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## Napoleon and Other Pimps in *Le confessioni d'un italiano*

In the beginning of *Le confessioni d'un italiano* Ippolito Nievo's protagonist seeks to "ingenuously" impart the "moral" of his life, that it might be useful to others "che da altri tempi son destinati a sentire le conseguenze meno imperfette di quei primi influssi attuati." Despite or perhaps because of such an ingenuous beginning, critics have often overlooked Nievo's greatest novel. Even ardent supporters of Nievo's work such as Folco Portinari have labeled it "un romanzo di giovinezza," focusing exclusively on its youthful excesses. Others such as Marinella Colummi Camerino focus on the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the text, noting that such multiplicity is consistent with the diversity of Nievo's own literary production. And while any reader of this novel must agree that it possesses incredible width of scope, before it might be productive to consider the pluralistic and divergent tendencies of this text, it might be useful to consider to what extent it does have unificatory and linear tendencies.

After all this is a novel whose protagonist proclaims to write "ingenuously" and to impart a "moral." Any reader acquainted with the numerous adventures of the text will realize that what this moral might be could benefit from clarification. Many critics I suspect have been sidetracked by the obvious answer that the novel is a fiercely patriotic proponent for the unification of Italy and a somewhat liberal democratic government. But it is hard to understand the text fully when one cannot fully understand the obsessive moralistic refrain which resounds throughout its course. The protagonist has an ambiguous and independent political stance and ideology, an ideology which while apparently traditional is not. The text describes the two great careers of Carlino Altoviti's life, that of an itinerant revolutionary and Italian patriot, and his passionate relationship with the love of his life, the Countess Pisana of Fratta. In the course of these two trajectories, the narrator will interrupt with a persistent, almost repetitious moralistic refrain on the need for proper education and social organization, specifically lamenting the manner and nature of Pisana's upbringing. For many readers digressions into lecture are perhaps the most unpalatable aspects of the novel. Who taught Carlino to be such a busybody? If there was

anything precocious and alarming about Pisana's temperament and behavior in her childish games that Carlino never suffered to interpret as innocent, his sentiments seem doubly so.

One must understand that *Le confessioni* seeks to provide a map or guidebook to those born into the modern world, a world where feudalism is remembered nostalgically as a forever lost youth, where modernity is represented as an unsatisfactory adulthood. These memoirs recited at "voce alta" are desperately trying to convince themselves as to the truth of their own events and the verity of the conclusions drawn from them. In this respect the novel fits tightly among its generic models such as Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*. Like Rousseau's work it perverts a genre normally reserved for the admission of guilt to establish the protagonist's innocence. Carlino's story is so densely permeated by the conventions of its genre that at the end of his life he blatantly asks for the absolution sought by nineteenth century confession novels. "Ed ora che avete stretto dimestichezza con me, o amici lettori, ora che avete ascoltato pazientemente le lunghe confessioni di Carlo Altoviti, vorrete darmi l'assoluzione?" (Nievo 909). From such evidence one can perceive the text's own conception of its aim or teleology. But in keeping with the tradition of confessional narratives, the rules of which permit the confessee to seek maximum exculpation with a minimum of confession, before pardoning our friend the narrator, we owe it to ourselves to understand exactly what we are pardoning.

Lacan tells us that "the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (31). We should understand that this text is permeated at many levels by desire: it is the story of the desire to be loved; the desire for a social order free from enemy invasions, bad government and internal unrest; the fundamental desire for economic security; finally it expresses desire for an order or meaning in reality which reconciles the frustration of the above mentioned impulses. All of the latter desires are subservient to the former, the primal desire of the subject to be recognized. In Carlino we see this as his political beliefs and career begins when he seeks to sublimate his passion for Pisana. It is of course natural that through narrative we come to terms with the gap between our own desires and the reality of the external world. As Hayden White points out, narrative appeals to a basic human instinct and is remarkably suited to act as an interface between human reasoning and reality.

What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that **real** events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need not only to

narrate but to give to events an aspect of Narrativity.

If we view narration and Narrativity as the instruments by which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse, we begin to comprehend both the appeal of narrative and the grounds for refusing it. (4)

Carlino's *confessioni* provide just such a mediation between the imaginary and the real, and present themselves as a meaningful interpretation of events, not only of the character's life, but of the events of his eighty years. White points out that narrative invites the reader to a shared interpretation of reality, and in this respect the text poses a contract with the reader, offering a satisfaction in the form of **meaning**, but subversively requires the reader to accept hidden terms.

