TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS AND THE ITALIAN REINVENTION OF WALT WHITMAN, 1870-1930

by

Caterina Bernardini

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska, USA

and the University of Macerata, Italy

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Majors: English (UNL)

Modern and Comparative Languages and Literatures (UNIMC)

Under the Supervision of Professors Marina Camboni and Kenneth M. Price

Lincoln, Nebraska

June, 2017

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Caterina Bernardini, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2017

Advisors: Marina Camboni, Kenneth M. Price

Abstract

This study aims to provide the most complete and multi-layered investigation of the Italian reception from 1870 to 1930 thus far, and it inaugurates a new multinational and networked approach to the study of Whitman's reception around the world. I build comparisons and parallels with how Whitman's reception occurred in other scenes and countries, and discuss the circulation of ideas and trace the connections among the people, events, texts and contexts that animated the transnational network of which Italy was a part. Studying how the active reinvention of Whitman's poetry took place is an opportunity to explore a series of cross-cultural contacts and encounters. It is a way to investigate how and what readers and writers perceived and wanted to perceive in Whitman's expression of "America."

For Italian literati, reading Whitman, echoing, "imitating" his poetry, or even criticizing it and opposing it, was always a way to go "beyond" their situated, present Italian-ness, and to confront and dialogue with their idea of otherness, of "America," of modernity. Reading, translating, and responding to Whitman was a powerful way to question, redefine, innovate, and often attack Italian literature and culture.

My methodological approach relies on a combination of techniques used in literary history studies, reception studies, comparative literature, translation studies, and on my multilingual skills. I investigate the history of publication and circulation of critical or creative writings related to Whitman's poetry in Italy, and describe the cultural and cross-cultural, historical, social and political contexts in which they originated. I look for intertextual connections by reading literary texts in the original languages, and provide translations and comparative evaluations. I analyze the translations of Whitman's poetry into Italian and discuss their peculiarities, and the role they played in the dissemination of interest in the American poet. I give particular relevance to existing manuscript materials, correspondence, translation drafts, and annotated copies of Whitman's books, which have often gone unnoticed in previous studies and which I was able to find in Italian libraries, archives, and private collections.

A mio nonno Renato Bernardini
(che, sorridendo, mi diceva sempre: “basta studiare!”)
nel centenario della sua nascita.

E a mia figlia Celeste, per altri cento anni ancora.

For my grandfather Renato Bernardini
(who, smiling, always told me: “enough studying!”)
in the centenary of his birth.

And for my daughter Celeste, for another one hundred years.

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Acknowledgments

I started developing the idea of carrying out this study in the spring of 2010, while writing the last pages of my MA dissertation on Whitman at the University of Macerata, Italy. The idea progressively became reality, having been first admitted to the PhD Program in Macerata, then awarded a Fulbright scholarship to come as a visiting scholar to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and finally having been granted the extraordinary opportunity to pursue a joint PhD between the two institutions. At UNL, I had the good fortune of working not only as a teaching assistant, but also as an editorial assistant for the Walt Whitman Archive and the Willa Cather Archive. I feel extremely lucky and grateful for the incredible support that I received from all the institutions mentioned above.

There is a long list of people that I wish to personally thank. Prof. Marina Camboni, for having taught me so much, for so long; Prof. Kenneth M. Price, for having given me the confidence I lacked and all the support that one can possibly be offered (including his own old office chair); Prof. Luciano Rascioni, Prof. M. Wynn Thomas, Prof. Éric Athenot, Prof. Mario Corona, Prof. Andrew Jewell, for their kind, enthusiastic and always reassuring encouragement and advice. I owe everything and more to my parents. A special mention goes to my father Oljmpio, who not only taught me to be curious since I was a little child and enhanced my interest in literature and foreign cultures and languages, but also assisted in my research in Italian libraries and archives, by taking pictures and notes with me. Finally, I owe immeasurable thanks to my husband Patricio

and my daughter Celeste: their daily love, support, and patience have literally contributed to the creation of each single sentence, each single page of this study.

Special thanks also go to the Love library staff and Interlibrary Loan specialists at UNL, and to librarians Clara Mazzetti at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence; Alessandro Tonacci and Roberta Valbusa at the Fondazione Il Vittoriale degli italiani; Cristiana Pipitone and Dario Massimi at the Fondazione Gramsci in Rome; Nicola Mastronardi at the Biblioteca Labanca in Agnone; Virginia Todeschini at the Fondazione Gramsci in Bologna.

¿A quién debo imitar para ser original?

Rubén Darío

Essences of the people's beautiful selves,
Violins whose strings quiver
With long, soft, delicate harmonies—
Even when touched by the world's rough fingers,
Even when touched by Grief's cold fingers—
Think of the day when you, sleeping in your graves,
Shall be awakened by the thunder of your own voices
And by the strong, cool winds of your own music:
For in the fertile soil of the years
Your voices will blossom and become thunder,
Your music will become winds that purify and create.

Emanuel Carnevali

Io sono io sono una moltitudine.

Edoardo Sanguineti

Introduction

> "Once we begin to read literature as 'the home of nonstandard space and time,' then it becomes much easier to unearth these buried networks of intellectual alliance and moral kinship that stretch across continents and through the fabric of time itself."
>
> Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents*

The need to overcome the ethnocentrism and nationalism intrinsic to traditional categorizations of literary works according to the linguistic or geopolitical background in which they are created, and to study the larger, interconnected, transnational dimension of *Weltliteratur*, has become more and more evident in recent years.[1] This is particularly true for the case of the Italian reception and reinvention of Whitman's work: understanding it as a nationally isolated phenomenon is simply misleading, since it was, instead, part of a complex multinational cultural network.

This study aims to provide the most complete and multi-layered investigation of the Italian reception thus far, and it inaugurates a new multinational and networked approach to the study of Whitman's reception around the world. My work is preceded by

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[1] I borrow the term *Weltliteratur* from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's theorizations about the circulation and reception of literary works on a global scale, and his prediction that "national literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand." See K. J. Moorhead, ed., *Conversations of Goethe with Johan Peter Eckermann*, trans. John Oxenford (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1998), 165. The term was also famously picked up by Marx and Engels in their 1848 Communist Manifesto. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* [1848] (London-New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 224.

excellent studies of a more tightly focused nature dedicated, respectively, to the South American, French, German, and Polish reception of Whitman: Fernando Alegría's *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (Mexico City: Ediciones Studium, 1954); Betsy Erkkila's *Walt Whitman Among the French* (Princeton University Press,1980); Walter Grünzweig's *Constructing the German Walt Whitman* (University of Iowa Press, 1995); and Marta Skwara's *Polski Whitman. O Funkcjonowaniu Poety Obcego w Kulturze Narodowe*j (Kraków: Universitas, 2010). I have also benefitted from two collections of essays: *Walt Whitman in Europe Today*, edited by Roger Asselineau and William White (Wayne State University Press, 1972), *Walt Whitman and the World*, edited by Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (University of Iowa Press, 1995).[2] At the moment, there is no comprehensive published monograph dedicated to the Italian reception but instead only a few brief articles and three dissertations, one of which centered solely on the Italian translations and not on the critical or creative responses.[3]

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[2] Another useful resource is Gay Wilson Allen's *Walt Whitman Abroad* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1955). Allen's book consists of a collection of critical essays about Whitman written by critics, writers, and scholars from different countries.

[3] A few articles and three dissertations have appeared: Rea McCain, "Walt Whitman in Italy," *Italica* 20 vol. 20, no. 1, (March 1943), 4-6. McCain offers a brief overview of the first phase of Whitman's reception; Glauco Cambon, "Walt Whitman in Italia," *Aut Aut* 39 (May 1957): 244-263 (also a general overview); Mariolina Meliadò Freeth's dissertation "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana, 1872-1903," University of Rome, 1961. Freeth's study, only covering the 1872-1903 was partially published as "La fortuna di Walt Whitman in Italia," *Studi Americani* 7 (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 1961): 43-76, and as "Walt Whitman in Italy," in Roger Asselineau and William White, eds. *Walt Whitman in Europe Today* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 20-23; Charles Grippi's PhD dissertation "The Literary Reputation of Walt Whitman in Italy," New York University, 1971 (unpublished; examines Italian scholarship on Whitman, but only partially considers creative responses of Italian writers); Grazia Sotis's published dissertation *Walt Whitman in Italia: la traduzione Gamberale e la traduzione Giachino di Leaves of Grass* (Napoli: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1987), dedicated to a comparison and contextualization of Gamberale's and Giachino's translations; Roger Asselineau's "Whitman in Italy," in *Walt Whitman and the World,* eds. Allen and Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 268-273. Asselineau's essay is a *summa* of the existing critical contributions about the Italian reception, and a brief discussion of the main creative responses to Whitman by Italian

Erkkila and Skwara make references to other literary scenes and cultures beyond France and Poland, respectively, but their emphasis remains substantially national. Alegría evaluates a larger multinational landscape, but he treats the different national South American literary scenes and poets separately. Grünzweig does more to take into account what he calls the "intercultural processes" of the German reception and the "multicultural network of relationships among the Whitmanites from several countries,"[4] but he does not sustain this focus throughout. The collection of essays edited by Folsom and Allen is an outstanding achievement, and it has been an incredibly useful resource for my study, but again the different receptions in various cultures and nations remain separate: the book does not make any general attempt to interrelate them or put them into dialogue with each other.

In treating the Italian literary scene from 1870 to 1930, the main focus and starting point of my investigation, I build comparisons and parallels with how Whitman's reception occurred in other scenes and countries, and discuss the circulation of ideas and trace the connections among the people, events, texts and contexts that animated the network of which Italy was a part. I believe that this is the only way in which the nature of what happened in Italy can be properly evaluated, and that the existence and the relevance of this larger network can be sensed and described. Similarly, while my historicist approach follows a general, traditional linear progression organized as a series of chronological phases of the reception, I show how this linear understanding often

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poets. Within the chapters, I will cite a few essays that treat specific aspects, moments or figures of the Italian reception (such as my 2015 essay on Dino Campana and Whitman, and Marina Camboni's 2016 essay on the reception of Whitman within Italian futurism).

[4] See Grünzweig, 1, 3.

needs to be challenged or abandoned altogether: in many cases, what happens in what I call a certain "phase" is directly connected to, or typical of, another, not necessarily preceding or succeeding moment in the reception.

My theoretical perspective aims to radically differentiate itself from any idea of debt, and to be closer, instead, to the idea of dialogue and reinvention, and to T.S. Eliot's concept of literary tradition.[5] Eliot's idea that "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it"[6] is also a recurring idea in Whitman's poetry. Whitman's poetry continually asked, demanded, to be addressed, actualized, transformed, reinvented. As he wrote in the poem titled "Poets to Come,"

> I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future
> I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back
>   in the darkness
> I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a
>   casual look upon you and then averts his face,
> Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
> Expecting the main things from you.[7]

Whitman wanted more than a passive reception: he wanted an active reinvention of his work by future readers and poets who would write the modern identity, create the modern poetry, and advance toward a modern "America" that would always remain an aspiration,

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[5] An important benchmark study for me, in this sense, is Kenneth Price's *Whitman and Tradition: The Poet in His Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[6] See T.S. Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent" [1919], available online at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/69400.

[7] The full text of the poem is available on the Walt Whitman Archive at www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

a goal never quite realized. "America," for Whitman, was like democracy, "a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted."[8]

This study does not conceive Whitman's poetry as a monolithic product, a list of prescriptions imported and adapted (in)to a foreign culture and country. The aim is not that of describing any derivative lineage or to re-inscribe and extend the canonical dominance of Whitman within and beyond the North American literary scene. Rather, I intend Whitman's poetry as a constantly negotiated embodiment of "otherness," mediated by translations, articles, creative responses, and understood according to different needs, wants, desires. Studying how this active reinvention took place is an opportunity to explore a series of cross-cultural contacts and encounters. It is a way to investigate how and what readers and writers perceived and *wanted* to perceive in Whitman's expression of "America." For Italian literati, reading Whitman, echoing, "imitating" his poetry, or even criticizing it and opposing it, was always a way to go "beyond" their situated, present Italian-ness, and to confront and dialogue with their idea of otherness, of "America," of modernity. Reading, translating, and responding to Whitman was a powerful way to question, redefine, innovate, and often attack Italian literature and culture.

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[8] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* [1871] in *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: McKay, 1892), 229. Available on the Walt Whitman Archive at www.whitmanarchive.org/published/other/CompleteProse.html.

and cross-cultural, historical, social and political contexts in which they originated. I look for intertextual connections by reading literary texts in the original languages, and provide translations and comparative evaluations.[9] I analyze the translations of Whitman's poetry into Italian and discuss their peculiarities, and the role they played in the dissemination of interest in the American poet. I find special relevance in existing manuscript materials, correspondence, translation drafts, and annotated copies of Whitman's books, which have often gone unnoticed in previous studies and which I located in Italian libraries, archives, and private collections. This archival work has allowed me to make a series of noteworthy discoveries. As argued by Grünzweig in his study of the German reception, the extreme richness and diversity of the materials and of the connections that emerge from the study of this receptive network allow us to disregard "questions regarding the validity of reception and of 'influence studies.'"[10] Presenting and exposing this richness, and understanding this diversity and the sheer extent and significance of these connections are my primary aims.

The scope of the investigation is mainly literary: I do not take into extensive consideration the reinvention of Whitman's work in the visual arts, musical, or cinematic sphere. This is fitting both because it is necessary to restrict the vast territory under analysis, and because Whitman's greatest impact was on other writers.

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[9] My practice is to provide, in footnotes, original passages from creative works but not from reviews, correspondence, or criticism. I privilege the creative texts because I frequently discuss their phonic, rhythmic, and lexical qualities in the original language versions. I usually provide my own translation of literary passages, but occasionally I rely on those done by others when I find them adequate.

[10] Grünzweig, 1.

The first chapter studies the two initial, crucial acts of critical introduction and mediation that came to Italy mainly through France and England: I am referring to the critical article of Thérèse Bentzon and the editions and selections from *Leaves of Grass* by Anglo-Italian critic William Michael Rossetti. Rossetti's editions are framed as the result of his post-risorgimental ideology and of the political climate in which the recent Italian Risorgimento played a central role. Rossetti's presentation of Whitman was inherited and extended by critic Enrico Nencioni, who, like other Italian literati of the time, had the somewhat paradoxical desire of transcending and looking beyond the borders of current Italian literature in order to found a new, more adequate national literature. Whitman was regarded as a fitting and inspirational example with reference to what Italian literati thought that the recently established, finally unified Italy needed to do: leave behind a tradition with an anachronistic attachment to academism and classicism, and give shape to a new, more modern literature. Italy is, then, discussed not as a passive receiving culture, but as a culture concerned with its identity, and determined to bring about renewal.

I also discuss Luigi Gamberale's 1887 and 1890 selected translations into Italian, and evaluate them in comparison with Turgenev's and Thérèse Bentzon's translations. In the last part of the chapter, I describe the first writers' reactions, from Ivan Turgenev to Jules Laforgue, to the South American *modernistas* (who were clearly influenced by the reading of Whitman put forth by the French symbolists, and yet did not fully grasp Whitman's innovation) to Giosuè Carducci. Carducci's reading of Whitman provided inspirational for his mediation between tradition and innovation and for his sense of a "barbaric" writing.

In the second chapter I concentrate on how Carducci, Nencioni, (and through them, Rossetti) left a legacy through their readings of Whitman to significant Italian poets of the turn of the century: Ada Negri, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Giovanni Pascoli. While some work has been done with regard to the latter two poets' interest in Whitman, practically nothing has been done before for Negri, who deeply loved Whitman's poetry.

Negri's interest in Whitman was sparked by a circumstance in her private life: Whitman's book was presented to her by her boyfriend Ettore Patrizi, who in that same period migrated to the United States. Her ideological view of America's promise of democracy and of Whitman's significance was shaped, then, not only by her interest in Nencioni's critical works and in Carducci's poetry, and by her socialist ideals at the time, but also by a private romantic episode and a personal mythologizing of a land Negri contemplated moving to herself. Negri's approach to Whitman can be productively compared with similar political readings by other international poets and critics at these times, and it illuminates an intriguing line of continuity between socialism and early fascism.

D'Annunzio's complex and long history of admiration of Whitman saw a series of phases that need to be differentiated and discussed in detail. By looking at letters and at his personal, annotated copies of Whitman's editions, I observe how D'Annunzio started from a Nencionian-Rossettian perspective, and then, also thanks to his knowledge of French vers-librism and of similar Italian experiments, moved further than his mentor Nencioni in the appreciation and imitation of Whitman's formal innovations, even while retaining his decadent poetics. Later, D'Annunzio paired the energy and inspiration he

got from Whitman with Nietzschean overmanism, and, finally, he went back to the first political reading, ultimately inflating it into a form of hyper-nationalism.

Pascoli, an innovative classicist who carried on Carducci's experiments with "barbaric" quantitative metrics and a symbolist who remained isolated from the French symbolists, but looked with interest to Poe and Whitman, often combined these two influences. Coining the concept of "reflected rhythm" and applying it to Whitman, Pascoli came close to Pasquale Jannaccone's important 1898 study of Whitman's "psychic rhythm." Pascoli, considered in conjunction with Jannaccone's study and other critical articles that came out in these years, highlights a sophisticated Italian understanding of Whitman's formal (and more specifically, rhythmical and musical) characteristics. This resonated with other important international insights, including those of José Martí and Vyacheslav Ivanov. This chapter closes with a brief discussion of Russian poet and translator Konstantin Bal'mont, who exemplifies the readings and appropriations of Whitman of Negri, D'Annunzio, and Pascoli, and who augurs future developments. The turn of the century, proto-modernist moment of the international reception of Whitman remains an intriguing and immensely fruitful phase of transition. Whitman acted as a figure of liberation in many senses, but not through complete dismissal of the past: in fact, his voice was often perceived as a powerful continuation and revision of the classical epic tradition that had to be recuperated and forged anew.

The first fifteen years of the twentieth century were also a crucial moment for the transnational reception of Whitman, as knowledge of the American poet's work became increasingly evident within world literature, thanks to the publication of numerous translations. This period was particularly productive, as Whitman's legacy was taken on

(and often dismissed, or profoundly revised) by various avant-gardist figures, within the transnational circles that famously animated the modernist scene. It was at this time that the experimental nature of Whitman's poetry was more fully engaged, understood, re-thought, and reinvented. Once again, the interest in Whitman proved to have profound political reverberations. Because of the extreme richness and complexity of this period, I divide this part into two chapters, the third and fourth of this study.

I begin the third chapter with a woman writer and critic who links various threads in this scene: Sibilla Aleramo. Significantly called "the errant Sibilla,"[11] Aleramo took active part in several literary circles of the time: the Roman circle of the *Nuova Antologia*, the Florentinian groups that gathered around the periodicals *Lacerba* and *La Voce*, the Milanese early futurist movement, and, finally, the Parisian circle of the *Mercure de France*. Aleramo can be seen as our figurative guide to help us understand how she and other Italian and international writers and intellectuals, who were part of these milieux, were reading and appropriating Whitman.

Four articles on Whitman that appeared in the *Nuova Antologia* between 1902 and 1908, signed with the editorial pseudonym of NEMI, were probably all authored by Aleramo. Although the authorship attribution question remains open to some extent, at least for three of the articles, these pieces are nonetheless illuminating and deserve attention. Too often neglected, these articles show a new understanding of Whitman's poetry both in political and in formal terms: an understanding that, as we will see, was vital to Aleramo and her literary emergence. Even if not the sole creator of them, Aleramo, whose job at the *Nuova Antologia* was to work exclusively for the rubric in

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[11] See Bruna Conti, ed., *Sibilla Aleramo. Dino Campana. Un viaggio chiamato amore. Lettere 1916-1918* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2015), 9.

which all these articles appeared, at least read and approved them. In any event, the articles speak to the background in which Aleramo's ardent passion for Whitman's poetry was first formed. This passion for the American poet's work would deeply impact both Aleramo's private life and her creative production.

The 1907 translation by Gamberale, the first unabridged one to appear in Europe, is crucial in this context. I compare the translation in parallel with others that appeared in these same years, while also noting the direct and extensive influence that Gamberale's work had on other French, Spanish, and Russian translators. I also evaluate the translation in comparison to another, this time selected, translation that Gamberale realized in 1912, and that has gone unnoticed by scholars who have worked on Whitman's reception. The translation was commissioned by the Roman publisher Bernardo Lux to a small Agnone (Gamberale's hometown in Molise) printing house: it was designed to be economical for workers. Gamberale seized the chance to delete parts of Whitman's work that he did not like, or considered unnecessary, and called this his "third edition," after the earlier ones of 1887-1890 and 1907. Gamberale's correspondence from these years illuminates the translator's relationships with other relevant figures of the Italian and international reception (such as, for example, Léon Bazalgette, Isaac Hull Platt, and Antonio Bruers). The correspondence is also useful for assessing the heightened enthusiasm about Whitman among common readers: Gamberale often received letters in which readers congratulated him for his work, expressed their interest in the American poet, and submitted their own creative work to Whitman's Italian translator.

The fourth chapter analyzes the role played by Whitman's work in the extremely diverse scene of the Italian modernist avant-garde, a scene that was inextricably

connected to other important international hubs that worked at this time as the propulsive engines of literary modernity. The iconoclastic assertiveness that various avant-garde movements often used as their main rhetorical strategy—pushing modernity forward by declaring a complete break with the past—has often led scholars to regard this epoch as if it were separated from previous times. But in recent years this idea has been largely discarded as various studies have shown a strong aesthetic continuity between nineteenth-century proto-modernism and the manifestoes of twentieth-century avant-gardes. These manifestoes were the outburst of a revolution that had begun much earlier and that had gradually evolved until this point. And if the avant-gardes assumed the task of enacting, performing, *becoming* this outburst of novelty, this does not mean that they were monolithic entities. They were, on the contrary, complex groups, conglomerates of individual writers and artists who, while all united in the desire for literary innovation, used different methods and had different, and occasionally even diametrically opposed, sensibilities and agendas.

In the first part of the chapter, I concentrate on the emergence of free verse in modernist and early futurist Italian literature, and evaluate Whitman's contribution to it. Writers like Gian Pietro Lucini, Corrado Govoni, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti programmatically adopted free verse and gave fuller force to the creative reinvention of Whitman's diction that had started in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. While Marinetti started to embrace a militarism that eventually led him to disregard free verse, and while some futurists began to carry out fascist appropriations of Whitman's poetry, others refused to do so. I also show how Russian futurism initially shares with Italian futurism a similar appreciation and imitation of Whitman's free verse.

I then move to analyze an important part of the Italian reception that has been overlooked in previous studies: the case of the literary periodical *La Voce*, and more specifically, of the readings of Whitman by three members of this influential cultural circle, Giovanni Papini, Ardengo Soffici, and Piero Jahier. While references to other figures of this group are made, it is useful to concentrate on these three writers in order to grasp not only the existence of different trends in Whitman's reception, but, ultimately, to observe the individual, idyosyncratic approach of single writers who belonged to the same circle. Papini's approach showed a strong consonance with other futurist readings of Whitman. But Papini never adopted free verse. Soffici shared Papini's admiration for the American poet and echoed *Leaves of Grass* more closely, but at the same time he diminished Whitman's stature as a poet. Instead, he proudly claimed his own identity and value as an Italian poet, and that of Italian and European letters, more generally. Jahier adopted a long, free, almost Biblical verse and echoed Whitman repeatedly, but with completely different poetic and political aims than Papini and the futurists.

The last part of the fourth chapter is dedicated to two poets, Dino Campana and Emanuel Carnevali, who have been little studied in connection with Whitman. The poets were both part of the avant-gardist literary circle that gravitated around *La Voce*, and they both decided to physically migrate to "America." Their writings about this experience are filtered through a Whitmanian perspective. Both poets left behind the Italian literary scene and plunged into the new American lands that, in their eyes, incarnated modernity. Their understanding of "America" proved to have been significantly shaped by reading Whitman. While traveling and upon arrival, both Campana and Carnevali in fact wrote a

poetry that directly invoked Whitman's presence, not only as a sort of companion traveling presence, but even as a tutelary deity.

While Campana went to Argentina and had a rather turbulent experience while working different jobs, which concluded with his return to Italy, Carnevali, after a first period of poverty and difficulties, started to collaborate with the magazine *Poetry,* and met various writers, including Carl Sandburg and William Carlos Williams. With them he even began to plan (before having to return to Italy because of illness) a new periodical, *New Moon*, modeled on *La Voce*. Carnevali's poetry thus represents a unique textual *locus* of encounter of the Italian and the American avant-garde. Ultimately, I show how Campana's and Carnevali's poetry can be seen as two important outcomes of the modernist transnational imagination in which the figure of Whitman played a central role.

The final chapter discusses the phase of Whitman's reception that goes from 1915 to 1930, but I also make a few flash-forwards into the 1940s and 1950s. There are various reasons why this phase can be seen as the closing of an era and the beginning of a new one. First of all, the reinvention of Whitman's work that took place in Italian and Russian futurism as early as 1909-1912 reached a peak in this period. Because of futurisms' affiliations with both Fascism and Communism, this reinvention took on highly politicized tones and directly contributed to political causes. This politicization of Whitman's work was also carried out by writers like D'Annunzio and Aleramo, who had first encountered Whitman at the turn of the century, and who seemed, at a later point in their life, to go back to revise his significance for them and apply it in strictly political terms. But, if this was the general tendency, I argue that there were also other writers, like

Mina Loy and Vladimir Mayakovsky, who looked at Whitman also for different reasons and who built on Whitman's formal innovations to achieve new breakthroughs.

Secondly, while in 1923 Gamberale published the final version of his unabridged translation, in these same years a young Cesare Pavese was preparing his dissertation on Whitman. This study and Pavese's later critical, editorial and translating work on Whitman marks a new stage of the reception. Pavese's 1933 description of Whitman's work as "poetry of poetry-making" offers evidence of a deeper understanding of the formal nature and value of the work of the American poet that had only sporadically, and never in such a clear-cut formula, emerged before in the Italian reception.

Pavese belonged to a new generation of Italian intellectuals and writers who started to look at American literature, and at Whitman, as a mythical alternative to the restrictive and asphyxiating fascist culture. This path would lead to the publication of a new translation –encouraged by Pavese—by Enzo Giachino in 1950, and to the birth of American studies in Italian academia, in the name of Whitman. As declared by Agostino Lombardo, in fact, for this first generation of Americanists, the discovery of Whitman coincided with the discovery of American literature at large.[12]

Abandoning traditional perspectives always implies a certain level of discomfort and uncertainty, but also of excitement. As Edward Whitley argues in his article entitled "Networked Literary History and the Bohemians of Antebellum New York," there is hope that networked literary history will "expose patterns or dynamics that would not

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[12] See Agostino Lombardo, *La ricerca del vero: realismo e simbolismo* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1961), 17-27.

otherwise be evident through other methods of inquiry."[13] Whitley contends that "by arranging our objects of study into networked forms—particularly as we take advantage of the interpretive strategies made possible by digital methods of network analysis—scholars and students alike will be better positioned to both imagine and to create alternative models of literary history." This study is a result of this hope and an effort to enact it.

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[13] See Edward Whitley, "Networked Literary History and the Bohemians of Antebellum New York," *American Literary History* 29, 2 (May 2017): 287-306. Other useful resources for an approach to networked literary and cultural history are: Marina Camboni, ed. *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939. Proceedings of the International Conference Macerata, March 25-27, 2002.* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004); Vilashini Cooppan, "Net Work: Area Studies, Comparison, and Connectivity," *PMLA* 128.3 (2013): 616; Longxi Zhang, *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2014); Patricia Novillo-Corvalan, *Modernism, Latin America, and Transnational Exchange: New Perspectives Across a Global Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2017).

CHAPTER ONE: The First Arrival of Whitman's Work in Italy, 1870s-1880s

1. A Sicilian Walking in Florence, Reading a French Periodical: Girolamo Ragusa Moleti, Enrico Nencioni, and Thérèse Bentzon's article

It is to Sicilian critic, journalist, writer and folklore scholar Girolamo Ragusa Moleti[14] that we owe the 1899 quasi-mythical account of the very first reading of Whitman ever done by an Italian.[15] While walking in Florence, in 1872, Ragusa Moleti would stumble upon the article on Whitman authored by French critic Thérèse Bentzon and freshly published in the *Revue de Deux Mondes.*[16] During that same walk, Ragusa Moleti would casually meet Florentinian critic and Anglist Enrico Nencioni, to whom he would show the article. Nencioni immediately admired Whitman's original voice, yet curiously he waited seven years before writing about it.

Other scholars have commented on how Ragusa Moleti's account of his pioneering reading can be seen as the product of a certain simplistic megalomania,[17] and also on the oddity of Nencioni waiting so long to write about Whitman, once he had read

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[14] For more on Ragusa Moleti, see Giovanni Saverio Santangelo, "Girolamo Ragusa Moleti: un letterato ribelle tra idealismo desanctisiano e 'realismo romantico,'" in *"Porquoi la littérature?" Esiti italiani del dibattito francese*, ed. Laura Restuccia (Palermo: Palumbo, 2003), 111-230; Giovanni Gentile, *Il tramonto della cultura siciliana* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1919), 176. On Ragusa Moleti and Whitman, see Giuseppina Calò, "La poesia americana e Walt Whitman nelle riviste letterarie siciliane dell'Ottocento" (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Palermo, 1990) and Irene Manzone, "Walt Whitman and Girolamo Ragusa Moleti" (MA thesis, Università degli Studi di Palermo, 1988).

