapers offered both morning and evening editions with thousands of subscribers.⁴⁰ One of the most popular periodicals, *L'Italia del popolo*, had a circulation of over ten thousand subscribers and it was this daily newspaper that hosted Emilio De Marchi's *Il cappello del prete* beginning on June 17, 1887. Dedicated to a democratic renewal of literature, culture, and morality in the budding Italian State, De Marchi's early editorial collaboration on and journalistic contributions to the Milanese paper *La Vita Nuova: Giornale di letteratura e d'arte*,⁴¹ incited him to produce serialized fiction modeled on the form of the French feuilleton.⁴² In 1876, he published a review in the bi-monthly in defense of the feuilleton for its ability to reach a wide, middle class reading public, and consequently actively assumed the role of conveying literary and social values to the masses through that particular medium.⁴³ In fact, all of De Marchi's novels – nine in total – first appear in serial form in Milanese and/or Neapolitan periodicals, demonstrating not only his dedication to serialized fiction as a valuable literary mode, but also his (market)ability to transcend the great north-south divide, appealing to culturally diverse Italian middle-class readers. The popularity of *Il cappello*

³⁷ Founded in 1861, Treves soon became a leader in the editorial market publishing Italian works of Verga, De Amicis, Tarchetti, De Marchi, Rovani, Bersezio, Capuana, Svevo, and works of foreign authors including Cervantes, Zola, Molière, Scott, Tolstoy, and Daudet (to name just a few). Treves acquired its success by directing its various publications to both a cultivated public and a popular audience, publishing also magazines for women and children (Turi 130 – 131).

³⁸ Fogazzaro directly sought publication of his first novel *Malombra* (1881) in volume form, hoping that his experience as a poet would assist him in obtaining a contract with a publishing house. Though Treves agreed to publish the text, they required the author to cover the initial expenses, which he did with the assistance of his uncle's finances. See Gino Tellini, *L'avventura di Malombra e altri saggi* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973), 22.

³⁹ The above statistics refer only to the number of newspapers and journals published during those years, not to the circulation of these publications. Though there are only fragmentary and incomplete statistics regarding the circulation of periodicals (attributable in large part to the short life of some publications), there was indeed a definite increase in the number of subscribers (Turi 116 – 117).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 151

⁴¹ *La Vita Nuova* lasted only two years, from January 1, 1876 to November 1877 with a total of forty-eight issues, before merging with another Milanese journal. In one of the first issues, De Marchi emphasized the general crisis in Italian literary and cultural output: “Da Manzoni a Guerrazzi, da Cavour a Mazzini, da Cattaneo a Ferrari, a uno a uno i grandi italiani poeti e romanzieri, filosofi e statisti vanno scomparendo, ma a chi cedono il posto? Dove sono i nuovi soldati che riempiano le righe, ormai vuote per molti caduti?” (Briganti 38; “From Manzoni to Guerrazzi, from Cavour to Mazzini, from Cattaneo to Ferrari, one by one the great Italian poets and novelists, philosophers and statesmen are disappearing, but to whom are they surrendering their place? Where are the new soldiers that will fill the lines, by now empty because of the many fallen ones?”). Fostering literary, cultural and social discourses among the middle classes was a common goal among the founders, De Marchi included, of the journal.

⁴² Spinazzola, 35.

⁴³ Adamo, 141.

del prete was not limited to the Milanese audience, and the editors of the Neapolitan newspaper *Il Corriere di Napoli*, Edoardo Scarfoglio and Matilde Serao, commissioned another serialized printing of the novel in their newspaper, with the first installment appearing in the issue dated April 8-9, 1888.⁴⁴ In the preface to the completed Treves edition of *Il cappello del prete* (1888), De Marchi himself proudly notes the double release of his novel in periodicals at opposite ends of the peninsula and critics also praised its ability to have satisfied the demands of a vast audience, and to have moved towards the establishment of a nationally cohesive reading public.⁴⁵ De Marchi's discussion of the positive reception of his novel in both journals culminates in a declaration that recalls and also parodies the Manzonian narrator's address to his "venticinque lettori,"⁴⁶ or twenty-five readers: "I signori centomila hanno letto di buona voglia e, da quel che si dice, si sono anche commossi e divertiti" ("One hundred thousand men have read [it] with good will, and from what is said, they were touched and entertained").⁴⁷ De Marchi's affirmation directly reflects the writer-reader relationship essential to the successful construction and reception of texts, and underlines the importance of pleasing a large audience in the modern literary market. Moreover, the increased quantity of readers, from "twenty-five" to "one hundred thousand," proudly emphasizes the expansion of the Italian market, the author's own ability to reach a large audience, and the growth in the number of Italian readers in the new nation. His subtle allusion to Manzoni, from whom he took creative inspiration, also demonstrates the positive result of an anxiety of influence: the achievement of greatness in one's own right through both homage to and transcendence of his predecessor.⁴⁸ Furthermore, De Marchi's "dialogue" with one hundred thousand readers reappropriates the reinvigorating forces of utility and patriotism characteristic of Romanticism for a new, post-Unification generation of readers and writers that are inextricably linked to mass culture.⁴⁹

In 1885, De Marchi adapted Fogazzaro's metaphor of the nutritive property of literature in light of the rapidly developing editorial market of 1880s Milan: "L'inventore di un'arte più semplice è un vero benefattore del suo popolo, come chi gli procura pane a più buon mercato" ("The inventor of a simpler art is a true benefactor of the people, like one who procures them bread at the best price").⁵⁰ The relationship between writer as producer and reader as receiver is underlined by the comparison of food and art, and again the analogy is not one of gluttony but of nutritious necessity. De Marchi's inventor of art, like Fogazzaro's model writer, emerges as a

⁴⁴ Giulio Ferroni, *Storia della letteratura italiana: dall'Otto al Novecento* (Milan: Einaudi, 1991), 458.

⁴⁵ Adamo, 141.

⁴⁶ Manzoni, 18.

⁴⁷ De Marchi, 4.

⁴⁸ Despite De Marchi's literary debt to Manzoni, he realized that a work such as *I promessi sposi* need be surpassed on both a social and psychological level, because his Italy was not that of his predecessor. As Pacifici notes, "The traditional hero of the early decades of the nineteenth century had a special dimension: he learned and matured as he lived, and his character was slowly molded by his experience. And in this sense there is no question that there is something reassuring about Manzoni's Renzo and Lucia, for example, who live in a well-structured society where the line of separation between good and evil is generally extremely clear" (10). De Marchi's post-Unification society suffered social and political instability, corruption, and rapid change in a world constantly advancing industrially and scientifically; resignation to God's will and the restoration of order by providence's divine grace and forgiveness appeared anachronistic. De Marchi's Baron of Santafusca reflects this feeling; after committing murder, the Baron refers to the famous conversion of Manzoni's Innominato and affirms that he met a good priest and never a police inspector because times back then were unsophisticated and no one asked him to pay for his crimes with the penal code in hand (120).