The experiences of Nievo's maturity are a never ending symbolic youth, a career of permanent displacement in a disordered environment. Franco Moretti explains, the very concept of youth has its origin in social instability.<sup>1</sup> Youth must be the period in which the individual seeks his proper role in society, and the discovery of a proper fixed and stable position represents in its own right a happy ending to the individual's narrative. The *Bildungsroman* is the narrative form which reconciles a populace with the social upheaval of the industrial revolution, and creates a mental space and moral ground to accept a world that is constantly in flux. While Carlino eventually finds personal prosperity in a career as a shipping merchant, as long as Venice is ruled by a foreign government his life has a transitory character to it by his own definition. Carlino's life is emblematic of the modern reality that along with the disappearance of a traditional childhood sure of repeating the successful careers of one's ancestors, one also can no longer expect to find any fixed or stable role in the new socio-economic order. One need only think of the many careers Carlino tries his hand at, or the change in fortunes of the boy turning the spit who enjoys prosperity at the end of the novel, while the successors to the powerful Conte di Fratta subsist on a diet of coffee. The octogenarian's life thus represents the trend mentioned above by Moretti; the dislocation from countryside to the city, the need to reposition oneself with regard to the new industrial modes of production sweeping through Europe. Moretti's analysis ties the model for personal life to the trends of historical development, an analysis which we will see is especially applicable to Nievo.

During the collapse of Saint Mark's Republic Carlino becomes Secretary of the new Municipality of Venice. Our protagonist's career parodies in many ways that of his mentor's, the brilliant Lucilio. The fiendishly clever doctor like Carlino has only one true love in his life, and a revolutionary passion with which it is inextricably intertwined. Lucilio is bourgeois and can never aspire to marry Clara while she is a member of the Venetian aristocracy. In the novel he single-

handedly hastens the demise of the feudal regime, not merely because of his deeply rooted ideological beliefs, but to consummate his singular passion. But while Lucilio outsmarts himself and places Clara forever beyond his reach when she joins a convent, Carlino is too distracted and awkward to seek Pisana's hand while it is obtainable, and thus cedes her to marry S. E. Navagero. Carlino is always simultaneously attracted and repulsed by Pisana, motivated by sexual and egoistic impulses to replace the affection of the mother he never knew, and he never wants what he can have.

This simultaneous repulsion and attraction runs parallel to the tension between youth and maturity, and is also the origin of that tension. Like Lucilio, Carlino finds his life centered around his relationship with a woman, or more to the point his inability to reconcile himself with her affection. Carlino can never commit himself to Pisana, and he can never reject her. He is forever horrified by the prospect that she might be unfaithful to him, but it is this very prospect that attracts him to her. Carlino Altoviti provides an interesting variation on the theme of the man who must separate women into two categories. On the one hand he seeks a woman who provides a pure and chaste affection, representing a maternal figure in the mind of the subject. Incest taboos prohibit the subject from desiring sexually the maternal figure and the subject's rivalry with the paternal figure also motivates the subject with the wish that his mother were pure and chaste. On the other hand the subject's sexual impulses drive him to seek a figure appropriately impure to provide an outlet for such impulses. In effect the subject wishes to violate the maternal figure's chastity and be her protector.<sup>2</sup> While some might find Freud's analyses simplistic or misogynistic, arguably it provides a useful key for decoding Carlino. Ideally Carlino would be able to find both his sexual outlets and nurturing affection in one source, one woman, as less severely neurotic individuals manage to do. Yet he is never able to reconcile the two extreme personae, and thus consistently insists on the dual volatile nature of Pisana.

The orphan who grew up in the absence of a mother was not ignorant of the nature of familial relationships, for like most marginal figures he was all the more keen an observer. More than most people he felt the need to find a mother substitute. For that reason when he was capable of marrying Pisana he felt no interest, but rather when she was betrothed to S. E. Navagero, a man old enough to provide a paternal rival to Carlino's affections, he "feels all the stars of the firmament collapse on his head." It is a clear moment of Epiphany in his affections for Pisana.

Confesso che l'amore della libertà, l'ambizione e tutti gli altri grilli, ficcatimi in corpo dalla generosità della stessa mia indole e dai raggiri di mio padre,

fuggirono via, come cani scottati da un rovescio d'acqua bollente. La Pisana mi rimase in mente sola e regina; mi pentii, mi compunsi, mi disperai di averla trascurata per tutto quel tempo, e m'accorsi che io era troppo debole o viziato per trovare la felicità nelle grandi astrazioni. (Nievo 459).