[15] See Girolamo Ragusa Moleti, "I fili d'erba di Walt Whitman," *Flegrea* V (October 5 1899): 431-452.

[16] Thérèse Bentzon, "Un Poète americain–Walt Whitman," *Revue de Deux Mondes* (June 1 1872): 565-582.

[17] Charles S. Grippi, "The Literary Reputation of Walt Whitman in Italy" (PhD diss., New York University, 1971), 4.

his work.[18] It is also strange that, according to Ragusa Moleti's story, both he and Nencioni would be so enthusiastic at first meeting the work of Whitman, when they encountered it through the rather negative lenses of Bentzon, who harshly criticized the American poet's work.[19] For Bentzon, Whitman's rhymeless poetry was in fact a brute and arrogant exhibition of virility and celebration of materialism.

But Bentzon's comments might have actually prompted a positive interest, in Ragusa Moleti, as critic Mariolina Meliadò Freeth hypothesizes:[20] Ragusa Moleti belonged to a literary and cultural circle–one associated since the 1880s with the Sicilian periodical called *Il momento letterario artistico e sociale*–that was profoundly anti-romantic, holding literary naturalism in high esteem. Bentzon's accusation that Whitman combined "the worst excesses of Victor Hugo with 'the most poisonous compositions of Baudelaire'"[21] might have indeed sounded appealing for Ragusa Moleti, who would, after a few years, actually dedicate a monograph to Baudelaire.[22]

Perhaps the outraged tone of the French critic attracted the curiosity of both Ragusa Moleti and Nencioni who then made extra effort to read Whitman and to spread the fame of the American poet. It is possible that both the Italian critics followed the French debate that Bentzon's article ignited, and that they read the articles on Whitman

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[18] Rea McCain, "Walt Whitman in Italy," *Italica* 20, 1 (March 1943): 6.

[19] Grippi, 8.

[20] Mariolina Meliadò Freeth, "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana" (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Roma, 1961), 40.

[21] Roger Asselineau, "Whitman in France and Belgium," in *Walt Whitman and the World,* eds. Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 234.

[22] Girolamo Ragusa Moleti, *Carlo Baudelaire* (Palermo: Gaudiano, 1878).

written in the following years by Emile Blémont[23] and Henri Cochin.[24] Both Ragusa Moleti and Nencioni were in fact passionate readers and popularizers of foreign literatures (and they were, respectively, experts in French and English literature), who wanted to help Italian culture to be more aware of the recent developments in other international cultural scenes.

Significantly, Bentzon's article, despite all its negative criticism, explicitly exempts *Drum-Taps* (she offers translated sections in the article) and the poem "Come Up from the Fields Father," which she translates in its entirety, describing them as the best pieces that Whitman wrote.[25] If we trust Ragusa Moleti's account, if he and Nencioni really read Whitman for the first time through Bentzon, then their first encounter was marked by Bentzon's appreciation of the war poetry. This appears to confirm what can be regarded as a characteristic of this very first phase of the international reception in 1870s: the great emphasis critics put on Whitman's political and war poems.

For example, William Michael Rossetti's editions and critical interventions privilege these aspects of Whitman's poetry, as does Ivan Turgenev, who translated "Beat! Beat! Drums!"[26] into Russian. Likewise, the Polish critic Seweryna Duchinska, who moralistically criticized Whitman, presented his war poems as a sort of redeeming

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[23] See Emile Blémont, "La Poésie en Angleterre et aux Etats-Units," *Renaissance Litteraire et Artistique* no. 7 (June 1872): 54-56; no. 12 (July 1872): 90-91.

[24] See Henri Cochin, "Un Poète Americain: Walt Whitman," *Le Correspondant* (November 25 1877): 634-635.

[25] See Bentzon, 577-581.

[26] See I. Chistova, "Turgenev and Whitman," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 13 (Summer 1995): 68-72.

exception.[27] Nencioni himself, in his articles and translations, as we will see later, would mostly concentrate on political and war poems, and I am convinced that both Bentzon's article and Rossetti's editions strongly contributed–together with the Italian political and cultural climate of the time–to shape Nencioni's vision.

True or not, mythicized or not, casual or not, the encounter of Ragusa Moleti and Nencioni with Whitman's work produced substantial, long-lasting effects in Italian culture. Back in the beloved Sicily that he worked so hard to put into lively contact with the rest of Italy and the world, Ragusa Moleti would strenuously encourage a series of people to translate from Whitman.[28] Among these people there was high school teacher and progressive principal, intellectual and translator Luigi Gamberale, who taught in Sicily in the early 1880s and would soon become not only the first Italian, but also the first European, to fully translate *Leaves of Grass*. Gamberale would acknowledge Ragusa Moleti's encouragement in the initial dedication of his first unabridged translation, in 1907. Between 1899 and 1902, about thirty years after this first encounter, Ragusa Moleti would also write a few articles about Whitman in the Palermitan journal *L'Ora*. The articles clarify how Ragusa Moleti, while fascinated by the contents and the "naturalistic" scope of Whitman's poetry, resented the poet's use of free verse.[29] Ragusa Moleti was in

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[27] See F. Lyra, "Whitman in Poland," in *Walt Whitman and the World*, eds. Allen and Folsom, 295.

[28] See Moleti, "I fili d'erba di Walt Whitman," 431-434.

[29] See Girolamo Ragusa Moleti, "Le *Foglie d'erba* di Walt Whitman," *L'Ora* (September 1901): 1-14; "Le Poesie di Walt Whitman," *L'Ora* (February 1902): 9-10; "Walt Whitman," *L'Ora* (November 1902): 16- 17; "Al 'ma' di un lettore," *L'Ora* (February 1902): 16-17.

fact a carduccian[30] at heart; that is, he belonged to the Italian school of thought that still followed–although actually contributing to revise it and modify it–classical metrical versification.

Ragusa Moleti's distaste for Whitman's long, free verse was shared by Nencioni, who never really understood the degree and the revolutionary value of Whitman's formal innovations and who often talked about the poet's evident flaws.[31] The attitude of the two critics reflects the general unpreparedness and reluctance of Italian literary culture to recognize the groundbreaking value of what Eugenio Montale described as "poetry which becomes prose without being prose."[32] This unpreparedness was typical not only of Italy, but of other countries as well, as we will see. And yet, Nencioni's critical work remains perhaps the one fundamental mediating act for the initial Italian diffusion of Whitman's work, as he would write a series of articles and offer some sample translations that would attract the interest of the general Italian public, as well as that of Italian writers and literati who were among his friends and disciples.

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[30] Writer Giosuè Carducci, discussed later in this chapter with reference to his admiration of Whitman and his close friendship with Enrico Nencioni, was a programmatically anti-romantic poet, whose work can be categorized as classicist, and yet at the same time was innovative, especially in its revision of classic rhythms and metrics. Ragusa Moleti wrote to Carducci on August 19, 1878, saying that he considered him "the greatest living Italian poet," and asking him for advice about his own poetry, which he sent along. The letter is part of the correspondence collection available for consultation at Carducci's house, in Bologna.

[31] See Enrico Nencioni, "Walt Whitman," *Fanfulla della domenica* 21 (December 7 1879).

[32] See Eugenio Montale, "Il cammino della nuova poesia," *Il Corriere della Sera* (January 24 1951) in *Sulla poesia*, ed. Giorgio Zampa (Milano: Mondadori, 1976), 465-471.

Nencioni was not only an influential critic,[33] a foreign literatures scholar, and an Anglo-Americanist,[34] but also an active member of the Florentinian and Roman cultural scenes. A regular of the Angloamerican salons in Florence and Rome, he met, among others, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Wetmore Story,[35] Henry James and Vernon Lee (Violet Paget).[36] Nencioni's experience reminds us of another important element shaping Whitman's reception: the existence, in Italy as well as elsewhere, of these highly cosmopolitan and ever-renovating communities of literati, educated travelers, and artists coming from all over the world. In these intellectual hotbeds, the novel, controversial work of Whitman could be very well brought up and become the center of internal debates. No doubt it was in these circles that many Italian readers and critics first encountered at least the name of, and sometimes the work of, Whitman.

In other words, while Ragusa Moleti's account, both vivid and valid, highlights the historical impact of Bentzon's contribution and of his and Nencioni's crucial

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[33] For Nencioni's critical influence on the Italian literary scene of the time, see *Le più belle pagine di Enrico Nencioni*, ed. Bruno Cicognani (Milano: Garzanti, 1943); Benedetto Croce, *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, vol. 2 (Bari: Laterza, 1943), especially the first half. With reference to Nencioni's role in the diffusion of Pre-Raphaelitism in Italy, Giuliana Pieri argues that "any attempt at tracing the exact pattern of the Italian diffusion of Pre-Raphaelitism inevitably leads to Nencioni, who sits at the centre of the web." See Giuliana Pieri, *The Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Fin-de-Siècle Italy: Art, Beauty, and Culture* (London: Maney, 2007), 44.

[34] Nencioni wrote about, among others, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Edgar Allan Poe, Algernon C. Swinburne, and Thomas Carlyle. For more on Nencioni's specific interests and aesthetics, see Isabella Nardi, *Un critico vittoriano: Enrico Nencioni* (Perugia: Università degli Studi di Perugia, 1985).

[35] For Nencioni's cultural and political ideology, and for his role in the Florentinian scene, also with reference to the reception of Whitman in it, see Silvio Balloni, "Walt Whitman nella Firenze dei Macchiaioli," *Antologia Viesseux* 18, 52 (2012): 43-59.

[36] This becomes particularly evident when studying Nencioni's correspondence and by looking at his close relationship and correspondence with Carlo Placci, a young writer who had a privileged place within Florentinian high society. Much of this correspondence is available at the Marucelliana Library in Florence.

mediating enterprise, still, we should not forget that this was just one part of a much larger process of coming to know Whitman's work within a complex, multi-sided, interconnected system of circulation. Hence, in the next section I will reflect on how the editions of Whitman's work by William Michael Rossetti, and his critical assessment of Whitman, were a crucial nexus of the initial transnational reception: they were not only highly influential within Italian culture, but also mutually dependent on it, as they can be seen as the expression of a common adherence to the Italian and European Risorgimento and Post-Risorgimento political and intellectual ideology. I will also show how Rossetti's criticism of the formal nature of Whitman's writing, as well as the critic's emphasis on Whitman's war and political poems, are, notwithstanding the differences, quite resonant with Bentzon's perspective. This same criticism of the innovative forms and the predilection for "the poet of the American war," to use the title of the 1891 article by Nencioni, is what the Florentinian critic and other Italian literati would focus on in these years. And it is from Nencioni and the context in which he wrote, that we have to start, in order to address the filtering action that William Michael Rossetti's critical and editorial interventions had for the Italian reception.

2. William Michael Rossetti's Editions in Italy: Whitman as a (Post)Risorgimento Hero

In Nencioni's August 1881 article "New Poetic Horizons" (his second devoted to Whitman), he urged young Italian poets to learn from Whitman's simple and direct poetry, vehemently concluding: "And please paint our Italy. It is an almost virgin topic

for us Italians, from Dante on. And in saying this, I feel greatly ashamed."[37] These dissatisfied words and Nencioni's assessment of the state of Italian literature and culture reflect the larger, profound frustration that the newly formed Italy had to face in the years that followed the Unification of the country. The words are even more significant when considering the venue of their appearance: the Florentinian *Fanfulla della domenica*, the first literary periodical, founded after the Unification, that aimed to have a national outreach.

The Unification had been finally achieved in 1861, after decades of struggles and failed attempts. But, politically, as observed by historian Giuliano Procacci, the centralized government of moderate prime minister Cavour looked more like an extension of the old Sardinia Kingdom than a new political organism.[38] The gap between the elite and the masses was pronounced: only a few, "illuminated" Italians could vote, and illiteracy, poverty and criminality were peaking. There was an extreme heterogeneity and separation of territories and cultures. As the words attributed to patriot and statesman Massimo D'Azeglio (which have become a popular motto) say, "Italy has been made, but Italians aren't being made." And arguably, not even Italy was "made," as the question of the "unredeemed lands" was still pending.[39]

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[37] Enrico Nencioni, "Nuovi orizzonti poetici," *Fanfulla della domenica* 3, 34 (August 1881): 2.

[38] Giuliano Procacci, *Storia degli Italiani* (Roma: L'Unità, 1991), III, 390.

[39] What was called the 'unredeemed lands' were those territories that, after Italy's third war of independence, in 1866, had remained under foreign domination (such as Trentino, Venezia Giulia, Dalmazia, Nizzardo, Corsica and Malta).

In this Post-Risorgimento context,[40] the "cultural translation" of Whitman, to employ an expression used by Wynn Thomas,[41] was shaped by–and responded to–the need for a true "Italianization," a more homogenous nationhood. Whitman's poetry was evoked as a way to keep the democratic, humanitarian Mazzinian and Garibaldian ideals that had been the ideological core of the heroic struggles to achieve the Unification, not only unforgotten, but vital, in a potentially revolutionary sense.

In this section, I want to look at the pioneering critical and editorial work of William Michael Rossetti as a crucial nexus of the transnational network of the reception of Whitman. I will show how Rossetti's British Whitman was also an Italian one; or, better, how Rossetti's reading of Whitman deeply shaped Italian ones,[42] within the context of a shared political interest and a shared vision of Whitman's America as, to use the words of Kirsten Harris in her recent book on Whitman and British socialism, the leading prototype for "a global democratic awakening."[43] I will also reflect on how Italian literati responded to what Samuel Graber has called Rossetti's gesture of "locating of the American war poetry" and Whitman's civil war in particular, "in the context of a long transatlantic tradition of expanding liberty."[44]

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[40] It must be noted that Risorgimento means "resurgence" or "revival" and it indicates, largely, the social and political movement at the base of the Unification of Italy.

[41] M. Wynn Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 171.

[42] I am indebted to Marina Camboni, who brought attention to these ideas in a talk she gave during the Third International Walt Whitman Week, held at the University of Macerata in June 2010.

[43] Kirsten Harris, *Walt Whitman and British Socialism: 'The Love of Comrades'* (London: Routledge, 2016), 18.

[44] Samuel Graber, "Twice-Divided Nation: The Civil War and National Memory in the Transatlantic World," (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2008), 466.

While critics starting with Bentzon have often, and rightly, focused on the Victorian moral prudishness that animated Rossetti's "expurgated" 1868 edition of Whitman's poems which exclude, among others, the "Children of Adam" and most of the "Calamus" poems, less emphasis has been put on the "democratic thrust of Rossetti's project."[45] The centrality that the British critic (and author of *Democratic Sonnets*) assigned to Whitman's most openly political poems and to *Drum-Taps* originated in his radicalism as a cosmopolitan democratic republican and socialist who supported the North in the American Civil War, passionately rooted for Italy in her struggle for unity and independence from foreign rulers, and sympathized with the Paris Commune in 1871. Rossetti identified Whitman as the champion of an international, liberal democracy, which deeply resonated with the European lineage of the French revolution, the 1848 struggles, and the most recent developments in that direction. In this sense, it is also important to remember Wynn Thomas' study of Whitman's own take on this "European Risorgimento nationalism," which shows how Whitman's poetry consciously relates and responds to "to the mid-nineteenth century European concern with nation formation and with writing the nation."[46]

Rossetti's ideological stance was rooted in the Italian Risorgimento tradition, which was historically and deeply interconnected with Britain. Rossetti's father, Gabriele

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[45] Harris, 4.

[46] M. Wynn Thomas, "Walt Whitman and Risorgimento Nationalism," in *Literature of Nation and Region,* ed. Winnifred M. Bogaards (St John's: University of New Brunswick, 1996), 352. On this, see also Larry J. Reynolds, "Revolution, Martyrdom, and *Leaves of Grass,*" in his *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 148; Albert Boime, "*Leaves of Grass* and Real Allegory: A Case Study of International Rebellion" in *Walt Whitman and the Visual Arts*, eds. Geoffrey M. Sill and Roberta K. Tarbell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 53-84.

Rossetti, was an exiled Italian patriot. A Dantist scholar, Gabriele Rossetti had participated in the Carbonari resistance and was an active member of the Italian community of expatriates (among whom Giuseppe Mazzini came to be the most eminent figure) who took refuge in London from the 1820s on. As summarized by Giuliana Pieri, in her study of the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on fin de siècle Italy, "the emotional and political link between Britain and Italy was particularly strong during the years of the Risorgimento, with the British support [especially of the younger generations] for the Italian national cause."[47] As Carlo Placci points out, this link facilitated an important reciprocity: "influences of our [Italian] past times on the Brits, and the influences of their [the Brits] present times on us."[48] The Italian Renaissance served as an inspiring model for British Pre-Raphaelites, while the work of these latter represented for Italian artists and intellectuals, as shown by Pieri, a modernized version of their "glorious past on which [they] could build a new artistic identity."[49]

The 1895 "Biennale of Art" in Venice, which was a major occasion for the dissemination of Pre-Raphaelite and British art, and in which William Michael Rossetti participated as a Committee member, was perhaps the epitome of this cultural exchange at the base of which was the common idea of a rebirth of the arts in nationalistic (and yet libertarian) terms. And here it is useful to think of the ambivalence underlined by Wynn Thomas about the Risorgimento concept of nationhood: both "libertarian and

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[47] Pieri, *The Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Fin-de-Siècle Italy*, 5.

[48] Placci's words are reported in Pieri, 7-8.

[49] Pieri, 172.

authoritarian," "violent and pacific."[50] We have to keep this ideological landscape in mind when we think of the entrance of Rossetti's 1868 edition of Whitman's poems in Italy.

Rossetti's edition and the Bentzon article were among the initial sources for the diffusion of the knowledge of Whitman's work in Italy, and they were fundamental contributions. Nencioni reproduced Rossetti's own re-titling of Whitman's poems (such as, for example, "Letter from Camp" for "Come Up from the Fields Father" or "The Wounded" for "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest") in his first articles and translations in the 1880s which served to disseminate Whitman's work, thus proving he not only read Rossetti's edition, but used it as his "original" reference text, or perhaps even the sole one. Nencioni, in fact, does mention, in the 1881 article quoted above, the 1870-71 Boston edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but he never seems to "use" it as base for his translation. In his selected translations,[51] Nencioni reproduces the centrality assigned by Rossetti to the *Drum Taps* cluster and his assertions about Whitman as the "greatest of American poets," by inserting, almost exclusively, poems about the war or with an evident political content. In his 1891article on Whitman entitled "Il poeta della guerra

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[50] Thomas, "Walt Whitman and Risorgimento Nationalism," 359.

[51] Nencioni's various translations of Whitman's poems appear both in his articles on the American poet and also in a 1904 volume that came out after Nencioni's death, and that was dedicated to foreign literature: L. Morandi, D. Ciampoli, eds., *Poeti stranieri* (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1904), vol. 2. (Here, Whitman appears only via his war poems in the translations of Contaldi, and, in two cases, of Nencioni.) Nencioni's translations are prose-like (also in the way they are assembled on the page) and quite literal, often employing a high register.

Americana" ("The poet of the American war"), Nencioni defines the American civil war "fertile, useful and sacred."[52]

Rossetti's influence on Nencioni's views is directly acknowledged by Nencioni in his 1881 articles on Whitman, in which he defines the British colleague as "one of the finest and most credible critics in England and in Europe,"[53] as if aiming to reassure Italian readers about the certainty of the value of the American poet championed by Rossetti. But the most interesting aspect of Nencioni's contribution on Whitman, in its clear interconnection with the ideological foundation he shared with Rossetti, consists in his explicit pairing, in a separate 1884 article, of Whitman with Mazzini, the revolutionary activist whose ideas and actions constituted the very soul of Italian Risorgimento. It must be noted that Rossetti deeply admired Mazzini, as he wrote in his 1872 letter to Whitman, in which he commented on Mazzini's death and proudly confessed to Whitman to be three-fourths Italian in blood.[54]

Whitman is, in this 1884 piece, depicted by Nencioni as the poet who realizes Mazzini's ideals about literature and its ethical mission: a poet who writes not about the past but about the present and imminent future, and who builds a sense of communal identity, a poet who is "with the people" and not "for the people," as Mazzini would say. It is clear then, how the epigraph from Carlyle used by Rossetti in his 1868 edition must

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[52] See Enrico Nencioni, "Il poeta della guerra americana," *Nuova Antologia*, 3, 36, 23 (December 1 1891): 452-469.

[53] Nencioni, "Nuovi orizzonti poetici," 2. A very similar appreciation of Rossetti's value as a critic appears as well in Nencioni's above cited 1879 article on Whitman in the *Fanfulla*.

[54] See Rossetti's letter to Whitman of March 31, 1872, in *Selected Letters of William Michael Rossetti*, ed. Roger W. Peattie (University Park-London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 286.

have deeply resonated with Nencioni: "it is a great thing for a nation that it get an articulate voice."[55]

In his articles, Nencioni also reproduces Rossetti's various criticisms of Whitman's formal flaws: this, as I wrote earlier, appears to be a widespread phenomenon, within the Italian and transnational initial appreciation of Whitman. The author of the first whole translation of *Leaves* in Europe and in Italy, Luigi Gamberale (a familiar figure for the Rossetti family, with whom he corresponded, having translated from Dante Gabriel's work and written about Christina's work), would also often hint at the flawed forms of Whitman's poetry, perhaps anticipating readers' reactions to an unfamiliar technique. But it must be noted that Gamberale's case, as we will see more fully later, is much more complex: perhaps because of his direct contact and work with the original texts, the translator repeatedly displayed awareness of the innovative value and beauty of Whitman's unusual diction, even if he was not able to fully understand it and, most of all, to reproduce it in his translation.

What is certain is that Gamberale shared with Rossetti and Nencioni a predilection for the political vein of Whitman, as is clear by looking at the first selection of 1887, which contains a high number of political poems and poems from *Drum Taps*. In this sense, Gamberale's operation is close to that of German poet and translator, exiled in Britain, Ferdinand Freiligrath, as shown by Walter Grunzweig. Freiligrath, who had read Rossetti's edition, also privileged Whitman's war poems in his selection.[56]

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[55] It must be noted that by 1884 Nencioni had edited a collection of the literary writings of Giuseppe Mazzini (see Enrico Nencioni, ed., *Gli scritti letterari di Giuseppe Mazzini* [Roma: Commissione editrice, 1884]).

[56] See Walter Grünzweig, "Whitman in the German Speaking Countries," in Allen and Folsom, eds., 161. Grunzweig also refers to another early German translator of Whitman, Karl Knortz,

As noticed by Meliadò Freeth, it is significant that Gamberale opens his 1887 translation with "Song of the Universal": the poem of cosmic democracy, of the "all eligible to all."[57] This emphasis on a sense of cosmic democracy is also important, I would add, in light of Gamberale's personal view of Whitman's democratic ideals. In 1884 he had written, in fact, in a polemic article against Nencioni, that Whitman should not be regarded as or compared to "a European democratic poet," as his democratic ideals are founded not on the past ("the past is the past") but on his faith in the American present and future.[58] In this first selection, Gamberale would almost completely ignore "Song of Myself" (and remarkably, the only section from this poem that appears in this 1887 collection is that of the Goliad Massacre). This omission is rather striking, especially considering that, in an article published in *Il momento* in 1884, Gamberale had written that "Song of Myself" contained Whitman's poetical program.[59]

As for the English editions used by Gamberale, it is known (only from a list of his private library, as the physical copies are not available) that he owned a copy of Rossetti's (possibly the 1886 one) edition, and also Rhys' edition.[60] Just as Rhys's,

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who was convinced that, with his translation, he could contribute to bringing democratic ideals to German people.

[57] See Meliadò Freeth, 86. For more on this, see also Marina Camboni, "Italian Translations of 'Poets to Come'," available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/poets/italian/intro.html.

[58] See Luigi Gamberale, "Per l'esattezza. Ad Enrico Nencioni," *Il momento letterario artistico sociale* 22 (April 1884): 6. Here, Gamberale would correct Nencioni's mistakes with regard to describing the aesthetics of Pre-Raphaelitism and his listing of Whitman's publications, and he would also clarify how views differed from Nencioni's on Whitman's conception of rhythm.

[59] See Luigi Gamberale, "Walt Whitman. Indole della sua poesia," *Il momento letterario artistico sociale* 23 (May 1 1884): 7.

[60] Antonella Iannucci, in her *Luigi Gamberale e la cultura italiana e europea tra Otto e Novecento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1997) reports on the presence of Rossetti's edition in Gamberale's

Gamberale's selections appeared in an affordable popular edition (by Milan-based publishing house Sonzogno) that had Italian workers as the main targeted readership of both Italian and foreign classics and latest novelties. Gamberale retains some of Rossetti's new titles, while he also inserts poems included by Rhys, and at the same time presents, already in the 1890 selection, poems that were probably derived from the 1872 Rossetti edition.[61]

Even if American editions and Italian translations had, by the 1880s, started to circulate quite widely in Italy, it is obvious how Italian literati continued to assign to Rossetti's editions and critical mediation a striking priority. For example, the first collection dedicated to American literature in Italy, which came out in 1884 and which was edited by Gustavo Strafforello, a compiler of educational manuals, bears the clear sign of Rossetti's mediation, as Strafforello inserts Whitman in his descriptive section on "humorous poets,"[62] as Rossetti had done in his 1872 collection titled *Humorous Poems*

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private library. Iannucci saw it in the Archives of the Public Library of Agnone, Italy (64). But Iannucci saw the book in 1996. The collection in which the private library was held was moved to the main building of the library in 2000, and a new catalogue was created. When I went there, in May 2016, the book could not be found. It has been hypothesized by staff that the book was misclassified or somehow left out during the operations for the compilation of the new catalogue. As for the diffusion of Rhys's edition in Italy, we know that it was certainly available (and it is still owned by a few libraries there), but Italian critics mention it far less often than the Rossetti edition.

[61] In the introduction to his 1907 translation, Gamberale indicated he used the1884 edition of Whitman's poetry published in Glasgow by Wilson & McCormick (which is a replica of the 1881-1882 Osgood edition). It is hypothesizable that he owned the edition already when he was working at the 1887 and 1890 selections, and that he combined Rossetti's and Rhys's edition with the McCormick edition.

[62] See Gustavo Strafforello, *Letteratura Americana* (Milano: Hoepli, 1884). The section dedicated to Whitman is on pages 144-145.

(in which Whitman appeared with the satirical, but indeed still political "A Boston Ballad").[63]

This Rossettian filtering of Whitman as the mythical voice of the liberal democracy and its appeal to the Italian post-unitary sense of discontent with the outcomes of the Risorgimento, would remain a major contributing factor within the following phases of the Italian reception, and it would enter the new century, encountering a variety of critical and creative re-makings, often even with quite opposite intents. The post-unitary discontent would still be distinctly felt and discussed by Italian intellectuals up until the 1920s: the first world war would be seen, in fact, as the "fourth war of independence," i.e. the ideal conclusion of the process of nation-formation of the Risorgimento. Later, in chapter five, I will talk, for example, about a copy of Rossetti's 1886 edition bought in a Parisian bookshop by poet–and disciple of Nencioni–Gabriele D'Annunzio, who would then cite the idea of Whitman's "sacred war," (to use Nencioni's 1891 words), in the famous, fascist blockade of Fiume that he guided in 1919. I will also show how, on the other hand, the Rossettian emphasis on Whitman's poems of liberty would not only be taken up and revived by the fascist, nationalistic ideology, but also by Italian communists who were hoping for a different kind of political revolution.

But for now, we must remain in the 1880s, and concentrate on the work of another crucial figure in this history: Luigi Gamberale.

3. "*Facendo* come quei che va di notte…": Luigi Gamberale and the Very First Selected Translations

[63] See *Humorous Poems Selected and Edited by William Michael Rossetti* (London: E. Moxon, 1872), 471-473.

Luigi Gamberale remains an intriguing and still understudied figure in Italian literary history.[64] A man who had studied English mostly by himself and had never spoken it with any living English speaker,[65] Gamberale translated from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Robert Browning, Whitman and others, with the same zeal and method that he used to translate from Latin and Ancient Greek, the subjects that he taught around Italy for many years. Translating and teaching were not his only activities: he also wrote a number of progressive treatises on pedagogy. His experience as a school principal led him to advocate for the modernization of Italian education system. He spent his retirement years spent in the small, remote town where he was born and where he grew up, Agnone, in the southern region of Molise.

Gamberale donated his incoming correspondence, his private library and his various manuscript materials, including the drafts of his translations from *Leaves of Grass* to Agnone's small library. These materials are revealing of the myriad of interests and activities that Gamberale was engaged with throughout his life. Among these, translating Whitman, was a primary one. By looking at the various translation drafts and notes[66] from and about Whitman's poetry, one is struck by the meticulousness and order of Gamberale's minuscule handwriting, and one imagines him dealing diligently with each single word, each single line, with the help of his grammar books, dictionary, sense

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[64] The only existing monograph on Gamberale is Iannucci's *Luigi Gamberale e la cultura italiana e europea*. Iannucci edits a selection of Gamberale's correspondence and discusses his life and work based on these materials.

[65] See Iannucci, 23.