⁴⁹ Spinazzola, 36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

provider for an audience that will consume the novel as cultural nourishment; however, the concept of consumption in De Marchi's assertion reaches a greater level of complexity, for it is explicitly tied to a flourishing journalistic literary market of rapid production and consumption, a market of which Fogazzaro was not a part.⁵¹ While both authors revered the consumption of literature as nutritious, De Marchi's conception of it is more informed by the commodification of popular fiction as demonstrated by such economically-charged terms as "benefattore" and "buon mercato." Moreover, De Marchi's characterization of the author as a benefactor imbues him with agency over his public, thereby instilling in him a greater responsibility, for not only must he provide quality literature, he must do so through a simple art with a reasonable price; hence the relationship between writer and reader becomes even more intimate. Unlike many authors of his time, De Marchi understood the demands of a mass readership and sought to satisfy them while maintaining morality and psychological profundity in his works. The author's own dynamic involvement in the mass literary market reinforces his desire to provide the staple of an accessible literature to a hungry public with simple tastes. As Spinazzola notes:

Entrano in crisi irreversibile le teorie sull'autonomia assoluta dell'esperienza artistica e con esse la collocazione dei letterati in una casta separata e chiusa. L'editoria, in quanto amplia il numero dei lettori, non può non invitare lo scrittore a prender atto delle richieste reali che i nuovi adepti del libro avanzano, in conformità a un livello inferiore di preparazione culturale.

(Theories on the absolute autonomy of the artistic experience are in crisis and with them there is the placement of literati in a separate and closed caste. The publishing industry, with its amplification of readers, cannot refrain from inviting the writer to heed the real demands that the new followers of the book express, in accordance to an inferior level of cultural preparation.)⁵²

The democratization of culture that transforms the book into a commodity and the reader into a consumer is often seen as a threat to the integrity of artistic creation, yet De Marchi did not seek to separate himself from this inevitable economic phenomenon. Unlike some high-culture contemporaries such as D'Annunzio, De Marchi refused the restoration of an aristocratic aesthetic ideal and sought an active engagement with the common reader toward culturally and ethically edifying ends. In the preface of *Il cappello del prete*, De Marchi celebrates his "comunicazione di spirito col gran pubblico" ("spirited communication with the vast public") and wonders if "non hanno torto gli scrittori italiani di non servirsi più che non facciano di questa forza naturale per rinvigorire la tisica costituzione dell'arte nostra" ("perhaps Italian writers are wrong for not making use of this natural force [the multitude] in order to reinvigorate the consumptive constitution of our art).⁵³ His colloquial style; rapid narrative pace; use of suspense, cliffhangers,

⁵¹ Fogazzaro's treatise, "Dell'avvenire del romanzo in Italia" was given over a decade before De Marchi's assertion, only at the outset of the developing journalistic market. After the commercial success of his first novel, Fogazzaro continued to publish novels in the traditional volume format and was therefore logistically removed from the journalistic milieu of serial fiction.

⁵² Spinazzola, 10.

⁵³ The entire quote reads in the original: "Dal canto suo l'autore, entrato in comunicazione di spirito col gran pubblico, si è sentito più di una volta attratto dalla forza potente che emana dalla moltitudine; e più d'una volta si è chiesto in cuor suo se non hanno torto gli scrittori italiani di non servirsi più che non facciano di questa forza naturale per rinvigorire la tisica costituzione dell'arte nostra" (4; "For his part, the author, having entered into spirited

middle or lower class characters; and themes of love, identity-construction, superstitions, and crime maintain the interest of the common reader, yet are open enough to move towards the writerly, should the reader so desire. De Marchi's practical acceptance of the novel as a democratic, economical phenomenon, or in Brantlinger's words, one of the "earliest forms of modern, commodified mass culture," did not mean that he succumbed to those often frequent editorial demands for culturally "inferior" material.⁵⁴ On the contrary, he effectively utilized the market without sacrificing artistic or moral values and achieved success on both a literary and commercial level.

The outset of De Marchi's preface effectively touches upon the cultural context of the serial novel in Italy, succinctly outlines the author's motives and intentions in its construction, and deconstructs the stereotype of the common reader:

Questo non è un romanzo sperimentale, tutt' altro, ma un romanzo d'esperienza, e come tale vuole essere preso. Due ragioni mossero l'autore a scriverlo. La prima per provare se sia proprio necessario andare in Francia a prendere il romanzo detto d'appendice, con quel beneficio del senso morale e del senso comune che ognuno sa; o se invece, con un poco di buona volontà non si possa provvedere da noi largamente e con più giudizio ai semplici desideri del gran pubblico. La seconda ragione fu per sperimentare quanto di vitale e di onesto e di logico esiste in questo gran pubblico così spesso calunniato e proclamato come una bestia vorace che si pasce solo di incongruenze, di sozzure, di carni ignude, e alla quale i giornali a centomila copie credono necessario di servire truogolo. L'esperienza ha dimostrato già a quest'ora le due cose, cioè che anche da noi si saprebbe fare come gli altri e col tempo forse molto meglio per noi; e poi che il signor pubblico è meno volgo di quel che l'interesse e l'ignoranza nostra s'ingegnano di fare.⁵⁵

(This is not an experimental novel, but something completely different, a novel of experiment, and it wants to be taken as such. Two reasons moved the author to write it. The first, to prove if it is really necessary to go to France for the so-called serialized novel, with that benefit of moral sense and of common sense that everyone knows; or if instead, with a little good will we could not widely and wisely provide for the simple desires of the vast public. The second reason was to experiment how much life, honesty, and logic exist in this vast public, so often

communication with the vast public, felt more than once attracted to the powerful force that emanates from the multitude; and more than once he asked himself in his heart if perhaps Italian writers are wrong for not making use of this natural force in order to reinvigorate the consumptive constitution of our art"). In a harsh review of a pastoral piece published by one of his contemporaries in 1876, the Milanese writer laments its artificial content and style and calls his fellow Italian authors to heed the lesson of modern French literature, which had succeeded in perceiving and satisfying a new reading public: "Gli scrittori francesi...si preoccupano prima di tutto di dilettere...detto dal volgo interesse e che dà al libro un sapore squisito; così i loro libri si leggono e si pagano" (Briganti 65; "French writers...first of all concern themselves with pleasing...the so-called common interest, which gives to the book an exquisite taste; so their books are read and purchased.").