Carlino had ample warning from Pisana's mother that she was an eligible bride, and had on more than one occasion sought to interest him in marriage. The transformation in Carlino's affections is instantaneous when she is no longer eligible, confirming the applicability of the Freudian hypothesis.

Many commentator has remarked that in many respects Carlino fails to ever mature, and from a psychoanalytic perspective it is true that he never overcomes his neuroses with respect to Pisana. Why is it that throughout the novel Carlino describes Pisana, from her very infancy, with regret towards her sensuality, her flirtatiousness and her independent character that refuses to be tempered or disciplined? He himself admits that his reflections on Pisana's youthful inclinations and moral character is greater than is "alla comune dei moralisti" (Nievo 53). If one can forgive the excesses of youth, what exactly are the grounds for accusing her of a delinquent career that was lamentably prepared for by an improperly supervised youth, and moves him to never tire of the maxim "bisogna coglierli giovani." The fact is that for all Carlino's jealousy and suffering during his adolescence with Pisana, his anxieties about her character amounted to naught.

La domanda è delicata; ma dilicatissimo è l'obbligo di rispondere. Come potete credere, una piena malleveria io non vorrei farla per nessuno; ma in quanto alla Pisana io credo fermamente che suo marito l'ebbe se non casta certo vergine sposa, e tale la lasciò per la necessaria ritenutezza dell'età canuta. Sia stato merito suo o della precoce malizia che la illuminava, ci sia entrata la fortuna o la Provvidenza, il fatto sta che per le mie ottime ragioni io credo così.

(Nievo 534-35)

To be less delicate and much more frank than our narrator, Carlino had very good reason to believe that Pisana was a virgin when she married S. E. Navagero as she later lost her purity when she lived alone with him in his father's house. If anyone is to blame for her alleged corruption, and her juvenile excesses were the only flimsy evidence for such corruption, it would be Carlino himself, her first lover. The fact that she managed to remain pure until her relationship with Carlino does much to absolve her from any accusations: unless there is some other item nagging at Carlino.

The real dilemma, and the problem which provides the origin for Carlino's narrative, is not what Pisana's character as a child may have been; rather the

narrator's anxiety responds to her transgressions as an adult. Carlino depicts Pisana's career as an ever more precipitous flirtation, progressing from tea parties as a five year old, to crushes on Giulio del Ponte and Lucilio as an adolescent, and to her brief affair with Ettore Carafa, Carlino's commanding officer in the Cisalpine army. Yet Pisana's loyalty to Carlino often proved equal if not greater than his own to her, and that might be the definition of the problem at the core of Altoviti's narrative. Folco Portinari and other critics give little attention to Carlino's episode in London, where he has been exiled for his part in the uprisings of 1820. Suffering from cataracts acquired during his imprisonment in Naples, his death sentence is commuted to life imprisonment and forced labor and then, again due to the intercession of Pisana and the Principessa Santacroce, he is freed into exile. Completely dependent on Pisana who has followed him to London to care for his health, he is forced to live off what she can earn for them in London due to his debilitated condition. Pisana sets about the formidable task of learning English and then proposes to teach Italian as a means of supporting them both. Alas Carlino writes of the high cost of living in London, where both food and rent cost them dearly; this is the center of the industrialized world at that time. Pisana is not able to make ends meet. In her indefatigable search to provide for both, her health worsens, and Carlino, completely helpless, feels that she is slighting him in her comportment towards him. Their on-again, off-again relationship as lovers had ceased with his marriage (at her request) and he could not even experience that solace in their suffering together.

Thus it is much worse in London than the siege of Genova. Even though in that episode of their relationship the economic conditions were much more extreme, when it was Pisana whose health suffered, Carlino was able to provide for her alimentary needs. It is interesting to compare that in those circumstances Carlino contrived to obtain a cat to make soup for her through the help of their common friend Alessandro, valiant colonel and erstwhile miller's son. In this comic episode Alessandro had a landlady that was quite enamored of him, and by luring her with sexual advances he is able to steal her cat for Carlino. In the most extreme of economic conditions one is constrained to exploit sexual taboos for material needs, but in this case our narrator is completely unabashed.