[66] The manuscript drafts available at the library in Agnone are mostly from later years (early 1900s on).

of poetry and, ultimately, bare intuition. Although critics have often noted the mistakes present in Gamberale's translations,[67] his outstanding effort and his valuable results have been praised, as we will see later, when discussing the unabridged translations of 1907 and 1923.

Gamberale was encouraged to translate Whitman by his friend Ragusa Moleti and his choice of poems reveals the weight of Rossetti's influence, to the point that the Italian translator often used the various re-titlings coined by the Anglo-Italian critic as a base for his translations, rather than Whitman's original titles. Gamberale had some criticism for Whitman's style, but at the same time he also appreciated it more than Nencioni or of other Italian critics at the moment. This latter characteristic has often been overlooked by critics, perhaps because the early materials (the first articles written by Gamberale in *Il Momento* in 1884 and the first selected translations) are difficult to access. Let us then take a more detailed look at the 1887 and 1890 selected translations authored by this fascinating progressive principal figure from Molise, for the popular editions of Sonzogno.[68]

The 1887 translation includes a significant epigraph taken from Dante's *Purgatorio* XXII: "Facendo come quei che va di notte, / Che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova / Ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte" ("Doing as he who goes by night / he carries the

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[67] See, for example, Meliadò Freeth, 85-68; Cambon, 251-252.

[68] See Walt Whitman, *Canti scelti*, trans. Luigi Gamberale (Milano: Sonzogno, vol. I 1887 and vol. II 1890). The two volumes were also combined, with no modifications, in an 1891 edition. Since, as I indicated before, Gamberale based his first translations on Rossetti's, Rhys's and the McCormick edition (equivalent to the 1881-1882 Osgood edition), I will refer to one of these editions when citing Whitman's original in parallel to Gamberale's translations.

light behind, and does not aid himself / but makes people after him instructed").[69] The first word of this tercet has been, in the epigraph to Gamberale's translation, modified and italicized (to signal the modification), from Dante's "facesti" ("you did") to "facendo" ("doing"). The tercet belongs to the dialogue between the roman poet Statius and Virgil. Statius has been asked about his conversion to Christian faith, and he answers by using the similitude that I just quoted: it is thanks to the pre-Christian work of Virgil, that he actually was enlightened.

In her article on Whitman and Italian futurism, Marina Camboni has explained that this epigraph summarizes Gamberale's judgement of the aesthetic value of Whitman's poetry:[70] the translator framed Whitman as fundamentally immature and imperfect, although certainly also as a crucial, prophetic precursor who opened the way to future works. Just as Virgil was not, and could not have been, for obvious temporal reasons, a Christian, and yet he is recognized and even thanked by Statius for being pre-Christian, Italian readers should accept and celebrate what Gamberale saw as Whitman's roughness, unripe style, and creative naïvete, as they still served to channel a series of important, groundbreaking messages. This idea also resonates with Whitman's own oxymoronic poetic program of being a humble bard who is "only" giving some hints and preparing the terrain for those "poets to come" he vehemently calls for. In this sense, the epigraph resembles Pound's perspective of continuity–in–difference in

[69] My translation.

[70] See Marina Camboni, "Le *Foglie d'erba* di Walt Whitman e la ricezione italiana fra Papini, i futuristi e Dino Campana: ovvero sangue sulla scena della *translatio,*" *Nuova Antologia* 616, 2278 (April-June 2016): 361.

"The Pact": that is, Whitman is the fundamental, impulsive breaker, but others will carefully carve. Gamberale, like Pound, failed to see that Whitman was also a carver.

The epigraph could also hide a second implication, and be a reflection on Gamberale's own limitations as a translator. Gamberale's modification of "facesti" in the jerund "facendo" may in fact also point to his own translating work and interpretive act. Gamberale could mean to indicate that his own work on Whitman is only an unripe attempt, an initial paving, in the dark, of the way for future readers, and, most of all, future translators of Whitman. With his self-taught English and complete lack of experience with spoken American English, Gamberale must have felt both the pressure and the honor of bringing Whitman to Italian readers for the first time. And, significantly, it is precisely with one of Whitman's writing staples, the present participle, a form with which Gamberale, and other translators around the world, would struggle, that Dante's original is modified here: a Whitmanian twist to a past ("facesti," "you did") transformed into the ongoing present of Gamberale's ambitious, extremely hard, and necessarily imperfect, translating work.

In the introduction to the selection, Gamberale provides readers with a solid, if not entirely accurate, biography, and announces major themes and stylistic issues. The introduction can be regarded as a *summa* of the series of articles mentioned earlier that the translator had published in *Il Momento* in 1884. In them, Gamberale recognized the polysemic value of Whitman's poetry, its ability to capture "immensity and complexity."[71] He had called it "chaos that carries in its lap a new universe of harmony and light […] the grandiose *fuga* of a great counterpointist […] a freed musical

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[71] Gamberale, "Walt Whitman. Indole della sua poesia," 6.

development."[72] He had also prepared readers: they might find things that would seem to need to be censored, but, he argued, they were part of Whitman's poetics of the union of body and soul, and they were composed without any sense of indecency. In a nice touch, he suggested that indecency was rather "in our thoughts," in readers' own prejudices and moral restraints.

Despite all he accomplished, Gamberale also revealed his limits: while he perceived the harmony of this new music, he did not quite understand how Whitman had been able to give it shape. In fact, Gamberale simplistically associated this renewed musicality with prose more than with poetry.[73] He sensed the value of the result but lacked an understanding of the procedures that led to it, that finer understanding that Montale would express many decades later. In Gamberale's opinion, Whitman's art was too new and groundbreaking. Employing a musical analogy again, the translator concluded that his ear was too inexperienced.[74]

These ideas, first appeared in the articles in *Il Momento*, appear again in the introduction to the selection that would first present a more complete version of Whitman's work to Italian readers who had until then read only single poems in articles and anthologies. Here, the translator immediately shows his fondness for Whitman's poetry: his enthusiasm is palpable. But he also, perhaps anticipating readers' reactions,

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[72] Luigi Gamberale, "Walt Whitman. Ideali democratici," *Il Momento letterario artistico sociale* 2 (June 16 1884): 3. My translation.

[73] See "Per l'esattezza," 5. Here, Gamberale wrote "the Muse of modern times, of this busy and hurried nineteenth century, cannot […] [but] aspire to the freer, the vaster, more divine sky of prose." My translation.

[74] Gamberale, "Walt Whitman. Ideali democratici," 3.

addresses what he considers Whitman's oddities: he lists the strange use of punctuation and the syntactical alterations, the frequent use of neologisms and words from other languages, a rushed quality in the writing, and the lack of organization and selection. All this exuberance often leads to a lack of lucidity, Gamberale argues. But Gamberale also notes:

> sometimes this lack of lucidity derives from something else. For his divinations of the future, for his remote and naturally indefinite aspirations, the expression becomes almost airy and impermanent as a fluid: his style, ceasing to be sculpted, becomes colored by half tones, sentences assume the indetermination of music, and thought shows itself as bundled in a crepuscular, dim light. But this is not a flaw: lyrical style, or better, the style of any poetry which departs from the spirit and is directed to the spirit, from Pindar to Carducci, is necessarily indefinite; since alive feelings and impetuous aspirations are, in and of themselves, without limits and contours.[75]

Gamberale seems almost to be manifestly contradicting himself: the lack of lucidity he had just criticized becomes, in this passage, praiseworthy. Gamberale once again perceives, although he does not fully embrace or understand, the innovative and pre-modernist value of Whitman's poetry, with is fluidity, musicality, indirections and half tones, and with is active refusal to give contours to thoughts and feelings. And the fact that Gamberale mentions his contemporary writer Carducci, here, illustrates his taste in poetry and illuminates how he could be simultaneously attached to tradition while also appreciating innovation. Carducci himself, as we will see later, was a writer who continually negotiated between novelty and classical models, and who arguably built a novel diction by re-working and updating classical metrical models.

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[75] Luigi Gamberale, "Introduzione" to Walt Whitman, *Canti scelti* (Milano: Sonzogno, 1887), 12-13. My translation.

Gamberale's mixed feelings about Whitman's style, about where to stand with regards to tradition and innovation, and his cautious moving closer to this latter, are reflected in the last part of the introduction. Here, he briefly reasons about rhymed and unrhymed poetry, and once again, only timidly concludes that unrhymed poetry would probably soon start to dominate the Italian literary scene. Gamberale's prediction is based, as he says, on the recent experimentation with unrhymed rhythmic forms (including that of Carducci)[76] and on the increasing use of the Leopardian "canzone libera"[77] and of free verse. And perhaps, he concludes, the future of poetry is precisely in the grandiose, superb "new music" of Whitman, rather than in the "warbling trills of the usual lines *sugared with rhymes.*"[78]

Does Gamberale then try to reproduce, in translation, this music he so greatly admires but cannot quite define? Let us look at some examples. Gamberale's lines are often longer than Whitman's. This is of course due primarily to Italian language's syntactical structures, but Gamberale doesn't seem to have worked too much at trying to shorten lines when he could. The second line of Whitman's poem "There Was a Child Went Forth," "And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,"[79] is converted

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[76] Gamberale's mention of Carducci's "barbaric" meters had already appeared in the article of 1884 entitled "Per l'esattezza. Ad Enrico Nencioni." The final passage of this article is very close to the one in the introduction that I am discussing here and probably served Gamberale as a draft.

[77] This term, literally meaning "free song," is used to describe early nineteenth-century poet Giacomo Leopardi's employment of stanzas of different length, with different metrical schemes and free, irregular rhyming.

[78] Gamberale, "Introduzione," 14. My translation. Italics present in the original.

[79] See Walt Whitman, "There Was a Child Went Forth," in *Leaves of Grass* 1881-1882, 282. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1881/whole.html.

in Gamberale's version into "E, non prima gli veniva visto un oggetto, che, ecco, in quell'oggetto ei si trasmutava"[80] (literally, "and, as soon as he had seen an object, then, in that object he would transform himself"). Gamberale adds length, triples the single comma in Whitman's original, and adds a not needed "then," thus significantly slowing down and hampering the fast, hopping rhythm of the original, and privileging, instead, an emotional, if not sentimental, quality.

The translator also gives little attention to the structure of lines, as he often joins two lines into a single, extremely long one (for example, he does not separate the third and fourth line of the first stanza of this poem). The numerous anaphoras of the original are also strangely dealt with: sometimes they are maintained, sometimes they are not, and sometimes they appear where they were actually not present in the original. But Gamberale often manages to keep the musical quality of the catalogues alive–if not as powerfully as in the original–by selecting and ordering words according to their rhythmical quality. In this poem he frequently uses, for example, alliterations that, although not always present in the original, have the effect, in the Italian, to make up for the often lengthier and less fluid lines: "the father strong, self-sufficient" is "il padre forte, fidente di sé," and "the yearning and swelling heart" becomes "il gonfiarsi e il gemere del core," while "the tight bargain, the crafty lure" become "i celeri contratti e gli allettamenti astuti."

Let us now look at one of the most celebrated poems by Whitman for its musical nature, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." The sense of eternal ongoing-ness of the title is substituted by Gamberale with the stiffer and more traditional "Ricordanze delle

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[80] Gamberale, trans. "Ei vi era un fanciullo che uscia ogni giorno," in *Canti scelti* 1887, 17-19.

rive del mare"[81] ("Rememberings of the shores of the sea") which is interestingly close to Whitman's first title of the poem for its publication in the *New York Saturday Press* in 1859 ("A Child's Reminiscence"). The sustained rhythm of the extremely long and yet extremely pressing incipit is not fully reproduced, as Gamberale does away with all the present participles at the end of various lines and does not maintain all of the anaphoras. But perhaps the most striking thing is that the translator decides to close the stanza not with the verb "sing" as the last word, but with the Italian word for "reminiscence," thus shifting away the emphatic weight put by Whitman on the singing, and regularizing the impressively altered order of the original, "a reminiscence sing."

The first Italian "Out of the Cradle" also suffers from lengthier and often convoluted lines that make the lyrical flow stop, become mechanical, or cease to exist altogether. "A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die"[82] becomes, for example, "Migliaia di ciarlieri echi sono balzate alla vita dentro di me, le quali non moriranno mai più'": having "le quali," the feminine relative pronoun equivalent to the English "which," for echoes, is not necessary, here, and in fact it is redundant, mechanical and prose-sounding. A simple (and more literal) "per non morire mai più" would have been much smoother.

Another strange choice by Gamberale is the fact that the original "aria" of section eight becomes "canto," "song," in Italian: why wouldn't he keep the explicit reference to opera represented by the Italian term used by Whitman? As for rendering the various

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[81] Gamberale, trans. "Ricordanze delle rive del mare," in *Canti scelti* 1887, 41-47.

[82] See Walt Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," in *Leaves of Grass* 1881-1882, 200. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1881/whole.html.

present participles in this same stanza and across the poem, Gamberale often opts to substitute them with past verbs, thus also altering the significant sense of continuity in the original. Whitman's use of the –ing forms remains, indeed, a challenge for Italian translators and, as we will see shortly, for other non-English language translators.

This initial edition of Gamberale's selected translations displays what will remain, over the course of about forty years, the main characteristics of the translating enterprise of the teacher from Agnone. There can be imprecise renderings and oversights, misunderstandings and awkward moments and certainly, too large a reliance on an archaic and refined lexicon which vastly diminishes the modern(izing) quality of Whitman's diction. This stanza from "Song of the Open Road" is exemplary, in this sense.

> You air that serves me with breath to speak!
> You objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape!
> You light that wraps me and all things in delicate equable showers!
> You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!
> I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me.[83]

This becomes in Gamberale's words:

> O aere che mi doni il fiato ond'io parlo!
> O voi, oggetti, che rivocate dal disperdersi i miei pensieri, e date essi una forma!
> O luce, che investi me ed ogni cosa del tuo così equo e delicato nimbo,
> O vie consunte in irregolari solchi sui marciapiedi,
> La mia fede è che voi, a me così dilette, occultate, in voi, esistenze invisibili.[84]

Let us start with the title that Gamberale assigns to the poem: "Canto della pubblica strada," ("Song of the public road") which sounds like an over-interpretation.

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[83] See Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road," in *Leaves of Grass* 1881-1882, 121. Available on the *Walt Whitman* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1881/whole.html.

[84] Gamberale, trans. "Il canto della pubblica strada," in *Canti scelti* 1887, 58.

It's true that the road the lyrical I is taking is open to everybody (and is, therefore, public), but the sense of spatial vastness and of the figurative act of walking toward the American future should still be maintained in the translation. It's also interesting to take into consideration lexical choices such as "aere," "onde," "rivocate," "nimbo," terms that sound completely archaic today, but that had a very dignified tone even at the end of the 19th century. "Aere," "rivocate" and "nimbo," in particular, are Latinisms that are inevitably far from their commonly used English counterparts, "air," "call" and "showers." The choice of iterating the vocative "O!" at the beginning of each verse adds rhetorical emphasis and solemnity to the passage. Finally, Gamberale tends to make things more complicated than they originally are, as happens in the fifth verse of this stanza, lengthened, re-ordered and reworded with a more grandiose register: the English "I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me" becomes "La mia fede è che voi, a me così dilette, occultate, in voi, esistenze invisibili" (literally, "My faith is that you, so cherished to me, conceal, in yourselves, invisible existences"). Gamberale's inversion of the first and last part of Whitman's original makes the Italian line sound confusing if not completely incomprehensible.

But there are also plenty of luminous moments, in Gamberale's translation, even in its first iteration. Although he turns too often to archaisms and erudite terms, Gamberale's word choice remains generally excellent, especially considering how limited his knowledge of English was. And even if lengthened, slowed down or altered, Whitman's tone and poetic footprint are still strongly recognizable. A second volume containing other selected translations, and meant to be the continuation of the first, came out, again for the popular series by Sonzogno, three years later, in 1890. Here Gamberale

displays a more thorough knowledge of Whitman's work: he includes the 1855 Preface and he also informs readers about his own rearranging and selection of poems from the larger corpus of the American original. And, this time, Gamberale includes more extended excerpts from "Song of Myself" and poems from the "Calamus" cluster. In addition, he differs from his first selection by putting less emphasis on war poems.

The impact of Gamberale's work on Italian and on other international readers would tend to be greater with his later unabridged translations, but the 1887 and 1890 translations are important documents that give voice to particular historical and cultural contexts. Who else was translating Whitman in the world, in these same years? And how can we evaluate these translations in comparison to Gamberale's? The tendency of lines to be usually much more prolix in Gamberale's translations into Italian than in the English original is also present in other initial attempts to translate Whitman into a different language. We can see this in a poem that was widely translated across the world in this first phase of the reception: "Beat! Beat! Drums!". Many international critics and translators focused on this poem, and this confirms, once again, the centrality that they assigned to Whitman's war poems at this time (although it must certainly be remembered that this militaristic poem is actually not very representative of Whitman's attitude toward the war).

This was one of the poems that writer Ivan Turgenev translated but never published (the manuscript was discovered at the French National Library).[85] As noted by a later translator into Russian, Kornei Chukovsky,[86] for the marching rhythm of the first

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[85] For more on this, see Stephen Stepanchev, "Whitman in Russia," 300-313. The manuscript of the Russian translation is reproduced in Chistova, "Turgenev and Whitman," 69.

[86] See his "Turgenev i Whitman," *Literatura Rossiya* 2 (July 28, 1967): 17.

line of the poem, "Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!"[87] (which returns in the poem at the beginning of each of three stanzas) Turgenev used sixteen syllables where Whitman had used seven. If we look at Gamberale, he rendered the same line with seventeen syllables.[88] Thérèse Bentzon had also translated the poem and had used twelve,[89] which is considerably better than others, but which is still almost doubling the original. Later on, future translators of this poem did better, attending more carefully to the formal nature of Whitman's writing. Chukovsky himself, for example, would have used eleven syllables for the first line (and would still not be happy with it, expressing his frustration with the the prolixity of Russian language) in 1907.[90] German translator Johannes Schlaf, also in 1907 (of course also facilitated by the closeness of German to English) used eight.[91]

As for other constitutive elements of the poem, while Gamberale, Turgenev and Bentzon do pay attention to anaphoras, which they try to reproduce most of the time, they do not always keep repetitions internal to lines (as in "would the talkers be talking?"). These latter are important, as they constitute the linear, continuing rhythmical counterpoint of the normal daily routine activities which the decisive beating drums of

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[87] See Walt Whitman, "Beat! Beat! Drums!," in *Leaves of Grass* 1881-1882, 222. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1881/whole.html.

[88] Gamberale, trans. "Battete! Battete! Tamburi!," in *Canti scelti* 1887, 59.

[89] Bentzon's (untitled) translation of the poem appears in her 1872 article, 577-578.

[90] Chukovsky's translation of the poem is reproduced and discussed in Elena Evich, "Walt Whitman in Russian Translations: Whitman's 'Footprint' in Russian Poetry," available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/russian/evitch.html.

[91] Schlaf's translation of the poem is reproduced and discussed in Werner Grünzweig, "Music in the Rhythm of War: Otmar-Shoeck and the Beginning of Whitman-Music in the German Speaking Countries," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 8, 1 (1990): 29-40.

the war are appointed to break. Whitman's use of repetition is, simply, not fully understood and/or accepted. Allitteration is also only sporadically maintained (nobody, for example, keeps the repeating "b" of the first line original, or goes for any other alliterating sound throughout the line). And while Turgenev maintains Whitman's dashes, these latter completely disappear in Gamberale's text and in Bentzon's (she actually does use dashes, but only to signal the end of lines, as the translation appears in paragraphs).

The considerable lengthening of the first line I discussed above is applicable to the rest of the poem, in all the translations I have mentioned. It is striking that this general lengthening takes place even in such a militaristic poem in which Whitman insists on assertive rapidity, creating a perfect rhythmical counterpart to the ideological celebration of the war. While we know that Gamberale had a tendency, also due to the syntactical nature of the Italian language, to lengthen Whitman's lines, and that Bentzon did not seem to pay too much attention to the formal nature of what she considered as "brute" verses anyway, the case of Turgenev remains particularly surprising, especially considering the importance of traditional metrical rigor of Russian versification. How could the Russian writer not have noticed this clamped rhythm and tried to replicate it? The explanation might be hidden in Turgenev's own creative work. In order to discuss it, let us move to the next section, in which I will look at how, still in this first part of the reception, international writers such as Turgenev often translated Whitman's poetry, wrote about it critically, and let the voice of the American poet mingle with their own voice.

4. The First Writers' Reactions, in Italy and Abroad

It is essential to recognize the ambivalence of the first critics and translators of Whitman's work when they evaluated the radical novelty of his writing. This ambivalence is a commonality found across languages and literary traditions. These critics and translators were not always sure about its real literary value, and yet they were strongly attracted by its themes and its visions, its social and political weight, its enthusiastic tone about the potentialities of America, seen both as a geographical territory in exciting evolution and as the symbol of a modern writing space. But how did writers react? Was this ambivalence present in them, too? What was the impact of reading Whitman on their own writing? Can we identify some comparative parallels, and trace any form of influence of Whitman's poetry on other writers?

Let us go back to Ivan Turgenev. While critics have discussed his manuscript translations from Whitman, nothing has been said about possible connections with Whitman in his works. As reported by Stepanchev, Turgenev had declared (possibly while talking to Henry James, in 1874) that in Whitman's poetry there was a lot of chaff, but also some good grain,[92] conveying his mixed feelings about Whitman. But what was the "good grain" according to Turgenev? Who was he, as a writer? While being famous mostly for his novels, novellas and short stories, Turgenev had started his career by writing poetry, he was always interested in achieving a form of lyric prose, and he repeatedly experimented with this type of writing. His last work, *Стихотворения в* п*розе* (*Poems in Prose*), published in 1882, is the epitome of this experimentation, and

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[92] See Stepanchev, 302.

would be highly influential in Russian literature. As critic Adrian Wanner argued, "in their hybrid mixture of realism and decadence, conservatism and innovation, Turgenev's prose-poems lead to a two-pronged juncture […] a tradition of realist prose poems […] [and] a tradition of modernist formal experimentation."[93]

French models, and Baudelaire's *poèmes en prose* were certainly influential on Turgenev, who lived in Paris for many years (at various times during the 1840s and 1850s and then more stably from 1871 until his death in 1883). And, perhaps, another model for this was Whitman, whose work Turgenev probably first encountered in France.[94] Perhaps, then, the "good grain" in Whitman's poetry for Turgenev consisted of its proximity to prose, and yet its retention of a powerful lyrical value. This would also explain why, in his attempt to translate "Beat! Beat! Drums!" Turgenev goes for a lengthy rendering: he sees Whitman as a writer of *poèmes en prose*, and he privileges the long line, which he is personally so interested in and which is indeed a novelty for Russian literature, over the rhythm.

If Whitman is a model in this sense, then, can we find echoes of his work in Turgenev's 1882 collection? In general, Turgenev's prose poems retain a narrative quality that is almost always absent from Whitman's poetry. The extensive use of dialogues by Turgenev is also another important difference. But there is an analogous depiction of ongoing, vivid and ordinary scenes that enhance the visual and spatial

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[93] See Adrian Wanner, *Russian Minimalism: From the Prose Poem to the Anti-Story* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 32.

[94] Turgenev first mentions the "astonishing American poet" in his November 1872 letter to critic Pavel Annenkov. It is striking to think that Bentzon's article had come out in June of the same year, and that the poem "Beat! Beat! Drums!" was precisely one of the poems that she had translated in her article. See Chistova, 70.

quality of the lines, and many exclamations, as, for example, in these passages from "Деревня" ("The Country"):

> The last day of July; for a thousand versts around, Russia, our native land.
> An unbroken blue flooding the whole sky; a single cloudlet upon it, half floating, half fading away. Windlessness, warmth ... air like new milk!
> Larks are trilling; pouter-pigeons cooing; noiselessly the swallows dart to and fro; horses are neighing and munching; the dogs do not bark and stand peaceably wagging their tails.
> A smell of smoke and of hay, and a little of tar, too, and a little of hides. The hemp, now in full bloom, sheds its heavy, pleasant fragrance.
> […]
> A round-faced young woman peeps out of window; laughs at their words or at the romps of the children in the mounds of hay.
> Another young woman with powerful arms draws a great wet bucket out of the well.... The bucket quivers and shakes, spilling long, glistening drops.
> Before me stands an old woman in a new striped petticoat and new shoes.
> Fat hollow beads are wound in three rows about her dark thin neck, her grey head is tied up in a yellow kerchief with red spots; it hangs low over her failing eyes.
> But there is a smile of welcome in the aged eyes; a smile all over the wrinkled face. The old woman has reached, I dare say, her seventieth year ... and even now one can see she has been a beauty in her day.
> With a twirl of her sunburnt finger, she holds in her right hand a bowl of cold milk, with the cream on it, fresh from the cellar; the sides of the bowl are covered with drops, like strings of pearls. In the palm of her left hand the old woman brings me a huge hunch of warm bread, as though to say, 'Eat, and welcome, passing guest!'
> A cock suddenly crows and fussily flaps his wings; he is slowly answered by the low of a calf, shut up in the stall.
> 'My word, what oats!' I hear my coachman saying.... Oh, the content, the quiet, the plenty of the Russian open country! Oh, the deep peace and well-being![95]

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[95] Original: "Последний день июня месяца; на тысячу верст кругом Россия — родной край. Ровной синевой залито всё небо; одно лишь облачко на нем — не то плывет, не то тает. Безветрие, теплынь... воздух — молоко парное! Жаворонки звенят; воркуют зобастые голуби; молча реют ласточки; лошади фыркают и жуют; собаки не лают и стоят, смирно повиливая хвостами. И дымком-то пахнет, и травой — и дегтем маленько — и маленько кожей. Конопляники уже вошли в силу и пускают свой тяжелый, но приятный дух. […] Из окна выглядывает круглолицая молодка; смеется не то их словам, не то возне ребят в наваленном сене. Другая молодка сильными руками тащит большое мокрое ведро из колодца... Ведро дрожит и качается на веревке, роняя длинные огнистые капли. Передо мной стоит старуха-хозяйка в новой клетчатой паневе, в новых котах. Крупные дутые бусы в три ряда обвились вокруг смуглой худой шеи; седая голова повязана желтым платком с красными крапинками; низко навис он над потускневшими глазами. Но приветливо улыбаются старческие глаза; улыбается всё морщинистое лицо. Чай, седьмой десяток доживает старушка... а и теперь еще видать: красавица была в свое время! Растопырив загорелые пальцы правой руки, держит она горшок с холодным неснятым молоком, прямо

Turgenev's emphasis on the idea of the sanity and equal well-being of people, young and old, in this piece, is also strikingly Whitmanian.

Whitman must indeed have been appealing to a writer whose mission was to depict Russian life realistically and yet lyrically, with its problems, strengths, and beauty, by employing the distinctively Russian idiom that he described as "great, powerful, righteous, and free."[96] Although still anchored to a strong narrative line, Turgenev's prose poems were an important modernizing force in a Russian poetry that had been too attached to rigid metrical structures and to an over-refined diction and imagery that often seemed artificial. And notwithstanding the substantial differences I noted above, it is fascinating to think that Whitman might have significantly contributed to the renovation of Russian poetic language.

Since France worked as a central connecting hub within this complex network of people and events, we return there to discuss other writers' encounters with Whitman in these years. The case of French poet Jules Laforgue is indeed close to that of Turgenev, as Laforgue also translated from Whitman. Betsy Erkkila explains how "among the

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из погреба; стенки горшка покрыты росинками, точно бисером. На ладони левой руки старушка подносит мне большой ломоть еще теплого хлеба. «Кушай, мол, на здоровье, заезжий гость!» Петух вдруг закричал и хлопотливо захлопал крыльями; ему в ответ, не спеша, промычал запертой теленок. — Ай да овес! — слышится голос моего кучера. О, довольство, покой, избыток русской вольной деревни! О, тишь и благодать!" Ivan Turgenev, "Деревня" (Derevnya) in *Стихотворения в прозе* (Stichotvorenya v proze) [1882], available online at http://www.ilibrary.ru/text/1378/p.1/index.html. Translation by Constance Garnett, in Ivan Turgenev, *Dream Tales and Prose Poems*, (London: William Heinemann, 1906), 239-242.

[96] Original: "о великий, могучий, правдивый и свободный русский язык!" Ivan Turgenev, "Русский язык" (Russky Yazyk) in *Стихотворения в прозе*, available online at http://www.ilibrary.ru/text/1378/p.51/index.html. My translation.

French Symbolist writers and critics who came to know Whitman during the 1880s, Jules Laforgue was one of the most influential in making him known to the French literary public."[97] In 1886, Laforgue undertook a series of translations of Whitman, which were the "most advanced and 'liberated' example of free verse that had yet appeared in France,"[98] also obtaining permission to proceed with a full translation that was never accomplished because of his death in 1887. As Erkkila argues, translating Whitman clearly had the effect of liberating Laforgue creatively,[99] encouraging him to be who he really was as a writer. It was in fact at this same time, that Laforgue decided to abandon his conventional poetry writing and to switch to a much more innovative free verse, to use words of ordinary provenance and urban origin and create neologisms. Numerous echoes of Whitman can be found in this late Laforgue's poetry, both at a formal and thematic level.[100]

Laforgue's translations were fundamental in making Whitman "officially recognized and adopted by French symbolism"[101] and in crucially advancing the practice of *vers libre*. But it must not be forgotten that the appreciation of Whitman by French symbolists had effects that went beyond France, and even beyond Europe, playing an indispensable role in South-American *modernismo*.[102] Fernando Alegría argues that it was

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[97] See Betsy Erkkila, *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 69.