⁵⁴Brantlinger, 2. De Marchi broke with *La Vita Nuova* when it merged with *Preludio* in 1878 because its commitment to literature, art, social commentary, and literary criticism had become comprised (Briganti 40). In a letter to his friend and colleague Antonio Cima, De Marchi expresses his disappointment at the failed project of the periodical and conveys his disapproval of authors, who, blind to their educational potential (or perhaps possessing none), turn themselves too easily into clowns (Ibid., 69).

⁵⁵ De Marchi, 3.

slandered and proclaimed a voracious beast that feeds itself only on incongruities, filth, and raw meat, and to whom newspapers of one hundred thousand copies believe it necessary to serve in troughs. The experiment has already demonstrated at this hour these two things, that is that we also know how to do as others do and that with time maybe we can do better; and that the gentle public is less vulgar than what our interest and ignorance would have us expect.)

De Marchi's emphasis on his novel of experiment, rather than a *roman expérimental*, serves to differentiate his work ideologically from Zolian naturalism (of which he was an opponent) and culturally from the influx of French mass culture (and its Italian imitators). The employment of the scientifically charged term "experiment" may also act to undercut the cultural phenomenon of positivism, which ultimately leads to the moral and mental destruction of the protagonist of *Il cappello del prete*. The first reason for writing his novel proves an essentially patriotic one, insofar as he believes that Italian writers are more than capable of providing quality popular literature to the masses. The author's second reason explicitly situates the common reader at the crux of his experiment, illustrating his visceral connection to her and suggesting that the contemporary writer cannot survive without her. Given that De Marchi composed the narrative with the intention of creating a characteristically Italian serial novel with moral and common sense, its triumphant reception reflects positively on the mass audience for whom it was intended, and highlights the success of the author's socio-literary "experiment." De Marchi's insistence on the participation of the reader in the writing process – production and consumption – imbues the reader with agency and underscores the failure of many of his contemporaries to fully comprehend and exploit the powerful role of the public in the revitalization of Italian letters.

The novel's positive reception and commercial success that cemented De Marchi's career as a writer of serial fiction may certainly be attributed to his knowledge of the market, interest in reader demand,⁵⁶ and familiarity with the public's horizon of expectations. De Marchi clearly anticipated the horizon of expectations of a very specific mass audience: the common newspaper reader, accustomed to fast-paced chronicles and the fictional format of the feuilleton. His challenge, however, in the reformation of the romanzo d'appendice hinged on its artistic and moral ennoblement, while at the same time maintaining its popular appeal. As previously mentioned, Dario Papa, editor of *L'Italia del popolo*, wagered that the Italian serial novel, essentially a mere emulation the French feuilleton, could not be morally and aesthetically reformed and achieve commercial success in Italy.⁵⁷ De Marchi essentially won the bet by composing a work that maintained some of the formalistic and sensational elements of its predecessor, while removing obscenities, bawdiness, melodrama, and adding a higher level of taste and improved prose style.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ De Marchi was always concerned with pleasing his audience and publicizing his work, as evidenced by various correspondences with Emilio Treves. In a letter from October 1892, De Marchi informed his publisher that he composed a novel that would be well-suited for the inclusion of illustrations. After surveying people with some illustrations of an unnamed artist, De Marchi determined that they were not well-liked and informs Treves in another letter that he will experiment with illustrations from another artist. In a letter dated June 11, 1888, De Marchi asked Treves if the release of *Il cappello del prete* in volume form should be announced in the *Corriere di Napoli*, so that his southern readers may be aware. He acknowledges critics' comparisons of his fourth novel with Dostoevsky and accusations of its sensational nature (with which he disagrees). He also affirms that he would like to know public opinion better for future reference. The preceding information was acquired through the online source <http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/>, which contains summaries of the letters found in their archives in Milan.

⁵⁷ Monteverdi, 59.

⁵⁸ Angela Gorini Santoli, *Invito alla lettura di Emilio De Marchi* (Milan: Mursia, 1986), 67.

He kept the rapid narrative progression and suspense, and utilized individual subtitles for each installment. In short, he aimed to create a work of higher aesthetic and moral value apart from lowbrow literature, while capitalizing on the elements of it that so attracted the masses. *Il cappello del prete* – the story of a decadent, bankrupt Neapolitan nobleman, the Baron of Santafusca Carlo Coriolano, who murders a morally corrupt and allegedly psychic, usurer priest Don Cirillo, and subsequently suffers a crisis of conscience (and consciousness) before going mad and implicating himself in the crime – succeeds in piquing the interest of its readers not only for its suspense and sensory appeal, but also for its contemporary socio-cultural relevance. As Adamo notes: “*Il cappello del prete* può essere anche letto come un grande affresco delle tensioni nella società napoletana di fine Ottocento in relazione alle istituzioni e agli ordinamenti del neonato stato unitario” (“*Il cappello del prete* can also be read as a great fresco of the tensions of Neapolitan society at the end of the 1800s in regard to institutions and organizations of the newborn unified State”).⁵⁹ The presence in the novel of post-Unification social phenomena such as a decadent aristocracy, urban poverty, corrupt Church officials, small business owners, increased crime, the State-run lottery, and *brigantaggio*, would all be well-known to its readers, given that the newspapers of the time chronicled (and often highly sensationalized) such current events. In Naples, the highly publicized murder of a priest, whose assassin later committed suicide before going to trial, may have been a source of true-life inspiration for the Baron of Santafusca’s crime and subsequent mental deterioration.⁶⁰ Don Cirillo’s lamentation that he had been kidnapped by lottery fanatics in hopes of discovering the winning numbers echoes similar violence done to priests and reported in the papers in the 1880s.⁶¹ The protagonist of the tale, Coriolano, considers joining the *briganti* to escape impending imprisonment due to his unpaid debts, and the haberdasher Filippino wins the lottery after providing Don Cirillo with a new hat that will ultimately become the agent (along with another priest’s misplaced hat) in the Baron’s descent into madness. In short, De Marchi utilizes these quotidian elements to provide a reality effect in their recall of contemporary news chronicles and also as portals into deeper ontological questions including fortune, sin, and conscience. The pedagogical vision of the Milanese author ultimately involved instilling values and appealing to the curiosity and sentiment of the reading public⁶² by taking full advantage of the mass medium of the newspaper and editorial market.⁶³ De Marchi’s preface, explicitly directed toward his common readers (as well as his highbrow contemporaries, both authors and critics alike), reflects a firmly established triangle of relations between writer, reader, and modern market, which will be echoed in the novel itself through the character’s use and abuse of texts.