Yet another case of economic extremity forces Carlino to avail himself again of the resources of Alessandro's landlady, in a manner of speaking, this time in Milan after he had resigned his post with the government of the French occupation. This time the exploitation of sex for economic purposes is done directly by Carlino, whose amicable relationship as the majordomo of the Countess Migliana is greater than professional motives require.

Ma dopo cinque e sei giorni cominciai ad accorgermi che la Pisana non poteva avere tutto il torto ad ingelosire della mia signora padrona. Costei usava verso di me in una tal maniera che o io era un gran gonzo o m'invitava a confidenze che non entrano di regola nei diritti d'un maggiordomo. Cosa volete? Peccai. (Nievo 703)

Carlino is rather more ashamed of this part of his career when he finds out that Migliana is a woman who has brushed his life before, a reactionary opportunistic agent who consorted with the most unsavory characters. These digressions serve to contrast the double standard by which Carlino measures his loyalty against Pisana's.

In London Pisana is absent from their apartment for long intervals seeking to earn what little money might make a difference in their living conditions, and Carlino has grave misgivings as to her activities of which she reveals nothing. Certainly she has been unable to find students in Italian (a sad commentary on the lot of teachers, and especially in this profession) but she assures Carlino that she is hiding nothing from him in her absences. Nonetheless he notes the exhaustion with which she returns from these absences, and becomes seriously alarmed when her health deteriorates enormously. After her first bout with illness and her apparent recovery she insists on again returning to her efforts to provide for the two of them, and it is then that she meets Doctor Lucilio on the streets of London. Their old friend who has become a prosperous doctor in London immediately provides for them, and after beginning the cure of Carlino's sight and bringing Carlino's family from Venice, rebukes Carlino for his coldness with respect to Pisana. Carlino felt slighted by the manner in which she had taken care of him, but Lucilio tells him in a heated exchange that he cannot know at what extremes she had suffered to nourish him.

-Tacete, Carlo; ognuna delle vostre parole è un sacrilegio.

-Una verità, volevate dire.

-Un sacrilegio, vi ripeto. Sapete cosa faceva per voi la Pisana quand'io l'ho incontrata pallida estenuata cenciosa per le vie di Londra?

-Sì . . . orbene? . . .

-Tendeva la mano ai passeggiieri! . . . Ella accattava, Carlo, vi accattava la vita!

-Cielo! no, non è vero! . . . È impossibile!

-Tanto impossibile che io stesso le porgeva non so quale moneta, quando. . . Oh ma vi posso descrivere quanto provai nel ravvisarla? . . . Come dirvi il suo smarrimento ed il mio?

-Basta, basta! per carità, Lucilio; la mente si perde, e vengo meno di dolore volgendomi a guardare dove siamo passati! (Nievo 780-81)

It is significant that Carlino has been blind during the course of his life, and it



is too painful for him to look back on where he and his life companions have passed. Contemplation will reveal that this is the action of the whole novel. While the histrionics of this exchange between Lucilio and Carlino are not atypical of Nievo, and it is lamentable that a Venetian noblewoman should beg for her living, the excess of Carlino's reaction indicates an omission of sorts. It requires no great suspension of disbelief to imagine exactly how Pisana begged for her living, nor must we believe that at some forty years of age illness caused by malnutrition and melancholy took her from this world, as the narrator would lead us to think. It is interesting to speculate where in the text the omission lies, whether it is Carlino who alters the facts of the story or whether Lucilio edits the tale as he does not wish to admit that he was on the verge of hiring Pisana for her services before he recognized her.

After her grievous death by venereal disease Carlino returns to Venice and establishes himself as a successful businessman, for the first time in his life providing for his economic success. Yet the evident trauma of his life in London leads him to some repression. When Raimondo Venchieredo begins some unpleasant gossip in the cafés Carlino is forced to challenge him to a duel where he emerges vindicated. But what provokes Carlino so much?

-Sono tanto vangelo! -ripigliò calorosamente Raimondo.