[98] Erkkila, 70.

[99] On this, see also Asselineau, "Whitman in France and Belgium," 241.

[100] Erkkila, 71-77.

[101] Asselineau, "Whitman in France and Belgium," 235.

[102] On the influence of French symbolism on South American *modernismo*, see, among others, Stephen Tapscott, "Introduction" to *Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry* (Austin:

primarily the Cuban poet José Martí's essay "El poeta Walt Whitman" that first introduced Whitman to Hispano-American literature in 1887,[103] but it is also true that South-American writers could read about Whitman while reading French magazines and French translations (they sought out these sources assiduously). The first echoes of Whitman in South America appeared in José Martí's poetry in 1891, with his *Versos sencillos*. Less than a decade later the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío composed the poem "Walt Whitman" to include in the second edition of his collection *Azul* (1890).[104]

Alegría has argued that "Spanish American modernist poets did not really grasp the essence of Whitman's message. Whitman's voice often is present in their work, but seldom his spirit. To them, Whitman was mainly a legend."[105] Similarly, Enrico Mario Santí has said that Latin American *modernistas* "invoke rather than imitate Whitman. In their works Whitman tends to be a *theme* rather than a stylistic or rhetorical model."[106] This use of Whitman as theme, legend, and champion of democracy (especially for Martí) is similar to what happened with Rossetti in England and Nencioni in Italy.

University of Texas Press, 1996), 1-20; Stephen Hart, *A Companion to Latin American Literature* (Woodbridge: Tamesis Books, 2007), 107; Gutiérrez, José Ismael, *Perspectivas Sobre el Modernismo Hispanoamericano* (Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 2007), 199-201. Note that here I will use the word *modernismo* in order to distinguish the South-American movement from Anglo-American modernism.

[103] See Fernando Alegría, "Whitman in Spain and Latin America," in Allen and Folsom, eds., 71-127.

[104] It has been a common mistake for critics to ascribe this poem to the first (1888) edition of, but it actually only appeared in the 1890 edition. See Alegría, 82, for his speculation about the possible composition date.

[105] Alegría, 80.

[106] Enrico Mario Santí, "The Accidental Tourist: Walt Whitman in Latin America," in *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?*, ed. Gustavo Pérez Firmat (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 156-176.

Whitman also served modernism as a hopeful sign that non-European, and more precisely, (Pan)American literature could really be the path breaking literature of the new era. In this sense, the fact that French symbolists praised and translated Whitman was valued by South American writers as an important encouragement. And yet, these latter's works, as indicated by Alegría and Santí, remain fairly distant in style and substance from Whitman's.

Seeking a clear and direct expressivity, Martí in *Versos sencillos* (1891) wishes to abandon the Romantic tradition and to create a diction closer to common language, but he only partially achieves these ends. Darío's *Azul* is characterized by an experimentation with rhythmical cadences and an affinity with Paul Verlaine's poetics of musicality, but it also presents a constant evocation of classic mythology, and of exotic, eastern elements. The poems, characterized by a certain sensory vehemence, tend to be descriptive, with many refined adjectives and foreign words, seemingly used to exhibit personal erudition rather than in a truly innovative sense. Darío's employment of foreign words is quite far from Whitman's use of them to experiment with pure sound and with the a-cognitive, sensory aspect of language.

Whitman, the poet who had famously declared himself to be "untranslatable," deliberately let foreign words float in his texts like "unassimilated fragments,"[107]

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[107] With regard to Whitman's use of foreign words in his poetry, a passage in an anonymous review of *Leaves of Grass* (recently discovered, by Kenneth Price and Janel Cayer, as being co-authored by Whitman), published in 1881 in Boston's *The Sunday Herald*, reads: "these foreign words and phrases seem to depict unassimilated fragments floating on the life-current of the nation. Many intelligent people fail to comprehend. They can't see what the poet is driving at." For discussion of Whitman's co-authorship of this review, see Price and Cayer, "'It might be us speaking instead of him!': Individuality, Collaboration, and the Networked Forces Contributing to 'Whitman,'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 33 (Fall 2015): 114-124.

untranslated, on the text, in order to foreignize and modernize his own poetic diction so that it could better represent the social and linguistic reality he lived in and, more importantly, the one he wanted to help shape for future generations. Whitman let his all-American poetry be entered by non-English words and expressions so that it could fully and deeply be all-American and all-modern in the sense he conceived about what the best characteristic of present and future America was: that is, "the best cosmopolitanism."[108] But for Darío and other *modernistas* like, for example, Leopoldo Lugones, foreign words were mostly an affectation, a way to signal their status as literati.

And yet, Darío and Lugones remained deeply fascinated with Whitman, and alluded to him or addressed him directly in their poems. In "Walt Whitman," Darío consolidates the legend of the "gran viejo," ("the great old man,") a "serene and saint[ly] patriarch,"[109] but his approach is ideologically ambivalent. Recognizing that he is in the lineage of Whitman, Darío praises the new American "prophet," even as he begins to articulate the anti-imperialism which will find its full expression in his 1904 ode "To Roosevelt." As underlined by Raab,[110] in fact, Whitman is here also an "emperor" living

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[108] See Whitman's "Foreword" to his essay "An American Primer," published in *An American Primer by Walt Whitman*, ed. Horace Traubel (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1904). For more on Whitman's theories about American language, see also Marina Camboni, *Walt Whitman e la lingua del mondo nuovo*, *con tre testi di Walt Whitman*, (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004). On the topic of Whitman's use of multilinguism I gave a talk at the MLA 2015 (Vancouver, BC) roundtable "Beyond Monolingualism?" (respondent: Prof. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). My talk was entitled "*Omnes! Omnes!* The Proto-modernist Multilingualism of the 1860 edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*."

[109] Original: "un patriarca, sereno y santo." See Rubén Darío, "Medallones, no. III, Walt Whitman," in *Azul* [1890], (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1969), 107. My translation.

[110] See Josef Raab, "El Gran Viejo: Walt Whitman in Latin America," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 3, 2 (June 2001). Available online at http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1122.

in an "iron country" and having an arrogant countenance, as Darío's expression "rostro soberbio" indicates. Darío's ambivalence would continue: in "To Roosevelt," Whitman will in fact actually be "recuperated" as an ally, this time, to Darío's anti-imperialism—"it is with the voice of the Bible, oh verse of Whitman, / that we should get to you, Hunter!"[111] Darío is here invoking Whitman, as paralleled to the Bible, as if trying to lead Roosevelt back to a fundamental, double moral authority that seems to have been cast away.

Lugones displayed a similar ambivalence in the introductory section of the long poem *Las montañas del oro* (1897). Here Lugones reflects about the composition and nature of poetry, and then lists exemplary predecessors. While there are some references to an understanding of the organic and cosmic qualities of poetry,[112] and a certain exclamatory tone of optimistic confidence vaguely reminiscent of Whitman, there is still a pronounced adherence to the romantic and decadent traditions. The lines are long and there are a few anaphoras and also a few dashes, but there is also a constant, rigid perfect rhyme.[113]

And Whitman here is again, just as in Darío, a legend, a mythical patriarchal, foundational figure that literally functions as a skeleton, a dna-maker for future poetry.

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[111] Original: "¡Es con voz de la Biblia, o verso de Walt Whitman, / que habría que llegar hasta ti, Cazador!" See Rubén Darío, "Oda a Roosevelt," in *Songs of Life and Hope/Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* [1905], eds. Will Derusha and Alberto Acereda (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 84-88. My translation.

[112] For other echoes of Whitman's poetry in Lugones' *Las montañas de oro*, see Alegría, 83-85.

[113] Alegría seems to overlook the presence of rhymes, and argues that, because of the long lines, and the use of dashes, this poetry can be considered as free verse. While it is certainly a long verse, the perfect or alternate rhyming creates a beating effect of separation and isolation of couples of lines, which is absolutely far from Whitman's continuous diction.

And yet, Whitman is here completely enchained in rhymes. Here, "verse" still rhymes with "universe."

> Whitman entona un canto serenamente noble.
> Whitman es el glorioso trabajador del roble.
> El adora la vida que irrumpe en toda siembra,
> El grande amor que labra los flancos de la hembra;
> Y todo cuanto es fuerza, creación, universo,
> Pesa sobre las vértebras enormes de su verso.[114]

It is striking to see how Lugones and Darío identify the foundational significance of Whitman's work as a point of reference, and yet they deviate consistently from his innovative diction, remaining attached to more traditional forms. Even if both were close to Laforgue, and perhaps even if introduced to Whitman via Laforgue's translations, the two South-American poets had a different understanding of Whitman. Whitman's work, even if clearly standing as a celebrated, founding father within the newly emerging (Pan)American tradition in which Lugones and Darío were placing themselves, did not have the same radical effect on their poetry as it had on Laforgue. These poets did not perceive Whitman's work as a liberating force, as a call to an immediate insurrection. Rather, they concentrated on the biblical weight and the epic presence of Whitman's writing, and read it in terms of a call to recuperate, revise and re-found classical poetry and literary tradition. But these differences between Laforgue and Lugones/ Darío should not lead to label the conclusion that the first was the "correct" continuation of Whitman's proto-modernism, and the work of the latter was a complete misunderstanding and negation of it. They should be regarded, instead, as the expressions of different and

[114] See Leopoldo Lugones, "Introducción" in *Las montañas del oro* [1897], (Buenos Aires: Centurión, 1947), 13. My translation (with no rhyming except for the last two lines): "Whitman starts to sing a song serenely noble / Whitman is the glorious worker of the oak / He adores the life that erupts during harvest / The big love that plows the sides of the female; / And all that is strength, creation, universe / Weighs upon the enormous vertebrae of his verse."

ultimately complementary initial readings and re-makings of Whitman directed toward the same aim: poetic modernity.

The case of the early South-American *modernistas* is particularly close to the climate of the 1880s-1890s Italian literary scene that was still far from the bold experimentation of French symbolism, but that was nonetheless planting the first seeds of the slow, gradual renewal of Italian poetry. A letter from Darío of 1881 clarifies how in Italy, in these same years, Giosué Carducci was also encountering Whitman's work, perceiving its novelty, and yet, still trying to contain it within classical structures:

> Some poets have attempted to introduce the Greek and Latin hexameters into Spanish. At the present time in Italy, Giosué Carducci is trying to popularize the Spanish ballad and the Yankee prophet Walt Whitman repeats the Hebrew versicle in English.[115]

Darío is here reporting about only one of the many metrical experiments of the classicist writer and scholar Carducci who aimed to write a concrete poetry which, even when erudite, could still be close to reality and carry on a moral and civil mission. Convinced of the need to recuperate classical, quantitative Latin and Ancient Greek metrics, and to transfer it to modern Italian qualitative metrics, Carducci elaborated a system that allowed him not to perfectly reproduce, but to rhythmically imitate the main types of classical verses. This new metrics he called "barbaric" (a word that he also used for the title to his collection of poems, *Odi Barbare* [*Barbaric Odes*,] published in a series of different editions between 1877 and 1893), as he thought this would be what Latin or Ancient Greek poets would say about it, if they could hear it. While Carducci's barbaric poetry might seem to stand as far away as possible from Italian literary innovation and

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[115] The letter is reported in Alegría, 82.

from the beginnings of free verse, it crucially contributed to its advancement. It corresponded, in fact, to an initial breaking up of regular Italian metrics: it allowed a certain degree of freedom, of play, and it invited a radical rethinking of rhythmical structures.[116]

It is, then, not altogether surprising to see in an 1881 letter from Carducci to Enrico Nencioni, with whom he had a close friendship (the two had gone to the same high school in Florence), that Carducci wished to translate Whitman by using Homeric metrics. In this letter, Carducci comments on Nencioni's second article on Whitman, entitled "New Poetic Horizons" in which he urged young Italian writers to "paint our Italy." An avid reader of foreign literature, Carducci appreciated Nencioni's first article (1879) on Whitman and immediately encouraged him to write more, as he was convinced that coming into contact with foreign literature and with poetry like Whitman's might help: "Italy needs to get healed."[117] And Carducci had been looking forward to reading this new article: in a previous letter (August 15) to Nencioni, he had complained about not having been able to read it yet, as he was staying in his house in the country. But on August 26, he wrote to Nencioni that he had finally read it. He made sure to let Nencioni know that he absolutely agreed with his general assessment of current Italian literature.[118]

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[116] Carducci's works, like that of other poets of his generation, often stand at the border between tradition and innovation. As underlined by the poet and critic Edoardo Sanguineti, the real revolution was slowly started by the poets who mediated between classicism and modernism, like Gian Pietro Lucini, Enrico Thovez, Corrado Govoni and Adolfo de Bosis, and it exploded only later, with the futurists and with other avant-garde movements. See Edoardo Sanguineti, "Introduzione" to *Poesia italiana del Novecento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1969), XXXIX-XL.

[117] Original: "L'Italia ha bisogno di risanarsi." The December 7, 1879 letter from Carducci to Nencioni is reported in the essay by Giuseppe Lesca about Carducci's readings of Whitman, "Carducci lettore di Whitman," (Bologna: Cooperativa Tipografica Azzoguidi, 1937), 4.

[118] All the letters from Carducci to Nencioni that I discuss here are available in the special collections section at the Biblioteca Marucelliana, in Florence.

Nencioni started the article by quoting Flaubert's complaints about the fact that the language used by current literature had become stiff and conventional, a fixed literary jargon aimed to chisel and embellish: a colorful, decorative style which collects *cocottes* and *bohémiens*, Nencioni would add. The Florentinian critic then moved to recommend the remedy that he thought could heal Italian literature: studying the classics, who "were simple because they were strong–they were great because they were healthy."[119] And he added, among them were the ones who have "a powerful wing and vast horizons […] the painters of the great spectacles of nature" (1): Goethe, Shelley, Byron, Hugo, Whitman. Whitman, in particular, is defined by Nencioni as "simple, strict, rude, and colossal (and, in all of these qualities, perhaps excessive)." (1-2) Among all of Nencioni's articles on Whitman, this is the one most directly treating the "classical" character of Whitman's work,[120] rather than its democratic value or its depiction of the American Civil War. Of course there is still a deep political resonance, as Nencioni thinks it is exactly from this classical, "healthy," writing, that Italian writers should start to be able to form a new, more adequate, Italian literature.

Carducci can only praise such ideas since they are completely consonant with his own poetics. He adds that he had personally read and orally translated Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* three times[121] during the private lessons he took with his English language

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[119] Nencioni, "Nuovi orizzonti poetici," 1. My translation.

[120] The article also contains Nencioni's translation of Whitman's "Salut au Monde!," thus emphasizing the universal value of Whitman's "classical" voice.

[121] Among the various remaining notebooks that Carducci used for his English exercises, also available for consultation in his house, there is not a single mention of Whitman, so he must have really translated the *Leaves* only orally, as he declares.

teacher, Annibale Ferrari.[122] The teacher, Ferrari, had left Italy for the United States when he was seventeen and lived there for twenty years, also fighting in the Civil War. "He is a beast, always drunk," Carducci told Nencioni, but he "feels and breathes America; he has almost no Italian any longer; and he would comment [on Whitman's book] with ferocious gestures and shouts."[123] It is fascinating to imagine Carducci and Ferrari in the same room overlooking the quiet square in front of Carducci's house, debating about Whitman's work: Carducci wanting to translate it in Homeric hexameters, Ferrari animatedly building parallels between the poetry and his adventurous times in the States.

It is not known which edition of Whitman Ferrari and Carducci used for their lessons and where it came from: the book is not now part of Carducci's private library, well maintained in his house. The poet owned only the 1887 selection from *Leaves of Grass* by Gamberale I previously discussed, a volume published well after these lessons. So, did Ferrari own the book himself, and had he brought it with him from the U.S.? Or could Carducci have retrieved it from the library of the University of Bologna, where he taught, or received it from some other writer or critic?

These mysteries aside, what is certain is Carducci's admiration for Whitman. In this same letter, he writes that "after the great colossal poets, Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, and ??,[124] there will be something better pondered, deeper, but nothing so immediate and

[122] The private lessons with Ferrari started in 1879 and ended in 1882-1883. For more on this, see Torquato Barbieri, "I maestri d'inglese di Giosué Carducci," *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 15 (1977): 163-175.

[123] Letter from Carducci to Nencioni of August 26, 1881. My translation. The letter is also reproduced in Lesca, and in volume 13 of Giosuè Carducci, *Lettere* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1951), 172.

[124] Question marks present in the original.

original. It's a shame and a damnation that I understand so little of English."[125] Is this admiration reflected in Carducci's writing of these years? The second edition of the *Odi barbare*, entitled *Nuove odi barbare*, came out in 1882 (precisely in the period of time when Carducci was translating Whitman with his teacher and writing about him in his letters to Nencioni). The *Nuove odi barbare* received the immediate praise of, among others, Nencioni.[126] The edition is obviously characterized by an extensive use of the Carduccian barbaric metrics: the poem-manifesto "Ragioni metriche" ("Metrical reasons") explains that hendecasyllables are too slow to measure Italic beauty, and that the triumphal, heroic hexameter (the same meter he had declared to want to use for translating Whitman) is needed, instead. There are many latinisms, and the register is high and often archaic. Homer is often invoked, together with Pindar, Horace, and Petrarch, and images of muses and goddesses populate the pages. But Carducci's diction sounds unusual, new. There are no rhymes, and there are frequent anaphoras. Carducci often builds long sequences of tracking shots that come close to Whitman, both formally and thematically. We see these features in "Sogno d'estate" ("Summer Dream"):

> […]
> Off went the child with little steps of pride,
> superb with motherly love, struck in the heart
> by that immense feast that the nourishing nature was singing.
>
> […]
> and on peaks and on the valley, up on the winds, up on branches, up on waters,
> the spiritual melody of spring was running;

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[125] Letter from Carducci to Nencioni of August 26, 1881. My translation.

[126] The two friends would in fact constantly offer feedback about each other's creative work. While Nencioni was mostly a critic, he would also publish a few collections of conventional poems characterized by an extensive use of regular metrics and of high registers, and often, by a melodramatic tone and an almost obsessive focus on death. See for example, his *Poesie. Lo spedale. Un paradiso perduto. Varie* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1880).

> and peach trees and apples trees all were flowered with whites and reds,
> and below, with yellow and turquoise flowers smiled the grass
> and the red clover clothed the slopes of the meadows,
> and softened by golden brooms stood the hills,
> and a sweet air moving between those flowers and smells
> came down from the sea; on the sea four candid sails
> went and went rocking slowly in the sun,
> that splendidly circumscribed the sea and land and sky.[127]

These passages strongly evoke Whitman's "There Was a Child Went Forth," and there are even identical images: the clover, the apple-tree, the white and red flowers, the fragrance of the sea, all appearing, in both texts, in a long anaphoric catalogue, and the larger mythopoetical idea of the poet-child passing through, observing, absorbing. Of course, figures like the drunkard or the schoolboys do not appear in Carducci, as they are not compatible with his dignified tone.

The poem "Saluto italico" ("Italic Salute") might also recall "Salut au Monde." Carducci's poem addresses the recuperated ancient verses and assigns them with the mission of drawing a panning shot of Italic historical landmarks, in order to re-write and consolidate Italian identity and to exult in the final climax, "Italia! Italia! Italia!". In this sense, Carducci's poem is far from Whitman's universal and all-embracing vision of the world. But this can read as Carducci's adaptation of Whitman's poem to his priorities as poet, scholar, and intellectual: strengthening Italian political and cultural identity, by strengthening its literature. And for Carducci, this could only be done by going back to

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[127] Original: "Andava il fanciullo con piccolo passo di gloria, / superbo de l'amore materno, percosso nel core / da quella festa immensa che l'alma natura intonava. […] e su le cime e al piano, per l'aure, pe' rami, per l'acque, / correa la melodia spiritale di primavera; / ed i peschi ed i meli tutti eran fior' bianchi e vermigli, / e fior' gialli e turchini ridea tutta l'erba al di sotto,/ ed il trifoglio rosso vestiva i declivii de' prati, / e molli d'auree ginestre si paravano i colli, / e un'aura dolce movendo quei fiori e gli odori / veniva giú dal mare; nel mar quattro candide vele / andavano andavano cullandosi lente nel sole, / che mare e terra e cielo sfolgorante circonfondeva." See Giosuè Carducci, *Nuove odi barbare* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1882), 22. My translation.

the origins: to Italic peoples, and to the classics. The multiple anaphoras, a similar inclusive tone and an incredibly far-stretched and God-like vision, as if from above, are evident and strong common traits.

This second edition also presents a few poems that seem incredibly modern in diction, as compared to the main bulk of the collection. For example, "Una sera di San Pietro" ("An evening of Saint Peter"):

> I remember. The sun between red vapors and warm
> clouds went down to the sea as a big shield of copper
> that in barbaric combats sparkles fluttering then falls
> […]
> Me languid and sad (not long since I had the Maremman
> fever, and my nerves weighed as if made of lead).
> […][128]

With its longer, accumulative lines and enjambments, a more colloquial lexicon, the use of parenthesis, and a more somber and intimate tone, this poem could be placed near poetry that would be written a couple of decades later, in Italy, and it symbolizes the profound modernity that actually resides at the heart of Carducci's classicist experiment.

It is in this continuous negotiation between tradition and innovation that the first phases of the creative reinvention of Whitman's work take place, both in Italy and in other countries. As I have observed, Whitman was mainly appreciated for his political resonance, his writings about American identity and democracy. He was also admired, often idealized and invoked as a model, for the renovated and yet classical weight of his diction. Some echoes of Whitman started to appear in the poetry of others. The first,

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[128] Original: "Ricordo. Il sole fra i rossi vapori e le nubi / calde al mare scendeva, come un grande clipeo di rame / che in barbariche pugne corrusca ondeggiando poi cade. […] Io languido e triste (da poco avea scosso la febbre / maremmana, ed i nervi pesavammi come di piombo)." See Giosuè Carducci, *Nuove odi barbare*, 85. My translation.

timid advancements in the understanding of his forms were also taking place. Often divided and ambivalent about this, critics, translators and writers would debate whether this was poetry or prose, or something in between. Some said it was music. Some recognized the impasse and resolved it by saying that it did not matter.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the second phase of the reception, investigating two decades, the 1890s and 1900s, in which many new translators, writers, critics, and readers, entered the ongoing dialogue with Whitman's work. I will discuss the new emerging elements of this phase, but also reveal various threads of continuity with the first phase that I have just explored. In this sense, I will start precisely by discussing the work of three Italian writers who were younger than Carducci and Nencioni, and who gravitated around them, while beginning their careers: Ada Negri, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Giovanni Pascoli. While Negri would write to both Nencioni and Carducci (an inspiring poetic model for her) to respectfully ask for advice and support, and Pascoli would be one of Carducci's students in Bologna, D'Annunzio was so close to Nencioni[129] that he would announce his visit to him in Florence by writing: "we will get so drunk with poetry, my dear Enrico."[130]

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[129] D'Annunzio would dedicate his collection of poems entitled *Elegie romane* to Nencioni in 1892.

[130] Letter of December 11, 1887 from D'Annunzio to Nencioni. Manuscript available in the special collections of Biblioteca Marucelliana, Florence. For the relationship between D'Annunzio and Nencioni, see Giuseppe Fantini, "D'Annunzio e Nencioni," *Quaderni dannunziani* 18-19 (1960): 645-704.

CHAPTER TWO: The Turn of the Century Scene, 1890s-1900s

1. "The Giant of Free America": Ada Negri's Socialist Perspective and Creative Dialogue with Whitman

In February 1893, the anti-clerical, liberal-democratic periodical *Il figurinaio* published Ada Negri's article "Il gigante della libera America" ("The Giant of Free America").[131] Negri, a twenty-three year old poet and teacher, discussed Whitman's poetry with a passionate tone of admiration. She had published her first collection of poems, *Fatalità*, only one year earlier, and the book, focused on social and working class issues, was very favorably received. Thanks to the book's success, the poet had just been offered a prestigious advance in her career as a teacher: from the countryside near Milan, where she had been teaching elementary school, Negri moved to Milan itself, where she started teaching high school. There Negri would take part in a circle of people which included some of the first members of the newly formed Italian Socialist Party: Filippo Turati, Anna Kuliscioff, and Benito Mussolini. Turati and the others appreciated Negri's work for its political weight and its treatment of poverty, social and gender inequality, and class struggle.

Decades later, Mussolini himself, having become the leader of the fascist regime, would continue to admire Negri, whose work had shifted toward patriotic themes after

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[131] See Ada Negri, "Il gigante della libera America," *Il figurinaio* 5, 8 (February 9 1893): 2-3. The biweekly periodical, based in the Tuscan city of Lucca, was active from 1889 to 1895. Only a few libraries in Italy still own copies of it. I was able to retrieve this rare piece by Negri thanks to the help of librarians at the Fondazione Gramsci Emilia-Romagna, in Bologna. All passages from the article quoted here are translated by me.

the first World War. Negri never denied her sympathy for Mussolini and for the regime.[132] The poet received the 1931 Mussolini award and, later, she became the first, and only, woman poet to be selected as a member of the Italian Academy, the cultural institution founded by the regime (operating between 1929 and 1944) with the aim of officially promoting and coordinating the "best" Italian intellectual activities.

Negri's critical piece on Whitman has never been taken into consideration in the few existing critical assessments of Whitman's reception in Italy,[133] perhaps because of its rarity, or perhaps because of the widespread tendency, in these studies, to privilege more well-known male critics' and writers' contributions. And yet, this is a document of paramount importance. The essay clearly stands at the crossroads of a few lines of interpretation of Whitman's work in Italy. Negri inherited much from the Rossettian/Nencionian approach and updated and adapted it to her socialist agenda. But Negri also uses a language and an emphasis that come close to later, early fascist and futurist readings of Whitman. More precisely, Negri's article is the textual *locus* in which the post-risorgimental champion of democracy created by Rossetti, the "healthy" writer capable of chanting America and the future with a renovated epic energy, described by

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[132] On Negri and Mussolini's friendship and correspondence, and on the reasons for Negri's adhesion to fascism, see Patrizia Guida, "Ada Negri: una scrittrice fascista?," *Quaderni d'italianistica: revue officielle de la Société canadienne pour les études italiennes* 13, 2 (2002): 45-58. Guida clarifies how Negri, notwithstanding the fact that she never rejected the regime, cannot be fully labeled as an actively "fascist writer" as her work only rarely supported fascism directly. The last phase of Negri's writing, which corresponded chronologically with the acme of fascism, would be characterized, for example, by an intense spiritual introspection.

[133] The article is never discussed by Grippi and Meliadò Freeth in their dissertations, nor by Asselineau or Cambon in their articles. McCain briefly mentions Negri's article, with reference to the fact that Biagio Brugi, for his 1894 speech at the Sciences and Arts Academy in Padova, quoted from her. See McCain "Walt Whitman in Italy," 11.

Nencioni, is in the process of being transformed into the legendary, absolute source of revolt that will alternatively appeal to both socialism and early fascism.

The article also exemplifies Negri's complex and controversial profile and contribution within the Italian literary, cultural and political scene of the time. Always a proud and passionate free thinker, Negri was a convinced socialist who ended up adhering to fascism because of the similarities that, at least initially, she (and not only she, but many other Italian writers and intellectuals) perceived between the two political movements. A few central themes that appear in this piece on Whitman—specifically, the rebellious rejection of academia and aristocracy, the search for revolutionary models of renovated strength, the emphasis on the importance of work—would be also at the core of early fascism. But the article also reminds us of the main differences: Negri is still firmly socialist in her pacifism and internationalism, in her appreciation of Whitman's depiction of the dignity of the humblest people. Finally, the article shows how Negri, even while perhaps not classically a feminist[134] like her friend Anna Kuliscioff, the leader of the suffragette movement in Italy, still underlined Whitman's equalization of the sexes, and was non-conformist enough to provocatively engage a taboo topic like sex.

And while not iconoclastically innovative, Negri helped renovate Italian poetry, both in terms of content and form. As an emerging writer, Negri admired the work of Carducci and Nencioni. She wrote to both, asking for guidance and advice, and thanked

[134] While Negri would extensively portray the conditions of women, especially those of the working class, she would also, especially later in her career, promote traditional and anti-emancipatory models of motherhood and of the role of women in society.

them for their favorable judgement of her first books.[135] Her first production was close to Carducci's diction and thematic interests. She closely followed Nencioni's critical work, which she estimated as "robust and profound,"[136] and she might have first heard about Whitman in Nencioni's essays. But there is also another source for Negri's appreciation of Whitman, and of the American lands and identity that he came to represent, in Negri's estimation: Ettore Patrizi, a journalist and political activist whom Negri met in Milan (in the same socialist group of which Mussolini was part) and with whom she had a romantic relationship.

Patrizi migrated to the United States in March 1893,[137] and a few months before doing this, in June 1892, he sent a copy of Whitman's book–most probably the collected volume of Gamberale's 1887 and 1890 translations[138]–to Ada. This parallels what would happen a few years later for another couple of Italian letters that I will discuss in the third and fourth chapter: Sibilla Aleramo and Dino Campana, whose correspondence, which resulted in a love story, started with a reference to Whitman, a shared favorite of the two. Ada's reaction to receiving and reading the book is reported by her in the June 12, 1892 letter to Patrizi:

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[135] See for example, Negri's letter to Nencioni, of September 2, 1893 and that to Carducci, of February 2, 1896. The first letter is available at the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Florence, the second can be consulted at Carducci's house in Bologna.