On a banal level, De Marchi’s preface functions as most prefaces do, as a paratext meant to illuminate the text that follows; however, his focus on the production and reception of the novel also emerges within those very pages as part of the diegesis. The fabula of Carlo Coriolano’s crime

⁵⁹ Adamo, 133.

⁶⁰ Briganti, 110. In her discussion of the genre of *Il cappello del prete*, Briganti (among other critics) argues that it is essentially not a feuilleton, citing the use of news chronicles as atypical for the form. She further adds that the tale, unlike the traditional feuilleton, incites also an analytical reading informed by psychology (Ibid.). Of course, a reformation of a previous literary trend naturally involves utilizing certain elements of it while adding one’s own innovations and innovations, thus creating something new.

⁶¹ Gorini Santoli, 69.

⁶² Ibid., 68.

⁶³ Treves’ publication of *Il cappello del prete* in book form was highly publicized throughout Milan; posters depicting an enormous priest’s hat were hung throughout the city announcing the release of De Marchi’s famous novel (Briganti 102).

of desperation becomes infused with a meta-textual sujet insofar as various narratives – a (fictional) positivistic treatise, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologica*, and daily newspaper chronicles – appear within the novel, consciously calling attention to their material existence, and hence to the novel's own specific identity as a text. In nineteenth-century fiction, the self-referential nature of the novel especially emerges through anti-novel attitudes within the story and the narrators' direct addresses to the reader, both features which Brantlinger discusses in his study of the threat of mass literacy. In the introduction, he asserts that the "inscription of anti-novel attitudes within novels is so common that it can be understood as a defining feature of the genre; accordingly, any fictional narrative which does not somehow criticize, parody, belittle, or otherwise deconstruct itself is probably not a novel."⁶⁴ Whether characters voice anti-novel attitudes or the omniscient narrator continually calls on the "dear reader," these overt reminders of the text's identity as a novel seem more disorienting, but less thought-provoking than the actual appearance of texts themselves – novels, letters, newspaper articles, and so on – within the story proper, speaking as more than mere accoutrements of the reality effect. The inclusion of texts within the novelistic text adds another level of self-deconstructive complexity to this already self-reflexive genre; despite its readerly-ness, the "classic text"⁶⁵ may also move toward the writerly insofar as the objects within the narrative microcosm elicit the production of various meanings on the part of the reader. Barbara Johnson emphasizes the openness of texts which comment on their own production through "their pervasive thematizations of textuality – the myriad letters, books, tombstones, wills inscriptions, road signs, maps, [...] that serve in one way or another as figures for the text to be deciphered or unraveled or embroidered upon."⁶⁶ These meta-texts prove rich fodder for reader interpretation and call her to decipher the novel proper and the texts within its frame, as the Manzonian narrator decodes his ancient manuscript. The De Marchian narrator proves less direct than his Romantic predecessor, precisely by refraining from engaging in discourse (following the model of his veristic contemporaries), and gets closer to the writerly because of the centrality of scientific, religious, and journalistic texts within the narrative structure and their subsequent ability (in their textuality) to constitute, move, and threaten their human subjects.⁶⁷

Brantlinger addresses the questionable nature of novel-reading especially during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in England; however, the trope of the concurrent danger and pleasure of literature is an age-old, recurrent one, appearing in early Italian letters most notably in Dante's *Commedia* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*.⁶⁸ Fiction, whether in novelistic or novella form, is often depicted for its potential menace to decorum and integrity, yet De Marchi recalls and diverges from this motif. In *Il cappello del prete*, non-fiction works and their

⁶⁴ Brantlinger, 2.

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4.

⁶⁶ Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987), 18.

⁶⁷ Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (Autumn 2001): 1 – 22, 7.

⁶⁸ In *Inferno* V, Paolo and Francesca famously blame "Galeotto," the legend of Lancelot and Guinevere, for instigating their romance. Boccaccio later cites the same episode, and hence the warning about the dangers of fiction in the subtitle of the *Decameron*: *Il Principe Galeotto*. Boccaccio plays with the meaning of the term by suggesting that his lengthy prose work may act as a vehicle of vice for his young women readers because of its depiction of male and female interaction both innocent and bawdy within the frame narrative and the novellas themselves. In the preface he warns his intended female audience to refrain from imitating any indecent acts portrayed in the stories and refers to the book's subtitle of *Il Principe Galeotto*, suggesting its potential to unite lovers, while at the same time warning against any indecent behavior. Again in the Epilogue to his one-hundred tales, Boccaccio reiterates his warning to read carefully.

misinterpretations by their readers are portrayed as potential hazards to morality and social order. At the outset of the novel, the reader immediately receives a description of the Baron of Santafusca Carlo Coriolano: an atheist, “a libertine,” and “a nihilist;” “a great gambler, great smoker, and a great blasphemer.”⁶⁹ At age twenty, the narrator tells us that the Baron had wanted to become a friar, but he discovered the scientific treatises of “a certain Doctor Panterre,”⁷⁰ and the materialistic and anarchic propaganda of the fictional French physician which immediately converted him to the worship of positivistic science. The name “Panterre” recalls its seeming opposite, the pantheon; while the latter indicates the group of all gods, the former refers to all that is earthly and material. Furthermore, the doctor’s French surname and association with texts (given that he is also an author) may stand as subtle allusions to naturalism’s strong ties to positivistic science, which for De Marchi could not fully represent human reality. From his youth into manhood, Coriolano read and studied scientific texts, taking them very seriously.⁷¹ After the brief description of the Baron’s love affair with Panterre’s treatises, the reader encounters him at age forty-five when his love of gambling, alcohol, women, and the finer things in life have led him beyond bankruptcy into insurmountable debt. The organization from whom he embezzled funds is threatening to denounce him officially in court, and because of his poor credit, no one will lend him money. Coriolano decides to sell his dilapidated country estate to the wealthy priest Don Cirillo, yet opportunity and atavistic pride incite him to concoct a murderous plan.⁷² Cirillo informs the Baron that he will permanently leave town unbeknownst to anyone else and before he sets off on his journey, he will bring him payment for the villa. Knowing that the priest will arrive at the Santafusca country residence with all of his riches in tow, he resolves to kill and rob him, and bury his body on the grounds. Coriolano views his premeditated murder plan as justified because of the priest’s own avarice and moral corruption; he is not fearful of divine retribution thanks to his blind faith in the teachings of Panterre. The Baron ponders whether he should kill the “scheletro umano vestito da prete” (“human skeleton dressed as a priest”), affirming that the murder must be done reasonably, without passion, and with a coldness of heart, and he returns to Panterre’s treatise, *Trattato delle cose*, as a Christian would turn to the Bible for consultation and consolation:

Ma egli era profondamente persuaso che l’uomo è un pugno di terra, che la terra ritorna alla terra e s’impasta colla terra. La coscienza – aveva scritto il dottor Panterre – è un geroglifico scritto col gesso sopra una tavola nera. Si cancella così presto, come si fa. La coscienza è il lusso, l’eleganza dell’uomo felice. E Dio? Dio

⁶⁹ De Marchi, 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² While considering whether to execute his heinous plan, the Baron reasons that his life is certainly worth more than a lowly, usurer’s life, even if he is a priest: “Che cosa era un vil pretuzzo in suo confronto?” (21; “What was a vile, little priest compared to him?”). Coriolano even sites textual authority as support for his higher station and hence his right to value his aristocratic position over others’ lives: “I Santafusca avevano nelle vene sangue di re normanni, diceva la cronaca” (Ibid.; “The Santafusca had the blood of Norman kings in their veins, according to history chronicles”). Here, the historical chronicle functions dangerously, for documentation of one’s nobility further solidifies it; this text (along with Panterre’s treatises) also helps the Baron initially, and seemingly reasonably, justify the act of murder to his own conscience even before committing it. Of course, the need to justify the act before its commission demonstrates Coriolano’s acknowledgment of it as a transgression and suggests his conscience may return to plague him, which, like that of his Dostoevskian counterpart Raskolnikov, certainly does.

una capocchia di spillo puntato nel cuscino del cielo...Da questo lato della coscienza 'u barone' era tranquillissimo.⁷³

(But he was profoundly persuaded that man is a fistful of earth, that earth returns to earth and blends with the earth. Conscience – Doctor Panterre had written – is a hieroglyph written with chalk upon a black board. It erases itself so quickly. Conscience is the luxury, the elegance of the happy man. And God? God is the head of a pin stuck in the pillow of the sky...From this point of view of conscience, the Baron was at ease.)

Panterre's perception of conscience as an easily-erasable hieroglyph anticipates Lacan insofar as the signifier (the hieroglyph) determines the signified (which in this morality conundrum of murder would be guilt and remorse circumscribed by the notion of sin); hence, the signifier-conscience-hieroglyph may be erased altogether, thereby removing the possibility of the signified-guilt-remorse (just as the reappropriation of the epistle-letter-signifier in Poe's *The Purloined Letter* eliminates the value or meaning of its content-signified, for without the signifier, there can be no signified). Panterre's idea that conscience is a luxury of the happy man suggests that he who possesses a conscience that functions as a regulator of behavior, is indeed ignorant. The conception of God, usually construed as omniscient, omnipresent, and materially immeasurable becomes undermined by the vastness of the cosmos, of the natural universe, His supposed greatness the size of a mere pinhead on the surface of a pillow. These atheistic and positivistic ideals, in full bloom in fin de siècle Europe, naturally act as reassurances for the Baron because they allow him to rationalize his crime within the confines of religious and social ideology respectively. As Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, the Baron subscribes to the notion that if God does not exist then everything is permitted; hence, the liberating sensation of tranquility regarding his decision to transgress the boundaries of morality results from consulting a textual and scientific authority, which assures him that human law is the only threat. From a sociological standpoint, Coriolano turns to another scientific text – *Darwin's Origin of Species* (1859) – as a justification for his crime. Considering the justness of taking a life, he rationalizes that the struggle for survival is indeed in favor of the fittest: “Tra me e lui si è combattuta la grande lotta per la vita. La vittoria, come sempre, fu del più forte, vedi Carlo Darwin” (“The great fight for life was fought between me and him. The victory, as always, belonged to the stronger, see Charles Darwin”).⁷⁴ The Baron falls victim to that tragic misinterpretation of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest that may be appropriated to justify violence toward individuals and ethnic groups; as a faulty reader he seeks to find validation for his morally and legally transgressive actions and effectively misreads the works of Panterre and Darwin in an effort to utilize scientific texts for moral justification of his immoral and unnatural act. The non-existence of God and the immeasurable nature of the universe do not necessarily invalidate the humanistic worth of the individual. The survival of the fittest is a phenomenon of evolution, of the origin of species before the development of human societies; therefore, completely basing human comportment on the animal's propensity for survival fails to consider our humanity, our capabilities of reason and free-will. While De Marchi himself was indeed a believer in God, he identified with a modern Catholicism that accepted theories of evolution and advances in science as not necessarily contradictory to the existence of a divinity;

⁷³De Marchi, 22-23.

⁷⁴De Marchi, 57-58.

these anti-scientific attitudes in the novel then mirror those anti-novel attitudes that Brantlinger discusses. From a theoretical standpoint, these scientific texts act as a Derridean pharmakon in their dual potentiality to enlighten and to corrupt the reader.

After the commission of his crime, in the chapter entitled “Dopo il delitto – sensazioni” (“After the crime – sensations”), the murderer begins to feel ill-at-ease, despite the fact that the death of Don Cirillo had no effect on the natural order of things.⁷⁵ The world around him is not changed, yet he begins to feel strange “sensations” and seems to have aged ten years in a matter of hours.⁷⁶ These physical effects not only anticipate his mental state in its morbid decline, but also recall various nineteenth-century psychologies such as that of Cesare Lombroso and naturalism, which often attribute disturbances of the psyche to purely hereditary or physiological causes. In fact, a few days after the assassination, another priest visits the Baron in his city lodgings inquiring about the sale of his villa, and upon his departure, the Baron notices his *tricorno*, and immediately remembers that he interred the corpse of Cirillo sans hat. As the image of the missing priest’s hat begins to haunt his fragile psyche, Coriolano turns once again to Panterre’s *Trattato delle cose* for an explanation of the “sensations” he is experiencing:

La ripetuta sensazione aveva d’un tratto suscitata una di quelle sensazioni latenti, che secondo il celebre Panterre, precipitano e dormono anche per lunghi anni nelle fosse cerebrali, finché una sensazione più viva non le risveglia d’un colpo e le fa saltar fuori. Il grande colpevole non poteva capacitarsi come avesse potuto lasciare sul luogo del suo delitto una prova tanto pericolosa [...] Il dottor Panterre aveva un capitolo su certi fenomeni d’inerzia e d’insensibilità cerebrale, che potevano spiegare anche questa terribile distrazione.⁷⁷

(The repetitive sensation suddenly evoked one of those latent sensations, that according to the celebrated Panterre, precipitate and even sleep for many years in cerebral recesses, until a livelier sensation suddenly reawakens them and makes them leap out. The great culprit could not understand how he could have left such dangerous proof at the scene of the crime [...] Doctor Panterre had a chapter on certain phenomena of inertia and cerebral insensitivity, that could explain even this terrible distraction.)