-E già v'immaginerete qual era il mestiero da cui la Pisana ritraeva i suoi guadagni. . . . Una donzella veneziana non ne sa molti, me lo consentirete. Or dunque bisogna fare di necessità virtù. . . . Ad onta de' suoi quarant'anni l'era così bella così fresca, che ve lo giuro io, molti anche non inglesi sarebbero rimasti accalappiati. . . . L'amico Carlino poi sapeva tutto e pappava in pace. . . . Eh, che ne dite? eh! che buon stomaco! . . . Peraltro, lo ripeto, bisogna fare di necessità virtù! . . . (Nievo 820)

Carlino insists on describing Raimondo's talk as pure calumny, but it seems much closer to the truth than his own account. His aggrieved outrage also goes a long way towards explaining his characterization of Pisana throughout the narrative. It is for this reason that one must believe that our narrator was traumatized by her prostitution in London, and was subsequently wracked by guilt and remorse. From his view he could be considered an accomplice in her own destruction, or the cause of it, and in part he needs to shift responsibility from his relationship with her to their historical condition, such transference having the additional benefit of partially absolving her as well. His relationship with Pisana, the one true love of his life in spite of everything, is so central to his confessions that he needs to absolve himself, and imply that Pisana's degeneracy was innately motivated by her own personal defect born of a promiscuous childhood. In Carlino's mind she is so tainted by the actions to which she was

forced by life's extreme conditions that he must find some meaning, some overarching cause linking the actions of their maturity with their youth. It is not enough for him that in extreme conditions people could be forced to actions which they wouldn't otherwise consider. Thus it is this need to compensate for Pisana's actions in London that creates the central theme of the novel and motivates the moralizing tone and theme that weaves throughout the text. To reduce Fredric Jameson's ideas of the political unconscious to a smaller scale, Carlino's text responds to a question that can never be directly posed, i.e. what could have been done to prevent Pisana's degeneracy.

But to fully understand how the double helixes of Carlino's life intersect, the personal relationship with Pisana and the public career of a patriot, we must see how the answer of the text to the question posed by Pisana's death is also the answer to the parallel question of history. History in *Le confessioni* is not merely a charming romantic backdrop to the torrid passions of a boy from the Veneto. History is the question to which the text responds in the strictest Jamesonian sense, and it is a parallel question simultaneous with that of Carlino and Pisana's love. To recognize this we must remember that Pisana is not the only woman to suffer a tragic death in the novel. Like most representatives of the confession genre, the life of the long lived protagonist must read like a long war epitaph, a roll call of the multitude of characters who have died during its course. Pisana is representative of a melodramatic family tree in which the women have tragic fates, and it is with specific remorse that Carlino remembers the fate of Pisana's grandmother, the Contessa.

In Carlino's feudal youth, the Contessa was a very real relic and symbol of the declining political order, having once been with her husband a member of Louis XIV's court. In heavy symbolism her death is the result of the revolution which toppled the French order she had once participated in. It occurs when Carlino had gone to Portogruaro to seek the aid of Venetian troops to defend the castle of Fratta from the oncoming Napoleonic troops in the year 1796. Being sidetracked by a bread riot in town he returns later than he should have in the evening, to find the castle and its environs already thoroughly sacked. He races into the castle, totally deserted of its inhabitants, and fears for the condition of the Contessa, a frail woman of a hundred years. He finds her conscious in her dying state, badly beaten and abused by the French soldiers in the worst and most degrading manner, as she exclaims the indignity of her death and bitter renunciation of the faith that had sustained her "finora."

Carlino was at this point a young revolutionary idealist, and her renunciation of her religious faith is not such a severe blow to his own, but rather to his political faith. To prove that there is a political justice, if not a divine one, he seeks redress to the almost divine authority of the French commander, Napoleone Buonaparte.

He is in effect able to obtain a personal audience with the young Napoleone, but not the trial of the soldiers at fault. If natural modesty and charity were to incline us to dismiss the possibility that the Contessa was not the victim of rape at 100 years of age, we cannot have any doubts when Carlino tells Napoleone that “le cose . . . sono della massima importanza e della maggior delicatezza” (Nievo 413). Altoviti is the victim of a snow job: Napoleone rails on about the provocation provided by the Venetian authorities, and how whatever indignity a poor woman might have suffered must be understood as occurring in the context of a higher cause. Essentially Napoleone is not interested in weakening the morale of his troops in the pursuit of discipline. Carlino accepts Napoleone’s snow job for the glory of his political faith, in much the same way that Lucia would accept Fra Cristoforo’s doctrine of Providence.