[136] Negri's words are taken from her September 2, 1893 letter to Nencioni, mentioned above. My translation.

[137] Patrizi boarded the steamboat Kaiser Wilhem for New York in Genova on March 23, 1893. See Paola Maurizi, *Ettore Patrizi, Ada Negri e la musica* (Perugia: Morlacchi editore, 2007), 17.

[138] Negri refers to poems that appear in Gamberale's second volume of translations: she does misquote a couple of them probably by citing them from memory without double-checking the actual text, but it is evident that the textual corpus she refers to is the 1891 volume.

> Immediately, I must write to you immediately, I am so happy to have Walt Whitman, you cannot imagine how much. This morning, when I saw [the book] and thought it was mine, I jumped, you can laugh, my mom laughed, too, but I did jump. I have it here, I have already read a few pages, a few sublime pages, and my soul has already fused with the big universal soul of the poet.[139]

A few passages in the letter would later on, in slightly revised form, appear in a critical article by Negri displaying a fascination with the new horizons not only of Whitman's poetry, but of America itself. Patrizi, who was about to leave, was enormously attracted to the "freedom, civilization, the virile and gigantic enterprises and the parabolic and fantastic progresses" that he associated with America.[140] Negri understood Patrizi's excitement, and even encouraged him to migrate, although she hoped he would come back, and she repeatedly contemplated whether to join him (and never did). The two corresponded until 1896, when they finally ended their challenging long-distance relationship. Patrizi remained in the States, where he would spend the rest of his life: first in Chicago and then in San Francisco, working as editor and publisher of the newspaper *L'Italia*, and as a producer of opera shows.[141] It is important, then, to keep in mind how, given these circumstances, at the moment of writing this article, in the winter of 1893, a few weeks before Patrizi's departure to the United States, Negri was

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[139] The letter is reproduced in Giacomo Pellicanò, *Due vite una storia. Le lettere di Ada Negri a Ettore Patrizi 1892-1896* (Orvieto: Intermedia edizioni, 2017), 46. My translation. I am grateful to Pellicanò for having shared the preview of his book with me.

[140] Patrizi's words are reported in Pellicanò, 108.

[141] It is interesting to note that Patrizi, just as Negri and as other figures who had been part of the same socialist and progressivist political group in which Mussolini had played an important role before founding the fascist party, would follow their friend's example and adhere to fascism. In 1942, Patrizi received the order to leave San Francisco by the city's government, because of the pro-fascist views of his newspaper.

particularly sensitive to Whitman's work and to the idea of America, which had come to assume a certain exciting, mythical aura both in her ideology and in her emotional life.

The article by Negri is preceded by an unsigned short foreword (presumably written by a member of the periodical's editorial staff). The foreword starts immediately with a polemic note, lamenting how Whitman's death, in 1892, had gone almost unnoticed in Italy: the piece by Negri is then presented, with a certain tone of pride, as some compensation. But the author of the foreword also makes clear how this lack of attention to the loss of the poet that he/she defines as "one of the greatest sons, one of the most powerful and most original geniuses" (2) not only of America, but of "*the whole Humanity*,"[142] is not the only disappointing aspect of Whitman's reputation in Italy at the time. Another problem denounced here is the widespread critical attitude held by many "phony literati [and] big and small critics" (2) who denied to Whitman the rank of poet. This leads us back to one of the main issues that characterized the first phase of the reception: the inadequate understanding of the formal, poetic nature of Whitman's writing, even when appreciating his content and scope. This part of the foreword reads

> If the word poet was today understood in its truest, highest and most magical sense, we would call this *yankee* who coordinates his thoughts and deeds with a vast and very elevated humanitarian ideal, who aligns the strong vibrations of his intellect and the generous pulsations of his heart with the big and small actions of his daily life, a poet. A poet we would call, this humanitarian, this thinker who sings the praises of democracy and prophesies it and hastens its arrival with the mastery of his powerful art. (2)

While arguing for the need of finally, fully recognizing Whitman as a poet and devoting him the attention he deserves, this passage also clearly lays out the author's (and perhaps, more largely, the periodical's) view of what a poet should be: an individual guided by a

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[142] Italics present in the original.

strong humanitarian ideal, someone able to address intellect and heart, the big and the small, in the continuous effort to describe and build a more fully democratic world. These ideas animate Negri's poetry at the time, and the ideology of the periodical she collaborated with. And in fact, on a last note, in presenting Negri to the readers, the author of the foreword builds a direct parallel between her work and that of Whitman, arguing that she "has in common with him the same aspirations and inspirations, [the same] noble and generous mission of art." (2)

Negri's critical piece starts with the translation of the lines "Camerado! this is no book; /Who touches this, touches a man!" from Whitman's "So Long!"[143] Negri's first paragraph reinforces this idea: readers can feel, she passionately remarks, the touch of a "new and violent iron hand that drags [them]," "a surge of boiling, healthy blood spilling in [their] veins." (2) This insistence on the strength, health, and physicality of Whitman's poetry is something that the Italian futurists, later on, would also emphasize with regard to the "new man" that Whitman, and his work, represented for them.[144] Negri persists in noting that this robust temperament (and its accompanying joy and pride) are the primary traits of Whitman's writing. "No weakness, no sentimentality, no degeneration of sense, character or taste" (2) are detectable in this poetry, Negri argues.

This impetuously anti-romantic and anti-decadent assessment by Negri is the product of a freshly radicalized, socialist response to the post-risorgimental appeals by

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[143] See Walt Whitman, "So Long!," in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 382. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[144] For more on this, see, the reflection on the central presence of the idea of blood in the writings of Italian futurists, when commenting on Whitman's poetry, in Marina Camboni, "Le *Foglie d'erba* di Walt Whitman e la ricezione italiana," 369.

Nencioni to build, *via* Whitman, a poetry of renovated civic strength, and of Carducci's experiments and example in this sense.[145] In fact Negri's words in this passage and even the title of the article, directly echo Nencioni's words (which were praised by Carducci as expressed in his letter) about Whitman in one of his articles: "simple, strict, rude, and colossal."[146] And it is precisely in this idea of Whitman's colossal, gigantic "sanity" that Negri's socialism meets early fascism: only a few years later this idea would escalate into the futurist and fascist legend of an ultra-masculine, infallible, Nietzschian, omnipotent Whitman. Another legend, that of the new, free world of futurity also originates here, in the description of the American lands, which Negri represents as virgin and wild, primordially healthy and grandiose: their offspring inevitably being a "new race full of the future."(2)[147]

For Negri, it is only natural that the energies of such a robust, powerful poet would be applied to what she regards as the manifestation "of the highest and most useful form of human strength" (2): work. Negri underlines how Whitman sings what had traditionally remained quite unexplored topics in poetry: the triumphs of industrialism and technology and the value of human labor. She lists and briefly describes poems like "Song of the Exposition," "A Song of Joys," and "Song of the Broad Axe," which she defines as one of the most wonderful pieces in the book. She also remarks how these

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[145] Significantly, in her letter to Carducci of February 2, 1896, Negri would write: "And thank you, thank you with all my heart, great master, to whom all of us, from the young generation of poets, owe so much of our lively blood." My translation.

[146] Enrico Nencioni, "Nuovi orizzonti poetici," 1881. Carducci praises the article in his letter of August 26, 1881, to Nencioni. The letter can be consulted at Carducci's house in Bologna.

[147] These same words had appeared earlier, in the June 12 1892 letter to Patrizi.

poems often include snapshots of a vast range of working activities, from intellectual to manual work, including the humblest ones.

This leads her to discuss her next point: Whitman's democracy. Negri underlines here how Whitman chants of both "virility and femininity," (2) demonstrating a much more comprehensive understanding than that of the futurists for which Whitman's poetry would only embody the ultra-masculine. Negri is fascinated with Whitman's ability to equalize and "level off" humanity, to chant the "divine average," (2) to use his words. In his vision, Negri argues, there is no space for any old form of aristocracy or hierarchy, but only for one, compact, median social body made by "camerados and workers." (2) It is curious to note that Italian and German fascism would use terms equivalent to "camerado" in referring to their members. In this sense, the pairing of this particular word by Negri with "workers" can be seen as exemplifying the common ground shared by early fascism and socialism, and perhaps even to summarize her experience as a supporter of both ideologies.

But Negri's ideological framework in evaluating Whitman is distinct from that of futurism and of postwar fascism because it remains strongly democratic and internationalist. For Negri, "Years of the Modern," is the highest, most perfect expression of Whitman's poetry, the most vital expression of his vision: Whitman is here the prophet of the future advancement not only of America, but all of nations, united together, having finally reached that "mature and perfect degree of equality and solidarity to which [humanity] must certainly rise, by evolution or by revolution." (2)

While the internationalism and democracy evoked and praised here by Negri would not be at the center of the futurist and fascist agendas, the idea of rejecting any

form of aristocracy would remain a crucial ideological staple of these movements, as well. This same rejection of aristocracy and academia becomes apparent in this piece when Negri discusses how to evaluate Whitman's literary value: it cannot be described by traditional, academic—"useless, idle and almost ridiculous" (3)—literary criticism, but it must be experienced and loved. Whitman is then, in this piece, fully recognized as a poet, in the "truest" sense, to evoke the expression used in the foreword, but, at the same time, he is once again, although this time for different reasons, seen as inaccessible for traditional literary criticism.

The weight of the Rossettian and Nencionian influence, with regard to the emphasis given to Whitman's war poems, is echoed by Negri, who dedicates a long paragraph, toward the end of the article, to discussing what she considers as Whitman's sincerest and most touching writing: *Drum Taps* and *Specimen Days.* Here Negri calls, echoing the critics who had preceded her, and especially Nencioni, the American Civil War "the most grandiose war ever fought by the modern man in the name of Democracy." (2) But, most importantly, she ultimately interprets Whitman's writing about the war as a message of peace, or what Negri calls "the only means for the prosperity and progress of the Nations." (2) Negri's stress on Whitman's pacifism remains one of the most innovative and relevant aspects of this essay and is perhaps what most fundamentally sets her apart from later futurist and fascist readings and appropriations of Whitman's poetry.

In another remarkable passage toward the very end, Negri discusses Whitman's depiction of love: almost never ideal or romantic, but almost always physical, sexual, and often descriptive of reproductive acts. Earlier in the article, Negri had underlined how

even orgies are present in this poetry, as they are also an expression of the depiction of vitality which is at the center of Whitman's poetics. But Negri's reflections on Whitman's depictions of sexuality remain reductive and anchored to her general discourse about the health and sanity of this poetry: sex, she argues, is always "sane and fertile" (3) in Whitman. In other words, sex in Whitman's poetry remains for Negri eminently heterosexual, and eminently "useful" for reproduction.

Nonetheless, the simple fact that Negri, a woman—and an unmarried, very young, "exceptional" woman as an intellectual, teacher, and published writer—even discusses (and not subtly, but outspokenly) these themes in 1893, remains outstanding. Many Italian and international critics who had written about Whitman's work up to this moment and later would not even dare to write the word "sex" once, let alone the word "orgy." Negri's choice to write about carnal matters highlights her wish to alter the gender expectations of her era. It is not coincidental that Negri, almost three decades later, in 1921, would publish one of the most "scandalous" books in Italian literary history for its frank depiction of love and passion, *Il libro di Mara.*

Negri's ardent, frank, and courageous piece, closes with the expression of the writer's strong desire to see Whitman's work present in all libraries, all hands, and translated in all languages, in order to be a companion and guide for all, from thinkers to industrialists, to workers and teachers. Echoing the foreword's complaint about the scarce attention given to Whitman's death in Italy, Negri seems to confirm the impression that the American poet was at the moment still under-appreciated. This closing passage resounds with all the enthusiasm, openness to foreign cultures, and active search for

alternative political models, that characterized the Italian socialist group in its nascent phase.

Is Negri's enthusiasm for Whitman's poetry reproduced and manifested in her poetical work? Can we trace the presence of such an influence by looking at the first two collections of poems[148] that Negri published around these same years, and about which she would write to Nencioni and Carducci to ask for opinions and suggestions? Was the author of the foreword that precedes Negri's article right in assessing a certain closeness of forms and contents between Negri and Whitman? Once again, her letter of June 12 1892 to Patrizi is highly informative. In it, she wrote

> I confess something to you: Whitman has said that which was sprouting in my mind. I did have similar thoughts: but the word had not revealed itself to me. I also confess something else to you: I wrote, two days ago, a poem: "Workplace deaths." It was a sublime hour for me; in that moment I loved, I loved so much those poor broken bones of the workers, that that poem is not only a poem, but a part of myself. And then: reading today "The Mother of All"[149] by Whitman, I noticed that the general concept of this poem is similar to that expressed in the final part of my poem. Only in Walt there are dead soldiers on the field and the poet asks the air, the soil, the woods, to give him back, in centuries, the dear blood of the brothers, in atoms, in essences, in blades of grass, in whispers; I impose on the blood of the dead workers to transform into golden grapes that can give wine to all. […] Therefore there is a different development. Right? Please reassure me, they won't say that it is plagiarism! … it would be unfair![150]

Notwithstanding her anxiety about possible suggestions of plagiarism, Negri's "Workplace Deaths" would be published in 1893.[151] The poem does indeed resemble

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[148] Negri's *Fatalità* came out in 1892, while *Tempeste* was published in 1895.

[149] Negri is referring to Whitman's "Pensive on her Dead Gazing," which appears in Gamberale's 1887 volume (and then in the collected 1891 one) with the Italian re-title of "La madre di tutto" ("The Mother of All").

[150] In Pellicanò, 51-52. My translation.

[151] See "Le vittime del lavoro," *Vita Moderna* 2, 5 (January 29 1893): 33.

Whitman's elegy, in its dramatic evocation of the tragic deaths of the lost youths, and in its prayer to the earth to absorb their energies and even their bodies, so that they can live again through it. The original has rhyme, but there is a strong oratorical afflatus and a similar reliance on an anaphoric, climactic structure. And Negri also establishes a parallel with the war and asks polemically who erects monuments for workers, who are nothing less than "soldiers with the mallet and pickaxe":

> Sons of the shadows, heroes of matter
>   curved under an unripe yoke
> […]
>
> They all fell: - under debris,
>   from a bridge, into a ditch
> in the infernal blaze of the forge
>   their bones broken and scattered;
>
> […]
>
> Who remembers the numerous regiment
>   fallen into deep oblivion?...
> On the smashed bones who cries
> who kneels down on the muted grave?...
>
> For the soldiers with the mallet and pickaxe
>   who erects monuments [?]
> [..]
>
> These hearts, these muscular chests
>   live again underground.
> Pure blood of the defeated and the rejected
> Tremble, ferment, fecundate the earth:
>
> [..]
>
> May the world drink your juices, o lively blood,
>
> […]
>
> May, like a vivid wave that rolls and broadens,

Life flow again.[152]

But resemblances to Whitman's work appear also in Negri's first book of poems, *Fatalità*, published a few months before the article discussed above. Interestingly, the book came out before the moment when Patrizi gave Negri Whitman's book as a gift. This might mean that Negri had read Whitman before that time (the letter to Patrizi seems to imply this: her tone indicates that she knows Whitman already, and in fact cherishes the gift even more, because of this). The collection is characterized by a certain Carduccian, therefore classicist—and yet innovative—diction. While traditional rhyming is maintained and refined lexicon is employed, there is a clear (and often overemphatic) oratorical quality, and the lines are, if still regular, rather long. Negri exhibits a strong lyrical I, an accumulative and often repetitive style. There are frequent and intimate addresses to the reader, and long lists of non-hierarchically organized images, often scenes of working class life. There is also an extensive use of long dashes and of exclamations. Thematically, there are quite a few echoes from Whitman. One of the most explicit ones can be found in Negri's "Il canto della zappa" ("Song of the Hoe,") in which the hoe itself speaks, explaining its own symbolic value of dignity and hope, a positive sign for a more democratic and peaceful future. The work of the hoe continues incessantly, fired with the desire of becoming the symbol of the people's triumph, one day. One passage here is particularly resonant with Whitman's "Song of the Broad Axe":

But the blades will be free from blood,

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[152] Original: "Figli dell'ombra, eroi della materia, curvati a giogo acerbo, / […] / Caddero tutti: - sotto una ruina, da un ponte, in una fossa, / Nel bagliore infernal d'una fucina, frante e disperse l'ossa; / […] / Chi ricorda l'innumere falange nel grave oblio perduta? … / Sopra le frantumate ossa chi piange, / Chi s'inginocchia su la tomba muta? …/ Ai soldati del maglio e del piccone chi erige monumenti [?]/ […] / Questi cuori, muscolosi petti, rivivete sottoterra. / Puro sangue di vinti e di reietti, / Fremi, ribolli, feconda la terra: / […] / Beva il mondo i tuoi succhi, o vivo sangue, / […] / Scorra e s'allarghi come vivid'onda / Un rifluir di vita." My translation.

> and white will be the flags;
> [….]
> and from the earth saturated with love,
> […]
> will rise a hymn and a cry
> "Peace…work…bread!"[153]

Here, Whitman's line "I see the blood wash'd entirely away from the axe"[154] and the overall exulting tone of the closing stanzas come to mind. Negri's optimistic song identifies the hoe as the literal embodiment of a poetry that depicts the dignity of labor and that works at establishing the conditions for a future, more just and democratic society. While Negri's poem remains much shorter than Whitman's, and certainly less complicated and dualistic than Whitman's, the same optimistic vision of progress and advancement embodied by a human tool of daily use lies at its base.

In *Fatalità*, the lyrical I is often depicted as content to wander in the woods, in harmony with a nature that, just as in Whitman, regenerates and inspires pure freedom, of thought and of action. In "Arrivo" ("Arrival,") Negri writes:

> Freedom, unrestrained freedom
> was mine, was mine! … If you knew how
> beautiful it is to burst alone and disheveled
> in the forests and fields,
> without rigid laces and without name,
> the eye full of lightning![155]

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[153] Original: "Ma le lame saran pure di sangue, e bianchi gli stendardi; / […] / e da la terra satura d'amore, / […] / salirà come un inno ed un singulto: "Pace! …. lavoro! …. pane! …". Ada Negri, "Il canto della zappa" [*Fatalità* 1892], in *Ada Negri. Opere scelte*, ed. Elena Cazzulani (Lodi: Il Pomerio, 1995), 45. My translation.

[154] See Walt Whitman, "Song of the Broad Axe" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 154. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[155] Original: "La libertà, la libertà sfrenata / fu mia, fu mia! … Se tu sapessi come / è bello irromper sola e scapigliata tra le foreste e i campi, / senza rigidi lacci e senza nome, pieno l'occhio di lampi!". Ada Negri, "Arrivo" in *Tempeste* (Milano: Treves, 1895), 111. My translation.

Whitman's cosmic consciousness is also repeatedly evoked in Negri's poems: the lyrical I can be both a seed and a God, a leaf of grass and a bird, and there is a similar overarching, all-embracing desire to express the value of life in all its forms. Likewise, there are many metatexual reflections on the sense of the renovated epic breadth of this poetry. In the poem "Immortal," which echoes some ideas used by Negri in her article (the boiling blood, the physical strength and health, the ardent temperament) and presents Whitmanian anaphoric catalogues that portray nursing mothers, tired fathers, soldiers, woods, and mountains, the lyrical I declares to be singing "an uncontrollable, untamable hymn;/ simple as wheat, robust as man, / eternal like the sun!..."[156].

In *Tempeste*, published in 1895, Negri also echoed Whitman, this time with reference to his more erotic poems, which she knew well as her article makes clear. In "Eppur ti tradirò" ("And yet I will betray you,") a lyrical I is addressing a mysterious "you," asking to "not be jealous" and to be let free to live "one hour of joy and madness," which sound extremely close to Whitman's "One Hour of Madness and Joy," not only for the literally repeated expression (except for an inverted order of the nouns), but for the general request to be liberated, "confined not." Finally, *Maternità*, a collection published by Negri a few years later, in 1904, would also remain close to Whitman's diction.[157]

Negri's perception of the enormous revolutionary force of Whitman's poetry testifies to a widespread sentiment among critics and writers around the world during the

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[156] Original: "[…] un inno irrefrenato, indomo; / semplice come spica, robusto come l'uomo, / eterno come il sol! ...". Ada Negri, "Immortale" in *Tempeste*, 120. My translation.

[157] *Maternità* is in fact characterized by an experimentation with long lines and with the use of anaphora. Thematically, the collection concentrates on motherhood, but a strong echo from Whitman is still present with Negri's "Saluto fraterno" ("Brotherly salute") which might be directly echoing Whitman's "To a Stranger."

turn of the century phase of the reception. After Whitman's death in 1892, the mythical aura that had already been assigned to him while he was still alive (as in the works of, among others, Rossetti, Nencioni and Darío) tremendously intensified. And Whitman became, more and more, a standard bearer for different political and cultural agendas. Socialist readings of the American poet as the "giant" of a cosmic, democratic and humanitarian poetry, as the one given by Negri, were certainly numerous, if not preponderant. What the Russian critic N. Popov, as early as 1883, had defined as "the spirit of revolt and pride" of the poet who was "a champion of working-class solidarity and the brotherhood of all nations,"[158] had become recognized as a distinctive Whitmanian trait in many cultures. In 1887, José Martí had described Whitman, and his "America," in terms that sound extremely close to Negri's:

> The free and decorous life of man in a new continent has created a healthy and robust philosophy which is reaching out to the world in athletic epodes. To the largest sum of free men and of workers that the earth has ever seen, corresponds a poetry of unity and faith, tranquilizing and solemn, which raises, like the sun from the sea, firing up the clouds.[159]

In 1889, Rolleston and Knortz had published their first translation into German, centered on democratic ideals.[160] And as Kirsten Harris notes, in these same years British socialists, from Ernest Rhys to Edward Carpenter promoted Whitman's poetry seeing it as a means "to speak to and for the socialist cause, to be charged with a special socialist

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[158] Popov's words are reported in Yassen Zassoursky, "Whitman's Reception and Influence in the Soviet Union," in *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street,* ed. Geoffrey Sill (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 44.

[159] José Martí, "El poeta Walt Whitman," *El partido liberal* (April 1887). Available online at https://archive.org/stream/ElPoetaWaltWhitman-JoseMarti/ElPoetaWaltWhitman-JoseMarti_djvu.txt. My translation.

[160] See Grünzweig, 152.

significance."[161] Russian poet Konstantin Bal'mont likewise claimed to be finishing his translations from Whitman to the sound of the revolutionary guns, in 1905. And Bal'mont would declare that Whitman was "a part, and a strong part, of that future which is swiftly coming toward us, which is, indeed, already being made in the present. Ideal Democracy. Full Sovereignity of the people…Whitman spoke of it."[162]

But for now, we must remain in Italy, and discuss the work of another poet who, like Negri, was a direct disciple of Carducci and, most of all, of Nencioni, and who would inherit their readings of Whitman and apply them and adapt them to his new unique, controversial and flamboyant poetical and ideological enterprises: Gabriele D'Annunzio.

2. "My Big Sympathy": Whitman and D'Annunzio

In contrast to the relatively neglected Ada Negri, Gabriele D'Annunzio has been the single Italian poet on whom critics have concentrated the most when discussing Whitman's influence on Italian literature.[163] There are a few reasons for this: D'Annunzio's canonical centrality within late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Italian letters, his rich, innovative and influential production as both poet and prose writer, the myth that formed around his bizarre and megalomaniac personality

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[161] See Harris, "Introduction," 1-2.

[162] Bal'mont's words are reported and translated in Stephen Stepanchev, "Whitman in Russia," 293-294.

[163] See Meliadò Freeth "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana," 153-184; Grippi, 75-90; Asselineau, 262-263. See also Franco Ferrucci, "Whitman e D'Annunzio," *Strumenti critici* 13 (1998): 185-198; Caterina Ricciardi, "Da Whitman a D'Annunzio verso il Modernismo" in *Gabriele D'Annunzio e la cultura inglese e Americana*, ed. Patrizia Nerozzi (Chieti: Solfanelli, 1990), 101-118; Mario Praz, "D'Annunzio e la letteratura anglosassone" in his *Il patto col serpente – Paralipomeni di "La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica"* (Milano: Mondadori, 1972), 418-419.

during his life and after his death, his military and political activism and his connections with the fascist regime. And—last, but certainly not least—the extremely large number of direct and indirect allusions to Whitman's poetry, for which the Italian poet, as early as 1896, was even accused of plagiarism.

But, while critics have commented on D'Annunzio's admiration and imitation of Whitman, they have done little to clarify the various phases of this literary relationship.[164] In my analysis, I will show how the presence of Whitman, "my big sympathy,"[165] in the words used by D'Annunzio, evolved with the passing of time, playing different roles at different moments within the Italian poet's long career. Rooted, at first, in Nencioni's perspective, D'Annunzio's appreciation of Whitman evolved in dialogue with his own decadent and aestheticizing sensibility, as it was filtered through Nietzsche's theory of the overman, as echoed more deeply in D'Annunzio's experimentation with free verse, and as it expanded during his frequenting of Paris literary salons. Finally, D'Annunzio went back to rediscovering the emphasis that Rossetti and Nencioni had put on the political Whitman, in order to support and justify his activism in the post-first World War Fiume enterprise.

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[164] Freeth might be the only exception in this sense, as she does distinguish various phases. But she limits the nationalistic phase of D'Annunzio's reading of Whitman to the 1890s, and does not consider the employment of Whitman's words by D'Annunzio during the Fiume enterprise in 1918. Grippi's analysis builds on Freeth's, but remains quite superficial. Asselineau only briefly mentions D'Annunzio, and directly echoes Freeth's work. Ferrucci skips the initial role of Nencioni for D'Annunzio's knowledge and appreciation of Whitman, and only discusses his later production, and especially the works in which D'Annunzio employs free verse. Ricciardi underlines the proto-modernist Whitmanian elements employed by D'Annunzio (and builds an interesting parallel with Ezra Pound).

[165] This expression is used by D'Annunzio in his letter to Nencioni of April 17, 1884. The letter is reproduced in Renato Forcella, "Lettere ad Enrico Nencioni (1880-1896)," *Nuova Antologia* 18 (May 1 1939): 14.

These different phases can be delineated by studying D'Annunzio's works and letters and by examining his reading, a key but neglected topic.[166] D'Annunzio's private library—part of the writer's luxurious and extravagant mansion in Gardone Riviera, called "Vittoriale," where he lived from 1921 until his death, in 1938—contains various editions of *Leaves of Grass* (in translation and in original), and monographs and essays on Whitman that he annotated.

The Italian writer owned an extensive collection of books on varied topics. The collection has to this day been preserved as it was left by D'Annunzio: books are still held in the various rooms which the writer used for different purposes, and kept in the original positions. It is important to consider the function of each room in order to understand the importance that the writer assigned to a certain book, and the use that he made of it. In the so-called "Officina" ("Office,") the large room overlooking the Vittoriale court and the lake, the place with the best light in the house and with Virgil's warning at the entrance: "hoc opus hic labor est" ("here is the endeavor and the strain,") the writer did most of his writing and liked to work in perfect isolation. Here D'Annunzio kept the books (about two thousand) that he regarded as essential, and that he wanted to keep close to him for a quick consultation. Usually heavily annotated, this group includes dictionaries and encyclopedias, and Italian and foreign literature. In the so-called "Monco" ("One-Armed") office, D'Annunzio handled his correspondence (and ironically

[166] The only mention of D'Annunzio's personal copies of *Leaves of Grass* is made in Praz 418-419. Praz signals that Rossetti's 1886 edition is present in D'Annunzio's library and that the poems "Salut au Monde!" and "France" were clearly read by the poet. But he does not describe or comment on this further: there are actually more poems, and other volumes read by the poet, and one wonders why Praz only talked about the Rossetti edition. See Praz, 418-419. For my research at the Vittoriale library, I am extremely thankful for the help and expertise of librarians Alessandro Tonacci and Roberta Valbusa.

referred to his sculpture of one "cut out" hand which gave the name to the room, when justifying why he did not answer all of his correspondence). There he kept a few books (mostly of French literature) which might be useful when citing other writers in his letters. In the living room and in another couple of offices on the first floor, D'Annunzio kept the rest of the books that he consulted less frequently than the ones in the Officina and the Monco.

As for books by and on Whitman, D'Annunzio owned the 1886 Rossetti's edition (located in the Officina), the 1890 Gamberale translation (in the first floor library), Bazalgette's monograph on Whitman (in the landing office), the 1903 Putnam edition (in the Monco), the 1907 Gamberale translation (in the first floor library), and two copies of Bazalgette's 1909 translation (one in the Officina and one in the landing office). Significantly enough, Rossetti's edition and Bazalgette's translation are the only books that D'Annunzio had with him in the Officina in the last period of his life: as I will argue later, D'Annunzio encountered Whitman's work again in France in the 1910s, where he bought these two books (they both have the label of a bookshop of Rue de la Banque),[167] and heavily annotated them and underlined political passages in them. But the other copies, often annotated as well, are also useful in helping us to retrace the different stages in this story.