The Baron becomes fixated on finding the priest’s hat so as to eliminate the only evidence (besides his own eventual confession) that would incriminate him in Cirillo’s disappearance, of which the Neapolitan public is now aware because the formerly poor haberdasher Filippo has won the lottery with the numbers that the priest gave him in exchange for the new *tricorno*. Coriolano’s monomaniacal obsession with the priest’s hat and consequent paranoia results from his feelings of repressed guilt,⁷⁸ yet he seeks to explain these “sensations” as physical by referring to Panterre’s

⁷⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 51, 53.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁸ On the evening after the murder, the Baron joins his friends for a night of gambling and cannot stop winning large sums of money; ironically, the profits of his crime are not even needed anymore. The morning after his winning streak, he thinks: “se fortuna fosse arrivata un giorno prima, egli avrebbe potuto risparmiarsi di ammazzare il prete” (74; “if fortune had arrived the day before, he could have avoided killing the priest”). As he leaves the gaming salon he notices that Naples is full of priests walking the streets and the reader notes the onset of remorse and guilt, with which he

chapter on cerebral inertia and insensitivity, rather than acknowledge them as the true pangs of the previously supposed non-existent conscience.

Additional references to Panterre's treatise appear throughout the novel as the Baron attempts to rationalize his crime and assuage his ever-increasing sense of guilt and remorse; however he finally realizes that his belief in science has paradoxically actually helped to create and hone his sense of conscience, and that his obsessive thoughts over finding the priest's hat have become his eternal punishment.⁷⁹ In a dramatic scene at the horse races, after an interview with a journalist concerning the disappearance of Don Cirillo and the reappearance of his hat (found in the Baron's villa by the Santafusca parish priest Don Antonio that bestowed extreme unction on Salvatore, the moribund servant in residence), the protagonist finally expresses a newfound distrust in his previously prized text: "Quel caro dottor Panterre forse era uno stupido anche lui. Solo le belve divorano senza rimorso; e pace egli non avrebbe trovata mai, mai, lo sentiva, se non a patto di abbruttirsi a poco a poco nell'orgia e nel fango" ("Maybe that dear Doctor Panterre was also an idiot. Only wild beasts devour without remorse; and he would never have peace, never, he felt it, unless he also became a brute little by little in debauchery and in the mud").⁸⁰ Though the Baron admits that only beasts may live without remorse and that he would never find peace, he never makes a sane confession, nor consciously expiates his crime within the confines of Christian and civil ideology, unlike Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. Rather, Coriolano continues to feign innocence even when informally questioned by his friend, the police inspector Martellini; however, when he is finally questioned formally at the station, his sudden feverish state and mad ramblings lead to self-incrimination. He never makes a coherent confession to the authorities, nor does he confess to a priest; the novel ends as he is taken into custody and the reader assumes that he either goes to prison or an asylum. The double mention of Panterre again in his final ravings of the novel suggests that he fell victim to a potentially menacing positivistic text and that his downfall acts as a warning to the reader of the novel proper to refrain from placing blind faith in scientific texts (or perhaps any text in general). Ironically, the poisonous book in the novel is not a novel but a scientific treatise, whose deconstruction of a humanistic world in favor of a completely positivistic one destroys the Baron's humanity, finally rendering him akin to an animal that fails to properly repent and redeem himself within the cultural institutions of the State and the Church. The fatal consequences of the Baron's misreading of the *Trattato delle cose* further emerge in a Foucauldian light when one considers D.A. Miller's conception of the nineteenth-century novel's policing or disciplining function expounded in *The Novel and the Police*.⁸¹ Considering De Marchi's objective of producing an aesthetically pleasing and moralistic tale for the common reader, his protagonist's ultimate descent into madness not only cautions his audience on the dangers of reading, but also seeks to reform a public accustomed to consuming lowbrow literature, and strives to instill a sort of moral discipline within them.

While De Marchi succeeds in portraying the potentially destructive nature of a text on a man, he also depicts the destruction of a text's inherent moral value at the hands of a corrupt priest. After meeting with Coriolano to discuss the sale of his country estate, Don Cirillo, with a golden face that recalls the phosphorescence of gold coins, removes Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Summa*

continually struggles, progressively becoming feverish, paranoid, delusional and eventually completely mad as he inadvertently confesses during police questioning.

⁷⁹ De Marchi, 201.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸¹ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

theologica from its hiding place in a strongbox chained to the wall underneath the bed.⁸² Rather than serving its usual purpose of intended spiritual study and enrichment, it functions as the container of the usurer's loan registry and banknotes. The perversion of the mendicant Dominican's metaphysical volumes of Christian mysteries for materialistic purposes not only emphasizes Cirillo's greed and dishonesty, but may also suggest the avarice and opulence of the Church in general. The secular repurposing of the *Summa* strips it of its spiritual or moral worth because of its literal commodification, its transformation into an object that holds and regulates finances. The reiterated reference to the text as a "grosso volume," or "thick volume," not only communicates its actual, physical dimensions, but also insinuates that it is bursting with additional pages of promissory notes and bills.⁸³ The corruption of the book's inherent value is underlined in its description as a "tesoro di carte unte" ("treasure of greasy pages");⁸⁴ it no longer acts as a textual treasure that yields spiritual riches, rather it has become a veritable treasure chest that houses the priest's monetary riches. Furthermore, the adjective "unte" in reference to the pages of the treasured book may signify either "anointed" or "greasy"; therefore the reader receives both connotations of the word, for the text was formerly anointed or holy, but is now greasy or sullied by its current use. The ambiguous term in the description of the pages subtly suggests that slipperiness or flickering of meaning in language that deconstruction is so apt to notice and appreciate. Don Cirillo naturally carries Aquinas' text when he leaves Naples on his journey to the Baron's villa towards the undisclosed destination that he never reaches. As the Baron gives the priest a tour of the ruined palazzo Santafusca, Cirillo clutches the *Summa* to his heart in its hiding place under his robes, emphasizing that his true love lay in its material contents. When Coriolano offers to take his cloak, he refuses and becomes anxious that his fortune may be threatened. Don Cirillo "finì la sua idea con un moto nervoso di vecchio avaro, che cerca nascondere il suo tesoro, e si strinse la mantellina sui fianchi. Ma non fu tanto abile, che il barone non vedesse spuntare l'orlo del libro" ("[...] finished his idea with a nervous movement of an old miser that tries to hide his treasure, and he drew his cloak tight around his sides. But he was not so clever that the Baron did not see the edge of the book emerge").⁸⁵ The book is again referred to as the priest's treasure, yet only its connection to the avarice of the old miser is emphasized. The text's physical proximity to its owner's body further highlights its objectness (insofar as it reveals Cirillo's avariciousness), as well as its potential thingness precisely because of the subject-object relation that it reveals.⁸⁶ In other words, the ontologically corrupt text seems to physically mesh with the priest's body and become one with it as an appendage, just as wealth itself (or the love of it) proves an inextricable element of his character. The physical amalgamation of Cirillo and his makeshift safe fully reveals itself in the gruesome depiction of his death: "la piccola testa dell'infelice [...] si ruppe come una vecchia noce. Il libro cadde, si aperse, e molte cartelle si sparpagliarono sui mattoni" ("The little head of the unfortunate man broke like an old walnut. The book fell, opened, and many papers scattered on top of the bricks").⁸⁷ The Baron smashes Cirillo's skull with an iron rod and the explosion of the latter, like an old walnut as he falls into his prepared cistern sepulcher, parallels the book's fall to the ground and the bursting of its contents. Coriolano collects the valuable, strewn papers and monies and tosses the actual book into the grave with its owner; as in life, subject