Carlino’s *Bildungsroman* consists of his subsequent disillusionment with Napoleone and the ideology that liberty could ever be provided by an external force. One of the many great traumas of Altoviti’s life is the Treaty of Campoformio, where Napoleone traded Venice to the Austrians in return for the secure possession of the Low Countries. Not only was this demeaning to Carlino as a Venetian and an Italian, to have his fate decided arbitrarily by an outsider, but especially given all the great efforts that Carlino and his coconspirators had made to introduce the French troops into Venice peacefully in the name of Liberty. Such Liberty had proven to be the gateway from one servitude to another, and his sense of regret and shame were only heightened by his lack of activity during the crucial month that he remained secluded with Pisana in his father’s house in Venice during the transition from the one government to the other. When Carlino is finally set on the Via Maestra by the pursuit of the Austrian secret police, his final glimpse of Venice on the boat leading him into exile echoes and even parodies Manzoni’s “Addio ai Monti.”

O Venezia, o madre antica di sapienza e di libertà! Ben lo spirito tuo era allora più sparuto e più nebbioso dell’aspetto! Egli svaniva oggimai in quella cieca oscurità del passato che distrugge perfino le orme della vita; resta la speranza, il lungo sogno dei dormenti.

Parricidio, parricidio! gridano ancora gli echi luttuosi del Palazzo Ducale. Potevate lasciarsi addormentare in pace la vostra madre che moriva, sulle bandiere di Lepanto e della Morea: invece la strappaste con nefanda audacia da quel letto venerabile, la metteste a giacere sul lastrico, le danzaste intorno ubbriachi e codardi, e porgeste ai suoi nemici il laccio per soffocarla!

(Nievo 522)

This invocation to Venice reveals Carlino’s personal guilt for his role in the transference of his *patria* to its traditional enemies the Austrians. Indeed one

could argue that Altoviti foolishly accomplished more through his naiveté for the Austrian cause than his lifelong enemies Raimondo Venchieredo, Avvocato Ormenta, Padre Pendola, la Contessa Migliana and many of the other Austrian agents he was to continuously face.

But the essential message is not merely his personal regret and self-accusation, but rather the parallel between the end of the Venetian Republic and the death of Pisana's grandmother. While prosopopeia is traditional in patriotic literature, it approaches allegory when juxtaposed with the death of the Contessa. For like the Contessa di Fratta, "Venezia si destò raccapricciando dalla sua letargia, come quei moribondi che rinvergono la chiarezza della mente all'estremo momento dell'agonia" (Nievo 488). We must understand to whom Carlino refers when he says "those" moribunds, as the simile exactly describes the rape of the Countess, including the role of Napoleone personally. For the last part of Carlino's invocation to Venice ends thus:

Il Direttorio e Buonaparte ci tradirono, è vero; ma a quel modo si lasciano tradire solamente i codardi. Buonaparte usò con Venezia come coll'amica che intende l'amore per servitù e bacia la mano di chi la percolte. La trascurò in principio, la oltraggiò poi, godette in seguito di ingannarla, di sbeffeggiarla, da ultimo se la pose sotto i piedi, la calpestò come una **baldracca**, e le disse schernendola: -Vatti, cerca un altro padrone! (Nievo 553, emphasis mine)

Napoleone is thus twice figuratively through his troops the sexual abuser, once to the Contessa and a second time to Venice personified and feminized. Carlino holds himself responsible for both deaths, and this is the true cause for the nostalgia and regret that flavor the novel which has been the subject of debate by so many critics.

The three deaths of Venice, Pisana and her grandmother intersect of necessity for they exist in synchrony in the mind of the narrator. As Barret J. Mandel explains in his essay "Full of Life Now";

[P]ersonal history is put forth in a certain light. The past may be an illusion, but the light of now is never an illusion. What it illuminates, it makes real. **Now** is the only source of light. Anything it shines upon may be clarified. The image of one's personal history in autobiography is simultaneously in time and timeless, like Yeat's golden nightingale or like the image of a boy with a horse in Lincoln Steffen's autobiography. (65)

The memories of Carlino are of many great losses and fantastic failures, not all of which can reasonably be said to be his responsibility. Carlino grew up into a world in which he had already suffered the loss of a mother and a father. He regained his father as an adult only to lose him a second time. As Stephen

Spender writes, the subject lives in a naked solitude, “the expression of such naked solitude may be just what he wishes to avoid” (117). The *Confessioni* are the expression of such a solitude, the exile in which Carlino lives and all individuals possess as their birthright. This figurative exile is also the real story of his life. He cannot express it directly however, for the abyss is too great for him to stare in the face.