Like Negri, and many other young writers in the 1880s and 1890s, D'Annunzio had been looking to Carducci and Nencioni for inspiration and advice. It was in Carducci's *Odi barbare* that D'Annunzio found inspiration for his first poems, and it was

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[167] A label indicating the name of the bookshop is present in both books, which can be consulted at the Vittoriale.

from Nencioni that the seventeen year-old D'Annunzio, in 1880, received the first encouraging words about them. And it was, again, with Nencioni, that D'Annunzio soon began a relation of mentorship and close friendship that would only cease with the Florentinian critic's death, in 1896. During their long walks in Rome, where the two both lived for a period of time in the early 1880s, D'Annunzio would learn from Nencioni about a range of topics, from the foundations of literary criticism to Roman history, to the foreign writers that Nencioni specialized in.[168] The young poet from Abruzzo would also read Nencioni's articles and comment on them in his letters to his mentor.

Already in his October 12, 1881 letter, a few months before moving to Rome, D'Annunzio wrote to Nencioni:

> If I read your articles? I read, I read each single piece of yours, I avidly read it […] The *New Horizons* on poetry are wonderful; I think I can give you that ray of light that you are looking for, since I immersed myself in Nature and I studied the *thoughts* of Nature. I will read you everything; I will read you my new lyrical, long poem […] I am almost done with it; I have worked at it with all my soul; I drafted it on the naked beach of the Adriatic and in wheat fields I have felt it; I have deeply felt it.[169]

In this letter, D'Annunzio is referring to Nencioni's August 1881 article on Whitman, entitled "New Poetic Horizons," that I have discussed before. In it, Nencioni complained about the current state of Italian (and French) literature and urged young Italian poets "to paint our Italy" and to abandon an artificial way of writing that had been characterized by

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[168] For more on Nencioni's and D'Annunzio's relationship, see Giuseppe Fatini, "D'Annunzio e Nencioni," *Quaderni dannunziani* 18-19 (1960): 645-704. D'Annunzio and Nencioni shared a particular interest in romantic and pre-Raphaelite literature, and they would also–although to different degrees–both appreciate the emerging decadent movement of which D'Annunzio later became one of the major exponents.

[169] The letter is reproduced in Forcella, 6. My translation. Italics present in the original.

"the search for the new at any cost, the hunt for eccentric themes, the complacent, insisting painting of sensual refinements, the mania of describing for description's sake."[170] Young Italian poets were therefore invited to look at Whitman, with his simple but powerful style, as "the most effective medicine" against this type of literature. As I have argued before, Nencioni, in the article, had expressed the post-risorgimental desire to found a stronger, renovated and more cohesive Italy through literature, and to do away with a conventional, over-refined, elitist and exoticist way of writing. D'Annunzio is in this letter responding to Nencioni's appeal, arguing that he is trying to do what the Florentinian critic wished for, and that with his poetry he can, in this sense, bring that "ray of light" that Nencioni has been looking for. The work D'Annunzio is referring to with this hope is his *Canto novo* (*New Song*), which would come out shortly after this letter, in 1882. D'Annunzio emphasizes how his *Canto Novo* derives from an immersion in nature and from a careful study of it, how it is indigenous to the land and the sea in which it was written. *Canto novo* does indeed aim to express an organic, authentic unity and sensual embrace of the lyrical I with nature. But, while D'Annunzio's frequent use of exclamations, repetitions and enumerations is similar to Whitman, other aspects of his style diverge from the American poet, especially the widespread employment of technical, archaic, dignified terminology, and a vast number of latinisms and allusions to classical mythology. In this sense, D'Annunzio's diction is close to Carducci's (and notably, the metrics used here is also close to Carducci's in the *Barbare*) and also to Nencioni's tone as a poet.[171] Once again, with D'Annunzio's *Canto novo*, the

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[170] Enrico Nencioni, "Nuovi orizzonti poetici." My translation.

[171] In this same letter, D'Annunzio declares to look at Nencioni's creative production as a source of inspiration. Nencioni's poems were often characterized by a conventionally high, dignified

programmatic wish to learn from Whitman's innovations and to reproduce them, is not fully executed. Once again, Italian poetry hews close to tradition, taking significant but cautious steps into the road of modernity. Once again, abandoning tradition is easier said than done. And yet, there is a stubborn persistence in this will to renovate that keeps going back to Whitman as an indispensable guide. A few years later, in 1884, in another letter to Nencioni, D'Annunzio would write again about the American poet, inciting Nencioni to write a full monograph on him:

> Ah, if we were together, now that I am good!
> How many horizons you would show me!
> Speaking of *horizons*, why don't you publish a full book on *Whitman?* Gathering the articles you already have, expanding them, translating other poems into prose, into that musical prose of yours…I would love it. […] The *aim* of the book should be a vigorous revolt against the miserable *small-mindedness* of contemporary art. You should talk, a little more extensively, about the *new horizons*, the new tendencies, the new needs; you should charge headlong at the mechanical *chiselers*; then indicate and delineate the great figure of the American poet. It would be a beautiful and strong work.[172]

D'Annunzio's insistence on the idea of "new horizons" is revealing both in terms of his relationship with the Florentine critic and of his perception of Whitman. The Italian writer is using the term not only to directly invoke Nencioni's 1881 article on Whitman, entitled "New Poetic Horizons," and to recycle this particularly cogent formula, given the transnational context in which this receptive interaction takes place. He is also expressing his recognition of Nencioni's mentorship as an eye-opening experience for his intellectual growth: "How many horizons you would show me!" D'Annunzio then

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register (sentimental and melodramatic tones, also given to the author's special insistence on the theme of death). See Nencioni's *Poesie. Lo spedale. Un paradiso perduto. Varie* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1880).

[172] The letter, dated February 15, 1884, is reproduced in Forcella, 12.

repeats the term in a sentence in which Whitman's "new horizons" are strikingly contrasted with the "mechanical chiselers": on one side, the vast, enormous, adventurous new spaces of a new and different poetry, and on the other, the petty concentration on small details and decorations of an old and conventional, almost automatized poetry that lacks an ampler vision. This contrasting image suggests one more time what had been a common attitude in the Italian, and more largely, international reception, in the first phase: to regard Whitman as a breaching force, not a chiseler, to depict him as a mythical initiator of a "vigorous revolt," without paying too much attention to the methods that he used in order to achieve this end.

And yet, this letter also shows a timid step forward in this sense. Meliadò Freeth is right in assessing that Whitman is starting to have, with D'Annunzio, an unprecedented "subterranean influence."[173] While D'Annunzio seems to reproduce his mentor's perspective on the American poet (enamored with the message, short-sighted about the forms), he is in fact evolving toward a deeper understanding. While Nencioni's creative work remains not-responsive to Whitman, and conventional in metrics, themes and tones, D'Annunzio has begun to warm toward a more daring experimentation. It is not a coincidence that in this same letter D'Annunzio is inciting Nencioni to insert, in this potential monograph on Whitman, a few translations into Nencioni's best "musical prose." And it is not a coincidence that he writes, still in this letter,

> I would like to work on the *heroic poems*, but I find little epic materials, and the martellian is not satisfying; nor other meters can promise me any contentment. And I am tired of sonnets and of the other lyrical forms. Oh well! I want to write another two or three *novellas* in prose and join them in a volume.[174]

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[173] See Freeth, 154.

[174] Forcella, 13. Italics present in the original. My translation.

As Grippi notes, this passage clearly shows how D'Annunzio "was obviously concerned with the question of new experimental forms at that time."[175] His attraction to musical and lyrical prose was becoming stronger. And he continued to encourage Nencioni to experiment in this sense. Another letter from 1884 reads

> Start right away to work at your *conversational poem*; right away, understand? I want to read the first part by the beginning of May, without fail. Won't I be the first one to admire you? The attempt is splendid; if it works, as I am certain it will, you will have given to Italy a new genre and you will have opened a new path for Italic poets. Start, then, dear Enrico. *You are not old*, you are one of those rare men in which an inexhaustible and always warm youth keeps gushing from the heart. Don't distrust your strengths! Listen to me: the day after tomorrow, as soon as you receive this, get out; walk around the streets of Florence, which must be in this month delightful and divine, with the sun and the flowers; then go back home and throw on the paper the first line of the poem.[176]

The roles might seem to have been inverted here: D'Annunzio now sounds like the mentor, as he vehemently exhorts and almost tries to discipline Nencioni with regard to writing. But, in reality, D'Annunzio is the one desperately looking for guidance. He demands Nencioni to be brave enough and be finally innovative not only as a critic, but also as a writer. D'Annunzio has understood that Whitman's example must be absorbed more deeply and put into real practice. The "new horizons" are not enough, any longer: a tangible "new path for Italic poets" must now be formed. But Nencioni could not be of help, this time. D'Annunzio would have to build this path on his own.

And it would take D'Annunzio quite a long time, before reaching a deeper experimentation. In the second part of the 1880s and early 1890s, which he mostly

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[175] Grippi, 79.

[176] The letter, dated March 16, 1884, is reproduced in Forcella, 14. Italics present in the original. My translation.

dedicated to writing novels (including the novel canonically considered his masterpiece, *Il piacere* [*The Pleasure*], published in 1889), the writer fully embraced the decadent trend that had been dominating the Roman cultural scene. His works started touching what were considered as scandalous themes, and they were often accused of obscenity, and Nencioni, among others, had to repeatedly jump to his defense.[177]

Is the appreciation of Whitman still present, in this phase of D'Annunzio's production? The prose, characterized by a large use of dignified terms, and by an aestheticizing, sensual and impulsive tone, is certainly quite musical, perhaps in the sense that the poet associated with Nencioni's translations from Whitman, as discussed above. The few poems that appeared in those years, also full of dignified expressions, archaisms, rare words and latinisms, were characterized by rhetorical complacency and by a reliance on traditional methods such as perfect rhyme and regular metrics, with only some experimental incursions into the use of enjambment. In this sense, this poetic diction was far less innovative than the prose. And it was still far from Whitman's. And yet, the work of this latter was still directly evoked by D'Annunzio.

Meliadò Freeth has found, for example, a direct similarity with Whitman's "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" in the poem "O Rus!" contained in D'Annunzio's 1893 collection (which included poems composed from 1891 on) titled *Poema Paradisiaco* (*Paradise Poem*):

> Give me the juicy fruits, the good
> fruits of my land, so that I can bite them,
> Ah, mad is the one who does not remember
> of you, Mother, and of your simple gifts!

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[177] While Nencioni, coming from an earlier generation, did not belong to the movement, and never employed taboo themes in his creative work, he did display a certain decadent sensibility: his refined poetry often dealt with issues of illness, melancholy, solitude, and death.

Give me the fresh milk, so that I can drink it
in big sips. […][178]

Meliadò Freeth notes that "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" was precisely one of the poems translated by Nencioni and which D'Annunzio praised for its "musical prose." This poem remained one of his favorites even many years later: D'Annunzio's private library includes a copy of the 1909 French edition of *Leaves of Grass* with this poem annotated.

It is strange that Meliadò Freeth did not notice the poem that comes just before "O Rus!" in this collection: "The Grass." The poem reads,

Grass pressed by the foot, o humble
creature of the earth, you who are born
everywhere, in feeble threads and in bundles
from clumps and from fissures,

and always alive you wait for future
spring in horrible frosts, and feed
the innumerable herd, and are born again,
still well alive after the harvest,

immortal grass, o you that the foot crushes,
I know of a man who threw in the world
a seed like yours, sweet and tenacious;

and nothing can destroy that seed…
- Think of the Soul as a deep jail
where the humble grass freely sprouts in peace.[179]

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[178] Original: "Datemi i frutti succulenti, i buoni / frutti de la mia terra, ch'io li morda. / Ah forsennato chi non si ricorda / di te, Madre, e de' tuoi semplici doni! / Datemi il fresco latte, ch'io lo beva / a larghi sorsi. […]" Gabriele D'Annunzio, "O Rus!" in *Poema paradisiaco. Odi navali (1891-1893)* (Milano: Treves, 1896), 131. My translation.

[179] Original: "Erba che il piede preme, o creatura / umile de la terra, tu che nasci / ovunque, in fili tenui ed in fasci, / e da la gleba e da la fenditura, / e sempre viva attendi la futura / primavera nei geli orridi, e pasci / l'armento innumerevole, e rinasci, / pur sempre viva dopo mietitura, / erba immortale, o tu che il piede preme, / io so d'un uomo che gittò nel mondo / un seme come il tuo dolce e tenace; / e nulla può distruggere quel seme … / - Pensa l'Anima un carcere profondo / ove

It is fascinating to think that "the man" that D'Annunzio is referring to in this poem might well be God, but might also, easily, be Whitman. The grass is here, as in Whitman's section six of "Song of Myself," growing everywhere, "sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,"[180] and assuming a series of symbolic values: democracy, resilience, immortality, the cyclical nature of life, youth, hope. And the soul also appears, in a capitalized, personified fashion that is strikingly reminiscent of Whitman.[181]

Both in "O Rus!" and "The Grass," Whitman's example is echoed with reference to nature, seemingly working as a meta-textual reminder of the essential values of an authenticity and simplicity of inspiration that should not be forgotten. It is as if D'Annunzio is excavating to bring back to light the pulsating enthusiasm and sensual engagement with nature that had characterized his first works. It is perhaps not a coincidence that, in his personal copy of Gamberale's 1890 translation, which D'Annunzio might have read while composing his *Poema Paradisiaco*, he underlined passages such as "It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth" from "Song of the Open Road,"[182] and "Demand the blades to rise of words, acts, beings, /

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l'erba germoglia umile in pace." Gabriele D'Annunzio, "L'erba" in *Poema paradisiaco. Odi navali (1891-1893),* 128. My translation.

[180] See Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 33. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[181] Capitalizations also appear elsewhere in this collection, with reference to other major protagonists of D'Annunzio's poems: Dream, Death, Day, Mystery, and others.

[182] See Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 123. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

Those of the open atmosphere, coarse, sunlit, fresh, nutritious" from "The Prairie-Grass Dividing."[183]

In the midst of a collection that remains classically decadent for being highly nostalgic and funereal and for displaying exotic, oneiric and erudite themes, the exclamatory "O Rus!" offers an image of strength. Here and in "The Grass" we get images of strength, immortality and peace, fundamental outbursts of energy. This energy is a constant element within the whole of D'Annunzio's production. In this sense, while adapted to the needs of different phases, D'Annunzio's "big sympathy" always provides a regenerating, propulsive force, whether formal, thematic, or explicitly political.

In the early 1890s, D'Annunzio also gained confidence and strength through his encounter with the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Whitman's influence would in this sense double with that of the German philosopher in creating in D'Annunzio a form of eloquence that corresponded to an "affirmation of overman power,"[184] to use Meliadò Freeth's words. This tendency started to delineate itself in the same year in which *Poema Paradisiaco* had come out: 1893. D'Annunzio's *Odi Navali* (*Naval Odes*) contain a series of nationalistic poems that celebrate the Italian Navy, combining the poet's raising political activism and his long-lasting naval passion. D'Annunzio composed them in the occasion of the death, in 1892, of Simone Antonio Pacoret de Saint-Bon, an Admiral of the Navy who had taken part in Risorgimento battles.

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[183] See Walt Whitman, "The Prairie-Grass Dividing" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 107. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[184] Meliadò Freeth, 167.

And it is with regards to a poem included in this collection that poet and critic Enrico Thovez, in 1896,[185] denounced D'Annunzio's plagiarism of Whitman's poetry. The poem "In Memoriam," written in free verse and dedicated to the Admiral, is in fact extremely close to Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Door'yard Bloom'd," and some lines do read, as noted by Meliadò Freeth,[186] as a literal translation from sections seven and ten of Whitman's elegy for Abraham Lincoln. But there is also a direct acknowledgment of D'Annunzio's debt: in the epigraph, the Italian writer cites, in the original English, the first three lines of section ten of "When Lilacs….". It is with a translation of the same lines that he opens the poem. Thovez seems to have disregarded this important gesture by D'Annunzio, when talking about plagiarism. If it is true that D'Annunzio heavily borrows from Whitman, he also does not hide it. In fact, D'Annunzio's translation of the epigraph as an opening could be seen as an innovative intertextual experiment that literally places Whitman at the core of the poem. In this sense, D'Annunzio writes this poem in the name of Whitman. And whether one judges it an act of plagiarism or not, D'Annunzio's appropriation of "Lilacs" shows a renovated, nationalistically inflated, perception of the political Whitman, hero of the Civil War and singer of those epic times, first presented to readers by Rossetti and Nencioni.

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[185] Thovez's attack is contained in the article "L'arte di comporre di Gabriele D'Annunzio" *Gazzetta letteraria* (January 4 1896). The article was republished in Thovez's *L'arco di Ulisse. Prose di combattimento.* (Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1921), 32-47. In the piece, Thovez also underlined how D'Annunzio plagiarized Baudelaire, Verlaine, Shelley, and others. Critics like Benedetto Croce and Charles Maurras defended D'Annunzio, arguing that, if he borrowed from others, he also always transformed them through his unique style.

[186] Meliadò Freeth, 170. For an extended discussion of the parallels between the poems, see Meliadò Freeth, 168-173; Grippi, 88-89.

But this short collection is also interesting as it shows the first signs of D'Annunzio's breakthrough into formal innovation. Lines, though still regular, become much longer; rhymes are often abandoned; anaphora is present; exclamations are frequently used; the lexicon is still dignified, but much closer to common speech. It is striking to note how the political and the formal elements are joined: it is as if D'Annunzio has finally found the courage to follow Whitman's innovative example only when embracing a more political poetry. This seems to confirm that D'Annunzio saw Whitman first of all in terms of an epic, oratorical force.

These last years of the century saw a general increase in the appreciation and imitation of Whitman's free verse, and D'Annunzio probably felt encouraged by seeing how other writers were trying to open precisely that new path that he had asked Nencioni to open. Poets that D'Annunzio knew well, like Thovez, the person who had accused him of plagiarism and a long-time opponent, and also his friend and colleague Adolfo De Bosis,[187] had started employing free verse and other strikingly Whitmanian elements in their poetry.[188]

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[187] In 1895, D'Annunzio and De Bosis had founded, together with Angelo Conti, the literary criticism and artistic periodical *Il Convito*. The periodical, strongly decadent in orientation, remained active until 1907.

[188] Caterina Ricciardi has shown how this latter, especially with poems like "Giovine che mi guardi parlare" ("Young Man Looking at Me Talking") and "Ad un macchinista" ("To an Engine Driver"), closely followed Whitman formally and thematically, being concerned "in making poetry out of everyday life, which at that time was facing great social and technological changes" and announcing "the Futurists' appeal to the modern in art." See Caterina Ricciardi, "Walt Whitman and the Futurist Muse" in *Utopia in the Present Tense: Walt Whitman and the Language of the New World. International Conference on Walt Whitman. University of Macerata, October 29-30, 1992,* ed. Marina Camboni (Roma: Il Calamo, 1994), 265-298. For more on the influence of Whitman on De Bosis see chapter five in Giorgio Pannunzio, *Cittadino del cielo: De Bosis poeta tra modernità e tradizione* (Raleigh: Lulu Press, 2014). In the same article quoted above, Ricciardi also briefly describes Enrico Thovez's deliberate imitations of Whitman in his "Grido di liberazione in un mattino di primavera" ("A Cry of Liberation on a Spring Morning").

D'Annunzio was also familiar with other experiments with free verse and with various forms of *poèmes en prose* that had started to appear in these years, first of all, in France, especially by Charles Baudelaire, whom D'Annunzio deeply admired. But there were also Italian examples, and one of them must be discussed more at length: Luigi Capuana's poetry collection *Semiritmi* (*Semirhythms*). This 1888 collection certainly influenced D'Annunzio.[189] In *Semiritmi* Capuana, mostly a verist prose writer, had fused poetry with prose, creating long lines in free verse, and employing a flowing, almost colloquial diction. It is interesting to note how, two decades later, in his interaction with the young futurist writers who would praise him as the father of Italian free verse, Capuana underlined his first place in this sense, clarified that he had not imitated any foreign writer, and identified D'Annunzio as a successor. In his letter to Marinetti inserted in the *Enquête international sur le vers libre*, Capuana wrote:

> I was the first in Italy to attempt to introduce the *semirhythm*, and without any intention of foreign imitation. In 1883, when, at first for a parody, I gave a sample of it in the *Fanfulla della Domenica* and then, more seriously, I finally published a volume (Milano, Fratelli Treves, 1888), there had been no mention of *free verse*, at least among us. My opinion is that, if used with skill, [free verse] can contribute to give speed and freedom to poetic form. D'Annunzio has published wonderful examples. […][190]

Capuana's emphasis on originality—his lack of "foreign imitation"—is particularly striking for a series of reasons. As he states in this letter, he had initially published parts of the book with a parodic intention: he presented them as if they were

[189] It is not coincidental that writer and critic Diego Garoglio pairs Capuana and Whitman as examples for Italian poets who, like D'Annunzio, moved toward free verse. See Diego Garoglio, *Versi d'amore e prose di romanzi. Saggi di critica contemporanea* (Livorno: Giusti, 1903), 157.

[190] Capuana's letter to Marinetti is part of *Enquête international sur le vers libre et manifeste du futurism,* ed. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, (Milano: Éditions de Poesia, 1909), 37-38. My translation. Italics present in the original.

linear prose translations of the work of a fictional Danish poet that he had called W. Getziier. He had only later put these texts into poetry and revealed that they actually were pseudotranslations, and that he was the real author.[191] With the invention of Getzieer, Capuana made fun of the many critics who, in those years, translated from foreign contemporary writers, often praising and mythologizing them, and developing a dependence on foreign models. At the same time, perhaps these translations from foreign writers (which were often paraphrases of poetry rendered in prose) had inspired him in an experimental way, and led him to ask: what defines poetry as such? Can it still somehow be poetry even when it becomes prose? To pursue his inquiry, Capuana had used the excuse of the translation as a shield behind which poetry and prose could interact in an unprecedented way. If pseudotranslation is, in the definition used by Isabelle Collombat, the mise-en-scene of alterity,[192] Capuana had used "Getziier" to experiment with a new, alternative form, attributing its strangeness to the fact that his was a translation, and only later revealing that it was not.

Capuana's choices and his negation of a foreign model become all the more interesting when considering that parts of the *Semiritmi* appeared in 1883 in the *Fanfulla della Domenica*. Capuana himself directed this periodical from 1882 to 1883. This was the same periodical in which Nencioni published, from 1879 to 1885, a series of articles on Whitman. When creating the *Semiritmi*, Capuana was therefore repeatedly exposed to

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[191] For more details on this, see Aldo Menichetti, "Testi di frontiera tra poesia e prosa" in Stefano Agosti et al., *Lezioni sul Novecento: storia, teoria e analisi letteraria* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1990), 82. Menichetti also notes how the genre of pseudotranslation was quite popular in Italy and in France, in those years.

[192] See Isabelle Collombat, "Pseudo-traduction: la mise en scène de l'altérité," *Le Langage et l'Homme* 38, 1 (June 2003): 145-156.

Whitman's poetry. Was Capuana's parodic intention also directed to Nencioni, among others? And was Whitman really not influential at all on the *Semiritmi*, as Capuana proudly—perhaps in fact too proudly—claims with regard to any foreign writer? Did Capuana have the merit to understand the value of Whitman's free verse, at a time in which, as he reminds Marinetti in his letter, the question of "free verse" did not even exist as it would a few years later? Did reading Whitman via Nencioni provide Capuana with the idea of creating his "Getziier"?

Capuana's collection abounds with classical references, linking the poet closely to tradition, at a first glance. But the poems also employ anaphora, exclamations and questions, a colloquial tone, and, most of all, very long lines. And at the heart of the collection lies Capuana's declaration of rhythm as a foundational principle for his innovative poetry. In the poem "Poesia musicale" ("Musical Poem"), he writes:

> Words, words! … But in the syllables live,
> rolling up in a harmonius spiraling wave,
> a profound sense; rhythm itself
> is poetry that, indefinite, invades the heart.[193]

This discovery of rhythm would be extremely influential on subsequent Italian poetry, and especially on the symbolists. The poem in the collection which evidently comes closest to Whitman is "Sub Umbra" ("Under the Shadows").

> And the green grass, protected by the shadows
> of the branches, and the chrysanthemums and the silvery daisies
> were surprised by that song, new for them.
> […]
>
> Lying down on the wet grass, indolent,
> not thinking about anything, in the big quiet,

[193] Original: "Parole, parole! … Ma vive nelle sillabe, / avvolgentisi in spirale onda armoniosa, / un senso profondo: il ritmo anch'esso / è poesia che, indefinita, invade il cuore." Luigi Capuana, "Poesia musicale" in *Semiritmi* [1888] (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1972), 66. My translation.

> we breathed the voluptuousness of living;
> […]
>
> with intense egoism, muted in the saintly oppression
> of yours, o Nature with your tepid breath! ... [194]

In 1893, critic George Arthur Greene would indeed acknowledge this closeness, by selecting and translating the above quoted poem into English and by inserting it in his anthology of Italian literature, presenting Capuana's *Semiritmi* with these words:

> A more serious contribution to poetical literature is his curious volume of "Semiritmi" (Milan, Treves, 1888), in which he makes essay of various rhythmical forms which approach the nature of measured prose, and reminding the English reader of Walt Whitman, though without the American's author freedom and "verve."[195]

Greene's comparative assessment is dismissed by critic Carolina Nutini, who argues that Greene is falling into the trap of the parodic intent of Capuana: Whitman could not be a model for the writer who intentionally made fun of having models.[196] But the matter might not be so simple. While Capuana did want to make fun of the dependence on foreign models, Whitman's poetry, with which he certainly came into contact (and this is a point Nutini seems to forget) might have still influenced his interest in new poetic forms and his experimentation with them.

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[194] Original: "E l'erba verde, protetta dagli ombrosi / rami, e i crisantemi e le argentee margherite / stupivano di quel canto, nuovo per loro. / […] Sdraiati sulla rorida erba, indolenti, / non pensando più a nulla, nella gran calma, / respiravamo la voluttà di vivere; / […] con intenso egoismo, muti nell'oppressione / tua santa, o Natura dal tiepido alito! …" Luigi Capuana, "Sub umbra" in *Semiritmi*, 56-57. My translation.

[195] See George Arthur Greene, Elkin Mathews and John Lane, *Italian Lyrists of To-Day. Translation from contemporary Italian poetry with biographical notices* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 53.

[196] See Carolina Nutini, *Tra sperimentalismo scapigliato ed espressivismo primonovecentesco. Poemetto in prosa, prosa lirica e frammento* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2012), 243.

What is certain is that Capuana's poem is strongly reminiscent of D'Annunzio's *Canto Novo*, which had come out a few years earlier, and not simply for the mention of a "new song," but for the depiction of how organic this new song is with nature: the influence between the two writers was therefore reciprocal. It is not coincidental that D'Annunzio's name came up in Capuana's assessment of the heritage he left for the evolution of Italian free verse. In 1903, the first three books of D'Annunzio's *Laudi del cielo, del mare, della terra e degli eroi* (*Odes to the sky, to the sea, to the earth and to the heroes*) came out.[197] Free verse, oratorical style, erudite classical and mythical references and Nieztschian overmanism joined to create a work that revolutionized Italian literature. D'Annunzio gave full expression to an epic, semi-divine lyrical I that declared

> I will sing the man who ploughs, who sails, who fights,
> who extracts iron from cliffs, and milk from nipples,
> sound from oats.
>
> I will sing the greatness of seas and of heroes,
> the war of ancestries, the patience of oxen,
> the antiquity of the yoke,
> the magnificent act of the man who dunks the flour
> and of the man who pours oil in the vase
> and of the man who starts the fire;
> […][198]

In the second volume of the collection, which came out in 1904, appears the figure of Dante, showing once again the relevance that end of the nineteenth century

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[197] The other two would come out in 1912 and 1918.

[198] Original: "Canterò l'uomo che ara, che naviga, che combatte, / che trae dalla rupe il ferro, dalla mammella il latte, / il suono dalle avene. / Canterò la grandezza dei mari e degli eroi, / la guerra delle stirpi, la pazienza dei buoi, / l'antichità del giogo, / l'atto magnifico di colui che intride la farina / e di colui che versa nel vaso l'olio d'oliva / e di colui che accende il fuoco;" Gabriele D'Annunzio, "L'Annunzio" in *Laudi del cielo del mare della terra e degli eroi*, vol. 1 [*Maia/Laus Vitae*] (Milano: Treves, 1903), 17. My translation.

Italian literature and post-risorgimental culture gave to his figure in terms of an inspiring model for the foundation of a renewed national language and an identity: from the Rossettis to Gamberale to D'Annunzio, the voice and significance of Dante was often paired with that of Whitman. In this sense, if there is not a poem explicitly dedicated to Whitman, in this collection, we can still ideally find him in the poem "A Dante" ("To Dante"). And of course, there we can find D'Annunzio's himself, with his own Nietzschean idea of heroic overman:

> Drinking alone at sunrise at the secret fountain
> of immortal things, first Hero of our renovating
> blood;
> oceanic mind
> […]
> […] ancient and new soul,
> educated and ignorant,
> remembering and foreseeing, where all of the thinking
> of the Sages is enclosed and where Fire Air
> Water and Earth palpitate;
> […]
> Only in your word is light for us, o Revealer,
> Only in your song is strength for us, o Liberator,
> […][199]

Whitmanian enumerations and exclamations are largely employed in the *Laudi*'s energetic celebration of a cosmic poetic presence. Much attention is put on the musical aspect: assonance, alliteration, and even internal rhymes are noticeable, in the original Italian.