⁸² De Marchi, 16.

⁸³ Ibid., 26-27.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁶ Brown, 4.

⁸⁷ De Marchi, 46-47.

(Cirillo) and object (text) are fused in death. As a thing, the *Summa*, devoid of its original spiritual content functions both metonymically and metaphorically. The text is easily identifiable as Aquinas' great work from its outside covering, just as Cirillo is marked as a priest by his dress and tricorno; however, both text and priest are internally corrupt and in essence comprised of materiality, that of the former as checks and banknotes, and that of the latter as desire for money. As noted above, the book may also function as a metaphor for the riches and vast properties of the Church, which despite the dispersion of the Papal States in 1871, still possessed great wealth.

While Don Cirillo is physically removed from most of the novel's action, in his absence-presence he remains an integral part of the story both in the mind of the protagonist and also as a character in many Neapolitan newspaper articles; hence, in death he exits the novel proper only to reenter it through his appearances in journalistic texts. The subplot of the novel involves a poor haberdasher, Filippo Mantica, who gives a new hat to Don Cirillo as he is about to leave town in exchange for three lottery numbers. Filippo bets on these numbers and wins an enormous jackpot and word of Cirillo's intervention reaches everyone in the city, especially when the winner's story is reported in the newspapers. After some initial "sensations" following the priest's murder, the Baron begins to feel more at ease until he hears of Filippo's lottery winnings and Cirillo's hand in them at his local barbershop. When discussing current events, the barber – known as the "talking gazette of the city" – speaks of the unbelievable fortune of Filippo, and refers his client to the previous day's article in *Piccolo* for the full written report.⁸⁸ While still sitting in the barber's chair, Coriolano opens the newspaper and reads the headline in all capital letters, which comprise the final words of the chapter (and hence a shocking cliffhanger for the reader of the novel, and of course the protagonist himself, reader of the article): "PRETE CIRILLO."⁸⁹ The following chapter, entitled "Primi spaventi ("The First Fears") commences with a description of the psychosomatic reaction of the Baron to seeing his victim's name in print:

Che cosa provasse dentro di sè l'assassino a leggere stampato in lettere di scatola un nome ch'egli credeva d'aver cancellato dalla faccia della terra, è difficile dire [...] Provò un gran peso in tutto il corpo: il sangue si fece prima caldo come piombo liquefatto, poi rigido come mercurio, e non ci volle che la sua straordinaria energia morale, corazzata di metafisica, perché egli non si tradisse con un moto inconsulto o con un grido.⁹⁰

(It is hard to say what the murderer felt inside of himself as he read the name of the person he had believed to have cancelled from the face of the earth in block letters [...] He felt a great weight in all of his body: his blood became cold first, like liquefied lead, then rigid like mercury, and it took his extraordinary moral energy, metaphysically armor-plated, so that he would not betray himself with a rash movement or a scream.)

Though the memory of the priest's murder had indeed haunted his mind and given him strange dreams, reading Cirillo's name in print produced such a shocking effect on the Baron (and presumably on the reader of the novel as well), that physical sensations and mental disorientation run rampant. Despite another client's expressed mistrust of the media, Coriolano leaves the shop

⁸⁸ Ibid., 86,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 87.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 89.

and purchases every newspaper from the previous day, allegedly out of curiosity and not fear, which is of course untrue.⁹¹ He continues to read the papers in the following days and consoles himself by the lack of updates on Don Cirillo;⁹² however, the priest remains “old news” only for a while, until the discoverer of his lost hat, the parish priest of Santafusca, Don Antonio, finally returns it to the haberdasher (out of his own sense of guilt of finding and keeping something that did not belong to him). The same local newspaper, *Piccolo*, picks up the story of the priest’s recovered hat and continues to speculate foul play. Following an afternoon of drink and women, the drunken Baron opens that very newspaper and immediately sees the headline in capital letters: “IL CAPPELLO DEL PRETE.” His reaction to the article is again a physiological and a mental one; his chest feels tight, his head is melting, he breaks out in a cold sweat, and turns pale and clammy.⁹³ He becomes especially unglued as he reads his name in the article as owner of the estate where Don Antonio found Cirillo’s tricorno: “Diventando ad un tratto frenetico, lacerò rabbiosamente il foglio, se lo cacciò in bocca, lo morse, urtò e ruppe i vetri della finestra e andò a rotolare, ruggendo come una bestia feroce sotto la tavola [...] come un epilettico” (“Suddenly becoming frantic, he furiously tore the page, threw it into his mouth, chewed it, smashed into and broke the glass windows, and went to roll underneath the table, roaring like a ferocious beast [...] like an epileptic”).⁹⁴ The Baron’s visceral reaction to the newspaper article displays its power over his psyche and recalls the trope of textual consumption; however, the paper actually becomes a comestible and as he chews and presumably swallows it; it literally becomes a poison that thrusts him into an animalistic, epileptic fit, affecting both his body and mind.