Rather than believe that his life consists of arbitrary events, Carlino seeks to unify them under a single roof, the arch of his narrative. The keystone in the arch whose weight the novel supports, is historically the Treaty of Campoformio. Before and after the keystone in the arch are the death of the Contessa and Pisana. These personal crises are linked to Napoleone’s betrayal of Venice through the simile of sexual exploitation, through the words “la calpestò come una baldracca.” As readers we can thus understand the urgency in the narrator’s voice, and the underlying motivation for the composition of his autobiography. While it may be argued that a text composed of such varied historical and personal events can only be arbitrarily composed around a single central point, we can only respond that the text demonstrates that it conceives of itself as such in its obsessive return to its “moral.” This moral is his response to the issue that haunts Carlino in his old age, his response to the ghost of Pisana. For each time he returns to his moral it is a response to the return of his ghosts. At the end of the catharsis of his memoirs, Carlino concludes:

O primo ed unico amore della mia vita, o mia Pisana, tu pensi ancora, tu palpiti, tu respiri in me e d’intorno a me! Io ti veggo quando tramonta il sole, vestita del tuo purpureo manto d’eroina, scomparir fra le fiamme dell’occidente, e una folgore di luce della tua fronte purificata lascia un lungo solco per l’aria quasi a disegnarci il cammino. Ti intravvedo azzurina e compassionevole al raggio morente della luna; ti parlo come a donna viva e spirante nelle ore meridiane del giorno. Oh tu sei ancora con me, tu sarai sempre con me; perché la tua morte ebbe affatto la sembianza d’un sublime ridestarsi a vita più alta e serena. Sperammo ed amammo insieme; insieme dovremo trovarci là dove si raccolgono gli amori dell’umanità passata e le speranze della futura. Senza di te che sarei io mai? . . . Per te per te sola, o divina, il cuore dimentica ogni suo affano, e una dolce malinconia suscitata dalla speranza lo occupa soavemente. (Nievo 911)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Franco Moretti, *Il Romanzo di Formazione* (Milano: Garzanti, 1986) 11: "Nelle 'comunità stabili'—nelle società di status, o 'tradizionali'—'l'essere giovani' si realizza solo nella differenziazione biologica": così Karl Mannheim. Il giovane, qui, è un non-ancora-adulto, niente di più. La sua gioventù ricalca passo passo quella dei suoi avi, e lo introduce ad un ruolo che gli preesiste e gli sopravviverà: non prevede, ancora Mannheim, una 'entelechia' sua propria. Non ha una cultura che la contraddistingua e la valorizzi in quanto tale. E, potremmo dire, una gioventù **invisibile**, e **insignificante**. Poi la società di status inizia a crollare—le campagne si svuotano e le città crescono, il mondo del lavoro cambia volto con straordinaria e incessante rapidità. La socializzazione incolore e quasi inavvertita cui metteva capo la 'vecchia' gioventù diviene sempre più improbabile: si trasforma in un problema, e rende problematica la gioventù stessa." In a way it is possible to look at these confessions as a *Bildungsroman*, for by the end of the text our narrator has arrived at a perspective where he can resolve the internal conflicts of his desires; by proposing a culture of perpetual youth where the rigidity of maturity is opposed with the fervor of revolution. This is the appropriate mental space necessary for an industrial culture legitimized by a perpetual race forward to some future ideal.

<sup>2</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rieff, 1st ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 50-51: "1. The first of these conditions of love must be described as quite specific; wherever one discovers it one may look out for the presence of the other features belonging to the type. It may be termed the 'need for an injured third party'; its effect is that the person in question never chooses as an object of love a woman who is unattached, that is, a girl or an independent woman, but only one in regard to whom another man has some right of possession, whether as husband, betrothed, or near friend. In some cases this condition is so peremptory that a given woman can be ignored or even treated with contempt so long as she belongs to no other man, but instantly becomes the object of feelings of love as soon as she comes into a relationship of the kind described with another man. 2. The second condition is perhaps a less constant one, but it is no less remarkable. The type I am speaking of is only built up by the two conditions in combination; the first condition seems also to occur very frequently by itself. The second condition is thus constituted: a virtuous and reputable woman never possesses the charm required to exalt her to an object of love; this attraction is exercised only by one who is more or less sexually discredited, whose loyalty and fidelity admit of some doubt. . . . By a rough characterization this condition could be called that of 'love for a harlot'."

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