Astonished I gazed at

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[199] Original: "abbeverato solo nell'albe al segreto fonte / delle cose immortali, Eroe primo di nostro sangue / rinnovellante; / oceanica mente […] / […] anima vetusta e nuova, / instrutta e ignara, memore e indovina, ove si serra / tutto il pensier dei Saggi e palpitano il Fuoco l'Aria / l'Acqua e la Terra; […] Sol nel tuo verbo è per noi la luce, o Rivelatore, / sol nel tuo canto è per noi la forza, o Liberatore, […]." Gabriele D'Annunzio, "A Dante" in *Laudi del cielo del mare della terra e degli eroi*, *vol. 2* [*Elettra*] (Milano: Treves, 1904), 6; 7; 10. My translation.

the light and the world. So many
pallets I had!
I lay on the gilded sheaf
hearing under my weight
the arid spikes.
I lay on fragrant
hay, on warm sands,
on carriages, on shippings,
on marble loggias,
under pergolas, under
curtains, under oaks.
Where I lay, I was reborn.[200]

Notwithstanding these striking innovations, D'Annunzio's tone remains strongly anchored within classical tradition: many poems sound like excerpts from the Bible or classical literature, also because of the use of archaic diction, which will remain characteristic of D'Annunzio in later works, too. It is for this reason that poet and critic Eugenio Montale would conclude, with reference to D'Annunzio's free verse and formal innovations as derived from Whitman: "it still remained an erudite poetry and the Dannunzian free verse remains the least free verse of all."[201]

And an incipient nationalism is observable in the collection, with reference to the employment of Roman references, thus also already announcing D'Annunzio's later production. It is precisely for the purposes of his progressively increasing nationalism that D'Annunzio would continue to refer to Whitman. In France, where he went to live

[200] Original: "Attonito io rimirava / la luce e il mondo. Quanti / furono i miei giacigli! / Giacqui su la bica flava / udendo sotto il mio peso / stridere l'aride ariste. / Giacqui su i fragranti / fieni, su le sabbie calde, / su i carri, su i navigli, / nelle logge di marmo, / sotto le pergole, sotto / le tende, sotto le querci. / Dove giacqui, rinacqui." Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Laus Vitae. I giacigli" in *Laudi del cielo del mare della terra e degli eroi*, vol. 1 [*Maia/Laus Vitae*] (Milano: Treves, 1903), 26. My translation. It must be noted that in my translation I am not always capable of rendering the archaisms of the original.

[201] See Eugenio Montale, *Sulla poesia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 467-468.

from 1910 to 1915, D'Annunzio would continue to expand his knowledge of the American writer while being an active member of French literary circles: [202] as mentioned earlier, in a bookshop of Rue de la Banque in Paris, D'Annunzio bought the 1908 Whitman biography by Louis Bazalgette and the 1886 edition by Rossetti. The writer underlined both books and annotated them by writing in French, the language he used in those years. Identified by his fellow Italian expat Tommaso Marinetti as the "premier verslibriste italien,"[203] D'Annunzio's role was becoming in those years more and more central in Italian culture, not only for having stylistically opened the new path he had eagerly looked for, but also for assuming a strong political leadership, a topic treated more fully in the final chapter of this study.

3. Whitman, Pascoli and Symbolism: A Question of Sound

Another Italian poet who had been a disciple of Carducci and who was in these same years, just as D'Annunzio, tirelessly trying to forge a new path in poetic diction was Giovanni Pascoli.[204] Pascoli, who had studied with Carducci in Bologna and who, later in

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[202] For D'Annunzio's presence and interactions in French cultural circles, see Giovanni Gullace, *Gabriele D'Annunzio in France. A Study in Cultural Relations* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 145-158.

[203] See Fabrizio Miliucci, "Tra Francia e Italia. 'Liberazione del verso' nei primi anni del Novecento" in *Cantieri dell'italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo*, eds. B. Alfonzetti, G. Baldassari and F. Tomasi (Roma: Adi Editore, 2014). The version I am using here is the full text pdf, available online at http://www.italianisti.it/upload/userfiles/files/2013%20Miliucci.pdf. The letter reported here is on page 4 of this pdf version.

[204] See what Miliucci says about this: "The ferment that led Carducci to conceive his *Odi barbare* was alive also in the two greatest poets of the turn of the century, D'Annunzio and Pascoli, to whom we owe a strenuous experimentation of traditional rhythms that practically brings regular metrics to a final tension, so that even after the "verslibrist revolution," the poets who would in future years test themselves with free verse, were inevitably influenced by these predecessors"(my translation, see Miliucci, 1).

his life, having become a University Professor of Classics, was called to take his mentor's chair, always felt the duty to continue the work of the old poet from whom he had learned so much. Carrying on and advancing Carducci's rhythmical experiments with the *Odi barbare*, Pascoli reached new levels of linguistic innovation, demonstrating once again the existence of a fruitful line of continuity–rather than a breakage–between classic and modern poetry. And this careful revision of rhythms, joined with Pascoli's symbolist style and his attention to humble and common themes, created a poetry that sounded radically renovated and that is often identified as one of the founding modernizing contributions of the twentieth century. While he came close to D'Annunzio (and joined him and De Bosis by working for the *Convito*), and while, later in his life, he tried to echo the patriotic vein of Carducci, Pascoli remained fundamentally different from both decadent fetishism and political magniloquence.

Many hypotheses can be made about Pascoli's first meeting with Whitman's work: perhaps he first heard about him from Carducci when studying in Bologna, or perhaps in conversation with Ragusa Moleti. Pascoli lived in Sicily, where he taught at the University of Messina, from 1897 to 1903, and was in contact with Moleti. Pascoli quotes from Moleti's 1899 article on *Flegrea* about Whitman,[205] when discussing rhythm in a 1900 letter to classicist critic (and first biographer of Carducci) Giuseppe Chiarini.[206] In the letter, Pascoli discusses the idea of "ritmo riflesso" ("reflected rhythm"), of which,

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[205] See Ragusa Moleti "I 'fili d'erba' di Walt Whitman."

[206] The letter is now included in the section entitled "Antico sempre nuovo," which is part of Pascoli's first volume of collected prose. See Giovanni Pascoli, *Prose I. Pensieri di varia umanità* (Milano: Mondadori, 1971), 904-976. All quoted passages from the letter used here are translated by me.

he thinks, Carducci's *Odi barbare* is a perfect expression. As he notes, "Carducci's lines, even when composed of our own series and emistichions, have the virtue of suggesting to our soul the memory of the ancients."(944) "Reflected rhythm" is then an indirect echo of classic rhythms, and, for Pascoli, a proof of the fact that rhythm remains a core, indispensable element for poetry. As he argues, "for the dream to exist, reality is needed; for the echo to exist, voice is needed; for the shadow to exist, an object is needed" (947): for the larger, indirect reflected rhythm to exist, a more precise, basic cadence must exist as well. Pascoli contests, then, what he regards as the naïve and problematic declaration of Luigi Capuana (whose work, as he clarifies, he continues to admire) about the fact that poets are right when they get rid of rhythm in order to gain freedom and agility. No matter how difficult, Pascoli argues, poets must not—and in fact cannot, even when they declare to want to do so—do away completely with rhythm.

And Pascoli contests the declaration of another poet, whom he believes is as naïve as Capuana: "a great master from across the Atlantic," (950) Whitman. The words by Whitman in question are contained in the subsection "New Poetry" of "Ventures, on an Old Theme," which is part of *Specimen Days*. But it must be noticed—and previous critics have failed to do this—that Pascoli is actually misquoting Whitman, as he is using the Italian translation and adaptation included by Ragusa Moleti in the 1899 article quoted above.[207] Ragusa Moleti had in fact shortened and adapted (without saying so) Whitman's longer paragraph, making it sound like a total rejection of poetic rhythmic in favor of prose. Moleti had taken out an important part containing exactly what Pascoli

[207] See Meliadò Freeth, "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana," 142, and Grippi, 132. Both scholars do not notice that Moleti (and Pascoli, reproducing Moleti's translation) has omitted some of Whitman's words.

saw as missing: Whitman's acknowledgement of the fundamental importance of poetic rhythm. Among the omitted words by Whitman are: "the truest and greatest *Poetry*, (while subtly and necessarily always rhythmic, and distinguishable easily enough), can never again, in the English language, be express'd in arbitrary and rhyming meter."[208]

In this piece Whitman contests regular and conventional meter. In a hyperbolic provocation, he says here that "the Muse of the Prairies, of California, Canada, Texas, and of the peaks of Colorado, dismissing the literary, as well as social etiquette of over-sea feudalism and caste, joyfully enlarging, adapting itself to comprehend the size of the whole people, […] soars to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose." (323) But his parenthetical, and thus in typical Whitmanian fashion absolutely central assessment, about the "greatest *Poetry"* being "necessarily always rhythmic" cannot be omitted. The omission exposes Ragusa Moleti's selfish aim of promoting the *poémes en prose* he had been working on himself (as also inspired by his own translations from Baudelaire)[209] and of emphasizing the rude quality of a poetry that he presented as completely lacking any sentimentality.[210] But, in the case of Pascoli, the omission goes in his favor, as it shows the fine nature of Pascoli's critical understanding of Whitman.

While truly—and perhaps naively—convinced that Whitman was not aware of this, Pascoli is, with a pretentious tone, "teaching" the American poet that "elementary

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[208] See Walt Whitman, "New Poetry" [from *Specimen Days*] in *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: McKay, 1892), 323. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/other/CompleteProse.html.

[209] For more on this, see the chapter entitled "Girolamo Ragusa Moleti: dalla traduzione alla pratica del poemetto in prosa" in Nutini, 119-176.

[210] This mention of a lack of sentimentality is in fact completely invented by Ragusa Moleti, as it is absent from Whitman's original.

and essential poetry is only rhythm, only!" But most importantly, Pascoli argues that Whitman is paradoxically disowning an element that is in fact a leading part of his poetry: rhythms drawn from the Bible. And exactly here lies Pascoli's merit: in the recognition that "the fact is that Whitman rejects the precise rhythm of iambs and dactyls; but relies on the indefinite rhythm of the singers of Sion […] He despises rhythm, but he does not give up on it […]." (944) In a strange twist of fate, by scolding and teaching Whitman, Pascoli is making up for Ragusa Moleti's omission: he is actually doing justice to Whitman. He is finally concentrating on the formal, musical factor in Whitman that Italian critics before him had practically neglected to study. Pascoli's assessment also comes significantly close to José Martí's groundbreaking words about Whitman's rhythm:

> Walt Whitman speaks in Biblical verses; without apparent music, although after hearing them for a short time one realizes that these sounds ring like the earth's mighty shell when it is trodden by triumphant armies, barefoot and glorious. At times Whitman's language is like the front of a butcher shop hung with beef carcasses; at others it resembles the song of patriarchs seated in a circle, with the sadness of the world at the time of day when smoke loses itself among the clouds. Sometimes it sounds like an abrupt kiss […] But never does his utterance lose its rhythmical, wavy motion […] a sense of the universal pervades the book and gives it, within the surface confusion, a grandiose regularity; but his sentences – disjointed, flagellant, incomplete, unconnected–emit rather than express.[211]

Strikingly enough, "a grandiose regularity […] emitting rather than expressing" is a particularly fitting formula to describe Pascoli's poetic diction as well.

But, going back to the omitted passage, while Grippi does not notice the important omission of Whitman's words by Moleti—and consequently, by Pascoli—he still rightly suggests that Pascoli's idea of "reflected rhythm" is close to the concept

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[211] Martí's words are taken from his 1887 essay "The poet Walt Whitman," reproduced, in translation, in *Walt Whitman and the World*, eds. Allen and Folsom, 94-95.

elaborated in the 1898 rigorous study about Whitman's prosody by Italian scholar Pasquale Jannaccone: [212] "psychic rhythm."[213] With this term, Jannaccone indicates what he regarded as the peculiar form used by Whitman to build his stanzas, arguing that it is close to primitive and biblical forms and to ancient Greek religious poems. But Jannaccone clarifies how this does not mean that Whitman's diction corresponds to an involution of poetic forms:

> But this reproduction of ancient forms is not a return to the primitive stages because of a decline of the poetic organism; it is, instead, a necessary consequence of the evolution of verse. The form of the poems of *Leaves of Grass* marks, to put it simply, the first stage in the modern phase of the evolution of verse; it strengthens and gives relevance to the logical element, diminishes and sometimes even almost suppresses phonic rhythm, so that, between the two elements, a new balance and agreement can be formed. From this, more varied and more suggestive rhythms that can be more adequate to the ideological content, can be formed.[214]

Jannaccone identifies Whitman's "exquisite sensibility for music" (127) and describes the peculiar structure employed by the American poet: a proposal, two lines of development and a refrain, which create, he argues, a rhythm capable of reproducing thinking processes and, ultimately, their uncontrollable nature. In the book, Jannaccone also criticized Gamberale's translations, provoking a harsh response a few years later.[215] Gamberale regarded Jannaccone's assessment of the rhythmical structure in Whitman as

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[212] Jannaccone was a scholar of political economics with an interest in American literature (he wrote on both Edgar Allan Poe and Whitman). For more on his study of Whitman, see Meliadò Freeth, 92-101, and Grippi, 110-126.

[213] See Grippi, 134.

[214] See Pasquale Jannaccone, *La poesia di Walt Whitman e l'evoluzione delle forme poetiche* (Roux Frassati: Torino, 1898), 123. My translation.

[215] See Luigi Gamberale, "La vita e le opere di Walt Whitman," *Rivista d'Italia* 6 (1903): 201-207.

too forced, and underlined, instead, the centrality of the “recitatif” model in Whitman’s poetry, aligning himself with Oscar Triggs’ indication of a parallel between Whitman and Wagner.[216]

Whether Pascoli was aware or not of Jannaccone’s study remains uncertain, but the study was well-known to the circle of Italian literati who were interested in Whitman. And it must also be remembered that other critical assessments at the turn of the century had advanced a similar appreciation of Whitman’s forms in Italy, putting a special emphasis on their intrinsic musicality. In 1894, Biagio Brugi talked about “barbaric rhythms” that derived from “the rhythmical union of words or a line made of the fusion of lines of different length.”[217] Both Francesco Chimenti, in 1894,[218] and Ulisse Ortensi, in 1898,[219] commented, just as in the cases of Triggs and Gamberale mentioned above, on the presence of a distinguished Wagner-like (and also Dvorak-like, in the case of Ortensi) style in Whitman’s work. Ortensi noted, for example, the constant employment of a leit-motif and variations structure, and cited Wagner among Whitman’s main sources of inspiration. It can be hypothesized that Ortensi had read Edward Carpenter’s 1896 piece on Whitman, Millet and Wagner, as—in a quite striking coincidence—he cited Millet among these sources, too.[220] If building parallels between Wagner and Whitman had

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[216] See Oscar L. Triggs, *Browning and Whitman: A Study in Democracy* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co., 1893).

[217] See Biagio Brugi, “Una poesia di Walt Whitman ('Years of the Modern')," *Atti e memorie della Accademia di Scienze e Arti in Padova* 9, (1894), 150-151. My translation.

[218] See Francesco Chimenti, *Note di letteratura americana* (Bari: Pansini, 1894). For more on Chimenti’s reflections on Whitman and Wagner, see Meliadò Freeth, 90-91.

[219] See Ulisse Ortensi, “Letterati contemporanei: Walt Whitman,” *Emporium* 8, 43 (1898): 17-24.

[220] See Edward Carpenter, "Wagner, Millet and Whitman: In Relation to Art and Democracy," *Progressive Review* 1 (October 1896): 63-74. Ortensi was a librarian, critic, writer and translator

become almost a trend in international criticism about Whitman, Italian critics were certainly making their contribution.[221]

Pascoli's notion of Whitman's "reflected rhythm" emerged, then, from a renovated and fertile critical terrain, in which the formal nature and value of Whitman's work had finally started to be taken into serious consideration. Unlike the beginning years of the reception, now Italian critics were starting to accept the idea that Whitman was legitimately a poet: even when still not fully understanding the methods it was built on, there were no more doubts about the poetic nature of his work.[222] This enthusiasm was accompanied by a large number of new selected translations,[223] and, finally, the 1907

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who authored the first Italian translation of Robert Burns in 1893 and who avidly worked on other foreign writers and read international criticism, so he might have easily seen Carpenter's essay.

[221] The association of Whitman and Wagner had already been made by many friends and readers of Whitman's work, when the poet was still alive. Whitman himself commented on this in 1888, by saying, as reported by Horace Traubel: ""So many of my friends say Wagner is *Leaves of Grass* done into music that I begin to suspect there must be something in it. […] I was never wholly convinced—there was always a remaining question. […] What am I to believe? I confess that I have heard bits here and there at concerts, from orchestras, bands, which have astonished, ravished me, like the discovery of a new world […]" See Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 2, (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1915), Friday August 10, 1888. Available on the Walt Whitman Archive at http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/2/contents.html. References made to Wagner in international criticism include Fernand Freiligrath's in 1868, Knut Hamsun's in 1889, and two anonymous reviews (a British one in 1886 and a Russian one in 1916). See Allen and Folsom, eds., 30; 164; 306; 356.

[222] See, for example, critic Giulio Pisa's assessment in 1899: noting how "scowling critics have denied [to Whitman] the title of great [poet]" and certainly lacking an understanding of the finesse of Whitman's formal choices himself, Pisa insisted on the need to recognize Whitman as "a great poet." "Among the many poets who are the poets of a dying world, he is the poet of an arising world," he argued. See Giulio Pisa, "Gualtiero Whitman" in *Studi letterari* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1899), 174-175. My translation.

[223] In the same 1899 article quoted above, Ragusa Moleti, once again egotistically underlining how he encouraged some of them, describes the various projects of selected translations by a series of literati he was in contact with: Angelina Damiani Lanza, A. R. Levi, A. Olivieri, and Giuseppe Farina. Giulio Pisa, mentioned in the note above, had also translated a few poems, while Biagio Brugi had ended his article (also quoted above) with a translation of "Years of the Modern."

unabridged translation of *Leaves of Grass* by Gamberale that came out in the series "La Biblioteca dei Popoli" ("The Library of Peoples") which was created and directed by Pascoli himself.[224] The series had the aim of offering to readers "Poems and other literary monuments that survive their times and are immortal, being the vestiges that people live with in history. Collecting and divulgating them among other people, is almost like re-making the history of human thought in its highest manifestations."[225]

In the ten years in which Pascoli directed it, the series presented readers with texts such as the *Mahabharata*, Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, the *Nagananda,* the *Kalevala*, and a collection of popular Greek songs. It is clear then how Whitman was inserted in a cosmopolitan editorial initiative that aimed to build a *sancta sanctorum* of epic classics. Whitman remained an important figure of reference for Pascoli, and the publication of Gamberale's translation must have provided the poet with an opportunity to further ponder his work. Is Pascoli's creative work resonant with Whitman's echoes? Is there any trace of the "reflected rhythm" that he described? How did Whitman contribute to Pascoli's linguistic experiments?

Grippi and Meliadò Freeth both discuss various affinities.[226] The first of them can already be found in the title of Pascoli's first collection, published in 1891 (and then in a

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[224] Pascoli directed the series from 1902 until his death, in 1912. The series, which includes a total of seventeen volumes, would be published until 1922, and in its last decade it was directed by Paolo Emilio Pavolini.

[225] This agenda description was contained in the 1909 general catalogue of the series and is reproduced in *Remo Sandron, Palermo. Catalogo delle pubblicazioni del periodo comprendente l'attività di Remo Sandron (dal 1873 al 1925) e quella dei suoi eredi fino al 1943* (Firenze: Edizioni Remo Sandron, 1997), 89.

[226] See Grippi 131-140 and Meliadò Freeth, "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana," 129-153. See also Giovanni Getto, "Pascoli e l'America," *Nuova Antologia* 91, 1870 (October 1956): 159-178. Getto also discusses Pascoli's knowledge and appreciation of Edgar Allan Poe's works.

larger, updated form in 1903): *Myricae*, a Latin word meaning "tamarisks," which echoes Virgil's invocation to the Sicilian Muses in the fourth eclogue in the *Eclogues*. In the invocation, Virgil asks the Muses to give him the inspiration to chant of "more elevated things," as "not everybody benefits from shrubs and humble tamerisks":[227] this eclogue is in fact the least pastoral one, both thematically and stylistically, as Virgil is chanting the advent of a new, mythical golden age. Pascoli programmatically chooses "myricae," then, to express his adherence to humble and common themes. And this, as observed by Getto, certainly resonates with Whitman's own title and general attitude.[228] The world of *Myricae* is made of fields and woods, animals and plants, simple daily life objects and events. But while this adherence to depicting the experience of common people comes close to Whitman, Pascoli's diction remains quite distant. First of all, there are only a few mentions of the "I" pronoun in the whole collection: as subjective as the perceptions of the poetic voice are, there is an absolute lack of a Whitmanian construction of—and reflection about—the weight and nature of the "I." The collection is pervaded by a nostalgic and often grieving atmosphere which, while not absent from Whitman's work, is certainly not a dominant trait.

But it is precisely in one of these funereal poems that an echo of Whitman, and more specifically, of his "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" can be found. Both Meliadò Freeth and Grippi have talked about how this poem by Whitman might have influenced a crucial passage of Pascoli's manifesto of poetics "Il fanciullino" ("The

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[227] Original: "[…] paulo maiora canamus! / Non omnes arbusta iuvant humilesque myricae." Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 b.c.), *Ecloga IV,* available online at http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/ec4.shtml. My translation.

[228] See Getto, 165.

Young Boy," published in 1897).[229] But they failed to notice another poem that appeared that same year, 1897, first in *Il Marzocco* and then in the fourth edition of *Myricae*: "L'assiuolo" ("The Scops Owl").[230] Highly representative of Pascoli's impressionist phono-symbolism and of his large employment of onomatopeias, this poem actually presents a unique combination of echoes from the two American writers that Pascoli appreciated the most. Not only Whitman's "Out of the Cradle" is present here, but also Poe's "The Raven," a poem that had inspired Whitman's own elegy, and a poem that Pascoli had translated into Italian.[231] "L'assiuolo" reads

> Where was the moon? As the sky
> swam in a pearl sunrise,
> And the almond tree and the apple tree
> erected themselves to see it better.
> Came breaths of lightning
> from the black of clouds over there;
> came a voice from the fields:
> *kiù…*
>
> The stars shone rare
> among the milky fog:

[229] This prose text, divided in twenty chapters, describes Pascoli's theory—significantly influenced by his pedagogical studies and certainly close to a Wordsworthian perspective—of a poetry that must try to describe things with the same perceptual freshness of a young boy who looks at them for the first time. Meliadò Freeth notices how in one passage of "Il Fanciullino" there is a similar image of a wheezing see, a nightingale, and a young boy who is trying to decipher the bird's singing, which at times sounds like a complaint, or a rejoicing, or a questioning. See Meliadò Freeth, "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana," 129-131. Grippi echoes Meliadò Freeth's assessment without adding any novelty. It is interesting to think of Giorgio Agamben's notes on the idea of dictation in Pascoli's "Il Fanciullino," as paralleled to Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." See Giorgio Agamben, "Pascoli and the Thought of Voice," in *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics,* transl. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 72.

[230] I first wrote about this poem (together with others by Italian writers) in comparative conjunction with "Out of the Cradle" in the last chapter of my master's thesis, defended in 2010 at the University of Macerata and entitled "Parole dal mare: Walt Whitman da 'A Child's Reminiscence' a 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking'."

[231] See Getto, 160-162.

I heard the rocking of the sea,
I heard a fru fru in the thickets;
I heard a jump in the heart,
as the echo of a shout from the past.
And far sounded the sob:
kiù…

On all of the shiny peaks;
shook the grasshoppers
precious silvery sistrums
(jingling of invisible doors
that maybe can't be opened no more? ...);
and there was that chant of death…
kiù…[232]

My English translation cannot render the alternate rhyme and the large amount of alliterations, but I transliterated the onomatopeic "chiù" of the original into English to keep the sound, and I tried to maintain the syntactical inversions where I could. It is important to consider that the sound "chiù" in Italian closely evokes the word "più," meaning "more," but also "no more," which opens a direct connection with Poe's "Nevermore." Pascoli's insistence on highlighting the combination of various elements (the visual, the auditory, the physical, the intellectual, the emotional) in the perceptual experience emerges clearly when one considers the use of synesthesia and hypallage, the various evocations of different forms of sound and the quasi-personification of natural and animal figures. In a strange leap, the grasshoppers are producing a sound that comes close to that of the ancient Egyptian sistrums. The original "sentivo," which I translated

[232] Original: "Dov'era la luna? chè il cielo / notava in un'alba di perla, / ed ergersi il mandorlo e il melo / parevano a meglio vederla. / Venivano soffi di lampi / da un nero di nubi là giù: / veniva una voce dai campi: / *chiù* … / Le stelle lucevano rare / tra mezzo alla nebbia di latte: / sentivo il cullare del mare, / sentivo un fru fru tra le fratte; / sentivo nel cuore un sussulto, / com'eco d'un grido che fu. / Sonava lontano il singulto: / *chiù* … / Su tutte le lucide vette / tremava un sospiro di vento: / squassavano le cavallette / finissimi sistri d'argento / (tintinni a invisibili porte / che forse non s'aprono più? …); / e c'era quel pianto di morte, / *chiù* …". Giovanni Pascoli, "L'assiuolo" in *Myricae* (Livorno: R. Giusti, 1903), 127-128. My translation.

as “I heard” can also mean “I felt,” and the polysemia of this verb contains Pascoli’s symbolist agenda: evoking feelings through sound. The rhythmic structure of the poem, while relying on traditional meter and rhyme, achieves, through inversions and enjambments and the anaphoric repetition of the last line, a distinct effect of novelty.

If the night and the grieving singing of a bird (verbalized, here too, but in onomatopoeic form) play important parts in Poe’s poem as well, a few elements are distinctly echoing Whitman’s poem: the rocking of the sea, the sob provoked by hearing the echo of a cry perhaps belonging to a lost figure, the pervading sense of the immanence of a chant of death represented through various alliterating and onomatopoeic solutions, the agency of the natural landscape in revealing the symbolic secret it contains. Pascoli re-elaborates then, these two poems and conflates them creatively in order to achieve his poetic aim, which is defined by Giorgio Agamben (actually with reference to “Il fanciullino”) as representing “uttering speech in its inceptive state, as pure intention to signify.”[233] The singing of the bird becomes in fact a primordial voice, a communicative bridge between what can be said and what remains unsaid, between a pre-linguistic, linguistic and post-linguistic dimension. This connects Pascoli’s experiments with Russian futurism and its theories of a pre-language to be rediscovered.

While Pascoli was not close to French symbolism, he found significant inspiration in the work of Poe and Whitman. There a few other possible echoes of this latter’s work in Pascoli’s poems,[234] and overall, I agree with Meliadò Freeth who asserts that Pascoli

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[233] See Agamben, 72.

[234] Cambon, Getto, Grippi and Meliadò Freeth find a few other connections, including a striking resemblance of Pascoli’s “Soldato di San Piero in Campo” (“Soldier from San Piero in Campo”) with Whitman’s “Come Up from the Fields Father.” See Getto, 165; Cambon, 246; Grippi, 136; Meliadò Freeth, “Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana,” 147.

shares with Whitman a sort of adamic gaze, in the sense of seeing things for the first time.[235] This insistence on depicting a perceptual novelty also by pursuing innovative rhythmical and musical methods appears then to be a fully symbolist, and ultimately proto-modernist reading of Whitman by Pascoli. This latter's response to Whitman can therefore be inserted in the larger frame of the various transnational symbolist appreciations of Whitman's poetry, characterized, notwithstanding a series of inevitable differences, by a shared interest in Whitman's use of indirections and in his capacity to suggest rather than state directly.[236] And a particular connection exists, in this sense, between Pascoli and another symbolist poet from Russia: Vyacheslav Ivanov.

A classicist and Latinist, just as Pascoli, Ivanov theorized Russian symbolism as the movement capable of enacting the "barbaric renaissance" that he thought that Russian culture needed. With this idea, he indicated a modern(izing) culture based on a line of continuity with primitive and mythological culture, or what he called "the barbaric god." And he listed Whitman among the main examples of such a renaissance. Symbolist poets should for Ivanov be, just like Whitman, capable of penetrating "aboriginal secrets," and discover "a forgotten language of universal truth."[237] This recuperation of the "barbaric" as articulated by Ivanov, and as originated in the primitivist discourse of Russian (and

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[235] See Meliadò Freeth, "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana," 130-131.

[236] For more on the individual responses to Whitman by French and Belgian symbolists, South American *modernistas* and the Russian symbolists, see Erkkila's second chapter in *Walt Whitman Among the French*; Asselineau, 225 and 231-232 (for the differences in Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren's symbolist reading of Whitman in comparison to French ones), in *Walt Whitman and the World*; Alegría, in *Walt Whitman and the World,* 72-73; Stepanchev, in *Walt Whitman and the World*, 296-297.