The article that elicits the Baron’s mental breakdown also emerges as a meta-textual commentary on the sensational style of journalistic reporting, for it contains an invented conversation and compares supposedly true events to the exotic tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Furthermore, the novel’s narrator adds that the questionable news piece plagiarizes an article from another source, “without citing it.”⁹⁵ The initial article in the *Piccolo* describes Don Cirillo as a sorcerer, a magician, a cabalist, and a Nostradamus that possesses the secrets behind winning numbers and therefore the power to make someone a lottery winner (though he does so only once a year according to the townspeople). This description of him reflects similar ones heard among town gossip and highlighted by the narrator at the outset of the novel. The report is also firmly based on hearsay – the comments of random busybodies, including a rag lady and former neighbors of the missing priest. The other “news” reports that discuss theories surrounding the priest’s disappearance, his possible whereabouts, and the mystery of his hat (which is eventually returned by mail to Filippo thanks to the inside label stamped with his shop’s address), illuminate the explicitly sensationalized style of chronicles that pander to the public’s sense of mystery and desire for scandal. After the Baron finishes reading this first article concerning Don Cirillo, another client in the barbershop overly criticizes newspapers for their propensity to deceive the public and their actual pleasure in doing so.⁹⁶ Later in the novel, Coriolano curses the newspapers and journalists as producers of nothing more than “printed gossip”⁹⁷ and despite the fact that the half-truths printed in the papers eventually erode his sanity and thereby assist in the revelation of the

⁹¹ Ibid., 94.

⁹² Ibid., 101

⁹³ Ibid., 166.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 168-169.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 168.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 176.

truth, his critique of them remains nonetheless relevant. The Baron even succumbs to the pressure of an interview for the newspaper and after reading, not his quoted words, but the writer's interpolations and speculations his blood boils with fury against: "questo sistema detto di democrazia che consiste nel raccogliere su un foglio stampato i pettegolezzi, che le pescivendole sparpagliano sui loro usci. Colla scusa di un 'si dice,' si stampano cose che nessuno dice, che nessuno vorrebbe dire, e nemmeno sentire a dire" ("...this system called democracy che consists in collecting on a printed page the gossip that fish sellers scatter about their doors. With the excuse of a 'they say,' they print things that no one says, that no one would want to say, and not even hear said").⁹⁸ Coriolano's ravings against the newspaper demonstrate its invasion or surveillance of public and often private life, thereby underlining its role as a policing agent. Concurrently, the Baron's critique highlights the media's love of scandal and potential for stretching the truth, thereby revealing its frequent unreliability. Cecconi-Gorra discusses the invasive power of the newspaper within *Il cappello del prete* and notes how the Baron becomes akin to a wild beast, incessantly tortured by the written manifestation of the long hand of public opinion. From the point of view of the protagonist, plagued by constant surveillance, he has the right to curse it.⁹⁹ Though De Marchi was an enthusiastic participant in the phenomenon of mass literary and journalistic production, he did not favor vacuous and speculative news reports, just as he disapproved of unethical content and scandal in the feuilleton. In the end however, the sensational news reporting seems to be a lesser evil, for despite its inaccuracies, it indirectly assists in the apprehension of Cirillo's murderer precisely because of its sensationalism and speculation; hence, its policing function succeeds not only on a social level, but also on a legal level, by catching the true culprit, while the ignorant police detective had arrested an innocent suspect. The interspersed quotes from articles and even entire news stories themselves in the novel allows the author to create a narrative microcosm that is directly related to the reality of its readers insofar as they too are participants in the production and reception of texts through their consumption of *Il cappello del prete*.

It is noteworthy that only after the continuous news stories of the lottery winner and the missing priest does Coriolano's sense of paranoia and guilt accelerate and completely overcome his every thought. In fact, the newspaper itself assumes a policing function in a novel where actual police presence is marginalized. In relation to the protagonist, periodicals function like the chorus in Greek tragedy, becoming akin to a sort of external conscience as they constantly cause him to reflect on his crime. The newspaper's existence as an external conscience imposed upon the individual further emphasizes its disciplinary role in behavior, acting as a form of Foucauldian public surveillance from which no individual acting out of order legally (and even socially) can escape. The newspaper readers themselves also acquire an active role in discipline for public opinion functions not only as the regulator of others, but also as a regulator of the self.

The reporters assume the role of the detective in their speculation on and investigation of the disappearance of the priest and the reappearance of his hat. They gather and sometimes invent information and as the story becomes more popular in public interest, a reporter travels the short distance outside of Naples to interview the inhabitants of Santafusca. Only after continuous attention in the papers do the authorities enter into the investigation and begin to informally question those who knew the priest, never even suspecting foul play, much less the guilt of the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁹⁹ Marcella Cecconi-Gorra, *Il primo De Marchi fra storia, cronaca e poesia* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1963), 103.

Baron. The newspaper's role then as a policing agent recalls also De Marchi's desire to regulate the public's literary tastes through his reformation of the previously racy and morally vacuous feuilleton. While the author refrains from overly harsh comments on the actual genre of the serial novel itself, the self-reflexivity of his text is certainly evident, given that he evaluates and even subtly criticizes questionable journalistic writing practices that appear in the very newspapers in which he publishes his serialized fiction. *Il cappello del prete* proves an especially rich text for analysis not only because of its strong psychological content of the moral transgression, remorse, and madness of its protagonist, but also because of the omnipresence of texts throughout the novel. Panterre's positivistic treatise *Trattato delle cose*, the refurbished *Summa theologica* of Aquinas, and the newspaper articles that are intermingled throughout the narrative all serve as essential elements in the development of plot and in the determination of characterization; however, they also stand as indicators of various socio-cultural phenomena of late nineteenth-century Italy. The editorial history surrounding the production and reception of Emilio De Marchi's fourth novel is inextricably linked to the presence of texts within the narrative itself, so both an historical approach and a close reading of the novel prove fruitful methods of interpretation when employed together. Often cited as the inaugurator of the detective novel in Italy, *Il cappello del prete* is a tale in which the reader knows the assassin of Don Cirillo from the outset of the novel. Instead of following a detective who searches for a crime, the only person privy to knowledge of the murder, besides the criminal himself, is the reader, who nonetheless remains in a state of suspense as she watches the Baron's conscience and mental state progressively unravel. His sanity ultimately deconstructs itself, in large part because of his faith in Panterre and by virtue of reading about and participating in the journalistic investigation of his crime. The reader of De Marchi's novel becomes accomplice, judge, psychologist, and a kind of atypical detective much like the reader of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (almost always referenced in studies of *Il cappello del prete*); however, the self-reflexivity of De Marchi's "detective" novel proves much more evident due to the overwhelming presence of texts within the novel that directly affect or relate to the characters that read them. In the preface to his novel, De Marchi celebrates the potential of his common reader, who has proved that she is capable of appreciating a work of quality fiction (given his commercial success); and therefore, like the Manzonian narrator who must decode a manuscript, the De Marchian reader is called upon to decipher (or detect) the various texts within the novel and to consequently assume the dual role of reader and of writer, or of reader-writer.