[237] See Rachel Polonsky, *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43-44. For the cited words by Ivanov, I am using Polonsky's translation into English which appears in these pages.

international) culture at the time, is strongly reminiscent of Carducci's experiments, and of Pascoli's continuation of these latter and of his notion of "reflected rhythm." The description of Ivanov by fellow symbolist Russian poet, Andrei Bely, as "a learned barbarian"[238] seems to be fitting also for Pascoli and for his own poetic diction. And this idea of the "barbaric" will also remain vital in the next phase of the reception, as part of Giovanni Papini's pre-futurist judgement on Whitman, of Velimir Khlebnikov's assessment of the heritage left by the American poet, and of Dino Campana's Whitmanesque lexicon, as I will discuss in the next chapters.

But we need to return to the Russian poet Konstantin Bal'mont to fully understand the context for Negri, D'Annunzio, and Pascoli. As previoulsly mentioned, Bal'mont, a leftist since his University years who fled Russia after the 1905 revolution, shared Negri's assessment of Whitman as a "giant of freedom," and as the voice of "ideal democracy." Like D'Annunzio, he echoed Whitman's energetic and sensual celebrations of nature and was inspired to renovate his poetic diction, but he often showed both in his own poetry and in his translations of Whitman (which were contested by another Russian translator, Kornei Chukovsky[239]) to have a predilection for embellished, ornate tones and for an over-refined, erudite language. He never reached the free verse of D'Annunzio or the French symbolists, but, just as Pascoli, he experimented with new musical and rhythmical solutions, having a passion for onomatopeia and being convinced that it is through sound that poetry can best send its messages.

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[238] In Polonsky, 41.

[239] For more on this, see Stepanchev, in *Walt Whitman and the World*, 293-296.

Bal'mont's example epitomizes the complexity and diversity of this second phase of the reception, in which Whitman's work continued to stimulate political, thematic and stylistic renovations. In 1903, while translating Whitman and strongly influenced by his example, Bal'mont wrote "Будем как Солнце" ("We Will be Like the Sun,")[240] a poem that incited a new generation of poets to respond to Whitman's bold calls for renovation.

> We will be like the Sun! We will forget
> about what leads us to the path of gold
> [..]
> We will be, like the Sun always young,
> […]
> Are you happy? You will be happier twice,
> You will be the unexpected incarnation of dreams,
> Only do not linger in motionless calm,
> Forward, more, to desired traits,
> Forward, leads us our fatal nature,
> To Eternity, where new flowers flare up.
> We will be like the Sun, in it–is the youth.[241]

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[240] Bal'mont choice of the sun as a central, positive symbolic image of youth and eternal futurity is significant not only with reference to the recurrence of solar images in Russian Symbolist poetry— (on this, see Polina Dimova, "The Poet of Fire: Aleksandr Skriabin's Synaesthetic Symphony"Prometheus" and the Russian Symbolist Poetics of Light" [UC Berkeley: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 2009], available online at http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/25b624gd)—but also for similar mentions of such images in passages by Negri and D'Annunzio (see Ada Negri's "an uncontrollable, untamable hymn;/ simple as wheat, robust as man,/ eternal like the sun!..." in "Immortal" and D'Annunzio's Nietzschean "Drinking alone at sunrise at the secret fountain" in "To Dante"). Interestingly enough, an image of sunrise appears as well in Pascoli's "The Scops Owl" but it is described here as having here a "pearl" color, aptly indicating the overall dark and melancholic tone of Pascoli's poem.

[241] Original: "Будем как Солнце! Забудем о том, / Кто нас ведет по пути золотому, / […] Будем, как Солнце всегда молодое, / Счастлив ты? Будь же счастливее вдвое, / Будь воплощеньем внезапной мечты! / Только не медлить в недвижном покое, / Дальше, еще, до заветной черты, / Дальше, нас манит число роковое / В Вечность, где новые вспыхнут цветы. / Будем как Солнце, оно — молодое. / […]." Konstantin Bal'mont, "Будем как Солнце" ("Budem kak solntse") in *Будем как Солнце* (1903), (Иваново: Издатель Епишева О.В., 2008) (Ivanovo: Izdatel′ Episheva O.V.), 11. My translation.

CHAPTER THREE: The Avant-Garde Scene, 1900-1915. Part one

1. NEMI, or Sibilla Aleramo: Writing about Whitman Behind a Pseudonym

Whitman's idea (as reported by Edward Carpenter) that women might understand him better than anyone else[242] found significant confirmation in the Italian reception. Not only had poet Ada Negri been struck with Whitman's work, but other women writers and critics were devoting their energies to studying it and writing about it. Often they did so behind a pseudonym,[243] and this may explain why studies of the Italian reception have said little about them. But the presence of pseudonyms should not inhibit us from analyzing the pieces. This analysis can help in the work of liberating these women from the oppressive net of anonymity.

Between November 1902 and November 1908, in the biweekly periodical of "letters, sciences and arts" *La Nuova Antologia*, as part of the column "Tra libri e riviste"

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[242] See Edward Carpenter, *Days with Walt Whitman* (New York-London: Macmillan, 1906), 43. Carpenter writes: "What lies behind 'Leaves of Grass' is something that few, very few, only one here and there, perhaps oftenest women, are at all in a position to seize."

[243] While here I will only concentrate on the case of Sibilla Aleramo writing on Whitman as NEMI, there is also the case of critic and writer of children's literature Laura Cantoni Orvieto, who wrote articles in the Florentinian periodical *Il Marzocco* with the pseudonym of "Mrs El." Married to the founder of *Il Marzocco* Angiolo Orvieto, Laura Cantoni Orvieto often invited writers Sibilla Aleramo and Amelia Pincherle Rosselli to collaborate with the periodical, and animated various debates with these latter. On January 26, 1908, "Mrs El." announced in *Il Marzocco* the publication of Gamberale's 1907 translation. The article is entitled "La traduzione di un intraducibile" ("The translation of an untranslatable [poet]"). Orvieto did not particularly appreciate Whitman's enumerating style, which, for her, lacked elegance, and called Whitman's longest poems "the least perfect" (3), but recognized the importance of reading Whitman for "those souls who aspire to elevate themselves in freedom and fullness of strength, of joy, of desire […]" (3). My translation. Orvieto also overall praised Gamberale's translation, apart from noticing the presence of occasional mistakes. A curious fact is that, because of the English sounding pseudonym used by Orvieto, critic Alberto Lumbroso, who also wrote a review of Gamberale's translation for the periodical *Rivista di Roma* on February 10, 1908, while mentioning the important and, as he called it, "wonderful" article that had appeared in *Il Marzocco*, affirmed that the article was written by a mysterious "British female collaborator."

("Among books and periodicals,") appeared four articles dedicated to the work of Walt Whitman. *La Nuova Antologia*, a prestigious and influential Roman periodical,[244] had earlier published articles about Whitman by Enrico Nencioni and regularly published work by Giosuè Carducci and Giovanni Pascoli. With these four pieces in "Tra libri e riviste" and with other occasional articles,[245] the journal was continuing to advance knowledge of the American poet in Italy.

The articles are crucial in the reception history not only because of the venue in which they were published but also because they consolidated existing readings of Whitman, contested others, brought forth new ones. Interestingly, these articles supported a socialist-humanitarian and pacifist reading of Whitman, and they showed a continuing admiration for the nursing role of the poet in the Civil War. They also carried on a clear mythicization of Whitman's personality (but dismissed any insistence on his supposed egotism), and demonstrated an advanced understanding of Whitman's innovative poetic style. Finally, they announced the publication of important scholarly works about the American poet, such as Gamberale's 1907 translation and Bazalgette's 1908 biography.

But who had written them? The four articles are all unsigned, just as the rest of the individual articles included in the column. And while, at the very end of the column itself, the signature "NEMI" does appear, this was not the name of an individual, but only a pseudonym used as a collective signature, indicating, in general, the editorial staff of

[244] While it was founded in Florence in 1866, *Nuova Antologia* had moved to Rome in 1878 and remained there until 1978, when it was moved back to Florence.

[245] See, for example, Giovanni Papini, "Walt Whitman," *Nuova Antologia*, series 5, collection 135, volume 219, booklet 876, (June 16, 1908): 696-711. See also the letter sent to Papini by Giovanni Cena on April 25, 1907, when prompting Papini to write the article on Whitman. The letter is included in *Lettere Papini-Aleramo e altri inediti (1912-1943)*, ed. Annagiulia Dello Vicario, (Napoli-Roma: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988), 214.

the periodical.[246] Because of this, the authorship of the pieces has remained unclear. Scholars who have written about the Italian reception of Whitman have done different things, when acknowledging the existence of these articles: they have listed them in the final bibliography without discussing them at all,[247] they have briefly mentioned them and generically assumed that "Nemi" was a male critic (but without indicating whom and without mentioning the problem of authorship at all),[248] or have evidently misattributed the authorship.[249]

To better address this question of authorship, we need to excavate the life of a woman who had just started to be active in her collaboration with the *Nuova Antologia*, and who was specifically in charge of curating the more strictly literary pieces that were inserted in this column. This was Rina Faccio, a young woman writer and intellectual who had just courageously decided to abandon her marriage and to move from the Marche (unfortunately without her young son, who was kept by her husband) to Rome, to work and to live with the newly appointed editor-in-chief of the *Nuova Antologia*, Giovanni Cena, with whom she had a romantic relationship. NEMI was not the only pseudonym that Faccio would ever use: for the publication of her first novel, *Una donna* ("A Woman") in 1906, the writer, probably fearing possible repercussions from her

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[246] NEMI was used as the general editorial staff signature of this column from 1902 until 1923.

[247] See Meliadò Freeth, "Walt Whitman nella cultura italiana," III.

[248] See Asselinau in Allen and Folsom, eds., 260; Meliadò Freeth, "La fortuna di Walt Whitman in Italia," 59-62.

[249] See Grippi, 140. Grippi, who only briefly mentions the articles in his dissertation, states that they were authored by writer Flora Vezzani. But this latter was born in 1903, and so this is simply impossible. Grippi's mistake must have emerged from the fact that Vezzani did use the pseudonym "Orsola Nemi," but never to write in the *Nuova Antologia*, and of course much later than 1902-1908.

husband, would in fact permanently abandon her actual name, her "first name," as she calls it in her journal,[250] and become, once and for all, Sibilla Aleramo.[251] This is the name with which she is known in literary history and which I will use here in referring to her.

As we will see, it is in a letter to the French translator of Whitman, gone unnoticed by other scholars who worked on this question of authorship, that we can learn that the last of these four articles, the one written in 1908, was certainly written by Aleramo. But there are also multiple reasons to identify Aleramo as the author of the other three, 1902, 1906 and 1907 articles. First of all, while it is possible that Aleramo had heard of Whitman in Milan at the end of the nineteenth century,[252] it is certain that she was reading him, along with other foreign writers, already in the summer of 1902, right after moving in with Cena, and a few months before the first article was

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[250] This expression appears in Aleramo's short autobiographical notes (unpublished), as reported in *Orsa minore. Note di taccuino e altre ancora*, ed. Anna Folli (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 219.

[251] As she explains in her autobiographical notes, the first name "Sibilla" derived from a sonnet by Giovanni Cena, dedicated to her (the first line reads "I discovered her and called her Sibilla,") while the last name was inspired by the Carduccian ode "Piemonte," and specifically by the line "Il ridente di castella e vigne suol d'Aleramo" ("The delightful land of Aleramo with its castles and vineyards"). As argued by Franca Angelini, the transition to the new name corresponded to a symbolic loss of Aleramo's former identity, and the embrace of her new, creative identity, her "birth to literature." See Franca Angelini, "Un nome e una donna," in *Svelamento. Sibilla Aleramo: una biografia intellettuale,* eds. Annarita Buttafuoco and Marina Zancan, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988*),* 65.

[252] Aleramo, who in the 1890s had collaborated with a few feminist and positivist periodicals when still living in the Marche, and had attempted to found a Feminine League there, was appointed as the director of the Milanese periodical *L'Italia femminile*, and moved to Milan in 1899 with her husband and son. She would direct the periodical only for a few months, but she was able to enter the highly stimulating cultural circle in which figures like Ada Negri, Matilde Serao, and Anna Kuliscioff were active. See for example the letter from Negri to Aleramo of August 1, 1900, in *Sibilla Aleramo e il suo tempo. Vita raccontata e illustrata*, eds. Bruna Conti and Alba Morino (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1981), 25.

published.[253] Secondly, in July 1916, Aleramo herself acknowledged the authorship of what she called, at the time, an old article on Whitman, and forwarded it in her letter to her soon-to-be lover poet Dino Campana, declaring that she had loved the work of the American poet for a long time.[254] Thirdly, all the articles show a very strong continuity both in terms of the themes they treat and of their tone and style of writing, which is strikingly consonant with Aleramo's. Lastly, when comparing these pieces with Aleramo's intellectual and ideological mindset and interests, with her later pieces, notes and letters in which she mentioned Whitman, and with the echoes from Whitman present in her creative work, it becomes evident that the NEMI who wrote about Whitman was almost certainly, in all four cases, Aleramo. There is of course a small chance that she was not the only author, that Cena or others wrote parts of the articles or contributed to the editing and revision of them. In light of this slight degree of uncertainty, for the first three articles, it remains useful to refer to the author as "NEMI." The articles need to be studied in parallel with Aleramo's formation and life, and with the cultural climate in which they were produced.

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[253] See Anna Folli, *Penne Leggere: Neera, Ada Negri, Sibilla Aleramo: scritture femminili italiane tra Otto e Novecento* (Milano: Guerini, 2004), 185; Conti and Morino, eds., 36.

[254] The letter (which is no longer complete with the forwarded article) is included in *Dino Campana/Sibilla Aleramo. Lettere*, ed. Niccolò Gallo (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1958), 16 and *Sibilla Aleramo, Dino Campana. Un viaggio chiamato amore. Lettere 1916-1918*, ed. Bruna Conti (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2015), 44-45. The article she forwarded, Aleramo assessed, displayed a certain "naïvete," as the one she felt she had "back then": this reflection on a past intellectual naïvete reinforces the hypothesis that Aleramo is referring to a piece that she had written much earlier than 1916. Scholars Bruna Conti and Anna Folli have both suggested that the article in question is the 1906 one published in the *Nuova Antologia*, but there is no final evidence for this, as confirmed by librarian Cristiana Pipitone at the Gramsci Foundation in Rome.

The first article, published in November 1902, is marked by a strong political emphasis on what is called Whitman's "humanitarian physiognomy"[255]: this piece is very close to Ada Negri's 1893 article in *Il figurinaio*. And such a "physiognomy" was perfectly consonant with Aleramo's mindset. Raised by a father whom she described in her 1940s journal as a "scientist and atheist" who had "inherited from my Mazzinian grandfather the moral concepts of sincerity, loyalty, honesty, freedom, what today are called nineteenth century ideologies," and who had transformed them into a sort of "religion, a human religion," Aleramo was deeply imbibed with a radical non-conformism. To the education given to her by her father the writer also attributed a peculiar "pantheistic, touching sense of all things,"[256] an idea that can help us identify the roots of Aleramo's initial attraction for Whitman's work.

The article, which is complete with pictures of the poet in his old age in Camden, of his family house and of his grave, starts with a brief introductory part that indicates a significant scholarly documentation of the author: the complete edition in preparation by Bucke, Harned and Traubel, is mentioned, together with an article in the *Critic* dedicated to this edition. A few critical words are said about the fact that "about Walt Whitman little is known, in Italy," as there is only an "incomplete and imperfect" translation into Italian and a few essays "lost among the periodicals" (154). And while Jannaccone's study on rhythmical forms is defined as "good," NEMI complains that Jannaccone had promised to publish more studies, which did not happen.

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[255] See NEMI, "Walt Whitman," *Nuova Antologia* series 4, collection 186, volume 102, booklet 741, (November 1 1902): 154-157. All the citations contained here are translated into English by me.

[256] All these autobiographical remarks on Aleramo's father are contained in *Un amore insolito (Diario 1940-1944),* ed. Alba Morino (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1979), 43. My translation.

But the perhaps over-emphatic negative tone of this assessment serves a rhetorical aim: NEMI writes that Whitman's work is unpopular not only in Italy but also in America and England, and this is because this work is "too personal," and "too different" from the literature that is generally popular. Even the few people who claim to know the work of the American poet are often wrong. This is a salient moment in the article, as NEMI sets out to debunk what is seen as a false argument about Whitman: "he was not only a man who weighed two hundred pounds and who exhibited, in some poems, a rather primitive exuberance of physical vitality; he was not, most of all, the egotist that many are pleased to imagine" (154).

Instead, NEMI here puts emphasis on Whitman's life as "fine, free, simple," picturesque, far from any greed, devoted to others, and uniformly serene." (154) This observation is particularly in tune with the frugal, humble life that Aleramo and Cena were leading in that period, while actively dedicating themselves to help open schools and improve the living conditions of the poor in rural areas of the Agro Romano. And Whitman's experience in the war is given, once again, great relevance, but not in order to talk about the exemplary conquest of freedom that Nencioni had described. Rather, Whitman's compassionate role as a nurse is emphasized, as ultimate proof of his humanitarian commitments. And just as Ada Negri had done a few years earlier, NEMI concentrates on stressing Whitman's pacifism:

> The readers of these poems [*Drum-Taps*] can see that the writer's aim is not that of portraying battle scenes or to celebrate military bravery, but to sing the human aspects of anguish that follow the war. He perhaps felt that, as Burroughs writes, the permanent condition of modern society must be peace […] Today's Homer must sing war as a temporary episode and from the point of view of peace, progress, and benevolence. (155)

Whitman's words from "Lo! Victress on the Peaks!" are quoted right after this passage, and mis-translated[257] for the purpose of emphasizing the poet's anti-war message. The original line "No poem proud, I chanting bring to thee, nor mastery's rapturous verse,"[258] is rendered as "Io non ti porto un poema marziale, nè versi maestrevolmente entusiastici" ("I do not bring you a martial poem, or masterly enthusiastic verses") (155). The original "proud," which in Italian would be "orgoglioso" or "fiero," becomes here "marziale," "martial," indicating a much more explicit renunciation of war songs.

The article goes on in remarking Whitman's democratic spirit, his docile personality, always intent at "contemplating the movement and life of workers and carts drivers," always surrounded by children at play, and always in love with an America that had to grow "not with weapons, but with work and with industrious benevolence." (156) The nature of Whitman's work, its stylistic novelty or thematic centers, are barely treated, in favor of the quasi-mythical depiction of the poet's figure, with its exemplary traits. One interesting and quite unusual observation regards the poet's passion for Italian opera, and in particular, for the singing of the contralto Marietta Alboni. This important connection with Italian culture had, surprisingly enough, rarely been discussed in previous Italian articles.

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[257] Gamberale did not translate the poem in his 1887 or 1890 collection, so the translation must have been made by the author of the article.

[258] See Walt Whitman, "Lo, Victress on the Peaks" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 252. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

A few years later, in January 1906, *Nuova Antologia* would publish another one-page article on Whitman, in the same column, signed by NEMI.[259] This piece shows a striking continuity with the first article, as it underlines, once again, "the profound democratic sentiment" (344) at the base of Whitman's inspiration. But, at the same time, it shows an evolution in the appreciation of the formal characteristics of Whitman's work, to the point that it can be considered one of the finest critical assessments produced in the Italian reception until this moment. NEMI argues in fact that Whitman's poetic temperament is a rarity, and that the poet could be defined as "mystic-materialist."

This definition, which is indeed, in its antinomic nature, particularly suitable to Whitman, is explained in these terms: Whitman repudiates both an empty and intangible idealism, and the crass materialism of a society merely devoted to the pleasures of the senses. His work, on the other hand, aims to idealize and "exalt the present and the real, to teach to the average and mediocre man the glory of his daily work," to give "an immediate and vital expression of all the forces and aspirations of the modern civilization of his country" (344). NEMI clarifies, in this sense, how Whitman's "strange and chaotic" style should then be seen not only as the result of a "desire of originality for himself and for the new art of his country," but as the natural outcome of the poetic aim described above. Such an aim, argues NEMI, "required a new poetic instrument, varied and flexible enough to follow the fluttering, multiform, vast matter that the poet encountered when he decided to be the interpreter of modern democratic life." This resulted, as it is summarized in the conclusion, in an "interesting and beautiful experiment." (344)

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[259] NEMI, "Walt Whitman," *Nuova Antologia* series 5, volume 205, collection 121, booklet 818, (January 16 1906): 343-344. All the citations contained here are translated into English by me.

The recognition of this compact correspondence between content and form, the idea that Whitman's experimentation derives from and greatly contributes to his mythopoetic vision, is quite unprecedented in the Italian reception, and it would only be reached again a few decades later, with Cesare Pavese's formulation, which would cogently emblematize Whitman's creative mission as the "poetry of poetry making."[260] As argued by NEMI, Whitman's free verse, his accumulations, his non-traditional syntactic and semantic choices are nothing but new poetic instruments that are indispensable for chanting a "multiform, vast matter." And the nature of Whitman's poetry, Pavese would argue, lies in the mythical sense of discovering that very matter, that world in need of being sung, and in responding to such an urgent exigency through an eager search for giving it appropriate expression. In this sense, then, according to Pavese, Whitman's is the ultimate poetic utterance. While perhaps not as fine and informed as Pavese's critical assessment, this 1906 article can be seen as an important anticipation of it.

In the following years, the last two contributions made by NEMI on Whitman in the *Nuova Antologia* would be aimed at announcing two crucial publications that had just taken place and that would highly influence Whitman's transnational reception: Luigi Gamberale's 1907 first unabridged translation of *Leaves of Grass* into Italian,[261] and Léon Bazalgette's 1908 biography of Whitman,[262] in French. In December 1907, NEMI

[260] See Cesare Pavese, "Whitman-Poesia del far poesia," in *La letteratura americana e altri saggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1951), 141-165.

[261] See NEMI, "Le Foglie d'Erba di Walt Whitman," *Nuova Antologia* series 5, collection 216, volume 132, booklet 864, (December 16 1907): 697-698.

[262] See Sibilla Aleramo, "Una biografia di Walt Whitman," *Nuova Antologia*, series 5, collection 122, volume 238, booklet 885, (November 1 1908): 148-150.

opens with a celebratory tone in calling the translation the "gigantic endeavour" of "the cultured professor" (45). And while in 1902, a negative note had been struck about the value of Gamberale's selected translation, this time nothing is said about the quality of the translation. All the attention is focused on the enthusiasm for the accessibility of Whitman's work for Italian people.

Once, again, Whitman is described first of all as "one of the greatest modern poets, the singer of that free, robust and ascending American democracy that is now one of the main factors of progress in the world" (45). NEMI's choice of the adjective "gagliardo" ("robust, healthy") in this passage is particularly significant, as the adjective would be largely used in the futurist reception of Whitman.[263] There, it was used to emphasize the value of masculinity and the vitalistic, if not altogether violent, call to revolutionary action, that Whitman's work came to represent. This use of the word in 1907 might denote a developing understanding of Whitman in pre-futurist terms, and it might also indicate how Gamberale's translation itself could have been influential in this sense, as the translator did emphasize the healthy, strong trait that is, indeed, an important component of Whitman's poetic persona and rhetorical discourse.

If NEMI is, as I believe, Aleramo, was this latter using the word in this sense? The writer would indeed be close to the Futurist movement at a certain point, but that would be much later, certainly not earlier than 1912. Aleramo had shown a particular fondness for the word "gagliardo," but she had used it in a feminist sense. The first line of her 1906 semi-autobiographical novel "A Woman," reads in fact "La mia fanciullezza

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[263] On this, see Camboni, "Le *Foglie d'erba* di Walt Whitman e la ricezione italiana," 362.

fu libera e gagliarda" ("My youth was free and robust"). The line is a bold, feminist declaration of pride and independence, as the pairing of the values of freedom and robustness were quite unusual in association with the youth of a female child in nineteenth-century Italian culture. The assertive tone and the shortness of the sentence also contribute to making it particularly striking. This line comes very close to the line in the 1907 article that I cited above: "the free, robust and ascending…": significantly, in both the novel and the article, freedom and robustness are paired in depicting, in one case, a woman who rebelled against the social norms imposed on her because of her gender, and in another, the "ascending" American democracy sung by Whitman.[264]

The short article ends with four excerpts from Gamberale's translation, accompanied by no comments other than a few words to introduce the topic of each passage. The first excerpt contains Gamberale's translation of the first two stanzas of "For You, O Democracy," preceded by this short introduction: "He sings to American democracy." The original stanzas in English read:

> Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
> I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
> I will make divine magnetic lands,
> With the love of comrades,
> With the life-long love of comrades.

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[264] The word "robust," "gagliarda," would also come back in the first stanza of an Aleramo's poem whose main image was quite controversial, for the time: "Nuda nel sole" ("Naked in the Sun"): "Naked in the sun / for you, while you are painting, I am immobile / the chest only giving the rhythm / to the robust life of the heart." Original: "Nuda nel sole / per te che dipingi sto immobile, / il seno soltanto ritmando / la vita gagliarda del cuore." Significantly, for one of her more "scandalous" poems, Aleramo went back to use the word that had marked her literary beginning. In this poem too, in fact, the word evidently stands as a renovated signifier of her personal pride and her strong-willed fight to be free from gender norms and moral prejudices. "Nuda nel sole" was first published in the magazine *La Grande Illustrazione* in 1915 and then in the collection of poems *Momenti* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1921), 37.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of
America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all
over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's
necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.[265]

But NEMI chooses to cut one line, when reporting Gamberale's translation of these stanzas: the very last line of the second stanza, "by the manly love of comrades," translated by Gamberale as "col virile amore dei camerati" is absent in NEMI's article (and a full stop, instead of a comma, is put by NEMI at the end of the line that precedes the one that was cut out). It could be argued that the cut might derive from a form of moral prudery that was certainly present in Italian culture at the time (but certainly not in Aleramo's lifestyle and ideology). But the choice may, instead, give us a further proof of the fact that NEMI was, indeed, Aleramo. If the Italian word "camerata" does evoke primarily a man in a military context, and implies a relation of intimacy and sharing with other men, the word, especially in its plural form, "camerati," could ultimately (and provocatively, in a feminist sense) be extended to women. But the word "virile," just as the English "manly," necessarily excluded these latter. And this would certainly not be welcomed by Aleramo's strong feminist credo. Significantly, while this cut satisfies this credo, it also inevitably undermines the strong, and important, homoerotic connotation of the passage, thus depriving Italian readers of the possibility of recognizing Whitman's unusual theorization of a democracy founded on manly love.

The second excerpt is section sixteen of "Starting from Paumanok," in its entirety:

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[265] See Walt Whitman, "For You O Democracy" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 99. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

On my way a moment I pause,
Here for you! and here for America!
Still the present I raise aloft, still the future of the States I
harbinge glad and sublime,
And for the past I pronounce what the air holds of the red
aborigines.

The red aborigines,
Leaving natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds
and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names,
Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez, Chatta-
hoochee, Kaqueta, Oronoco,
Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,
Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging the
water and the land with names.[266]

The passage is thus announced by NEMI: "But he does not forget the poor American Indian people, while they disperse from their ancient land." These words aim to emphasize, once again, Whitman's benevolence, and the choice of the passage seems to be intentionally aimed–as the adversative incipit "but" implies— to counterbalance the imperialist flavor of the opening lines of the previous passage. But NEMI's choice is naïve, if not altogether myopic, as this passage does nothing but double the weight of the controversy. It is true that the overall image is certainly poetic and emotionally appealing, and that there is a striking insistence in enumerating the sounds of the Native American names, which materially strengthens the idea of their permanence. But it must also be noticed that the disappearance of these people is problematically pictured as natural, and most of all, as actively carried out and not violently imposed ("leaving […] they depart," Whitman writes, and NEMI repeats: "they disperse"). NEMI's lack of insight in this sense reflects a quite widespread tendency in the Italian and transnational reception of

[266] See Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 27. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

Whitman, at a time in which colonial enterprises–including Italian ones–were at full speed.

The next two poems, which also have the function to end the article, are fully reproduced by NEMI, and unified by a single introductory sentence that reads: "And so he sings to poets." The poems are "Poets to Come" and "To a Historian." Whitman's typical invocation of a dimension of futurity is significantly doubled, as if to strongly spur the creativity and inspiration of readers-writers. And this gesture is also understandable when thinking that this article is appearing at a vibrant time, in which dozens of emerging young writers were animating the complex scene of the international avant-garde. Aleramo's awareness of and active participation in this avant-garde was in these years becoming stronger. In 1910, she would in fact leave Cena and Rome, and enter the Florentinian circle that gathered around the periodicals *La Voce* and *Il Marzocco*. In 1912, in Milan, she came into contact with the first outbursts of the futurist movement, and then left for Paris, where she remained from November 1913 to April 1914, making friends not only with D'Annunzio, who was living there, but also with other important figures of the French and international literary scene.

The last piece on Whitman signed by NEMI was published on November 1 1908, in the *Nuova Antologia*, but this time we can safely stop to call the author "NEMI" and opt for Aleramo. The article testifies the intellectual encounter with someone Aleramo had been in touch with since that very year: Léon Bazalgette. And it is precisely in the correspondence with Bazalgette that we find proof of the fact that Aleramo authored this article. The piece is dedicated to the recent publication of Bazalgette's biography *Walt Whitman: l'homme et son oeuvre*. The biography was in French, and no Italian translation

was then (or is, even now), available, but Aleramo did know French, and many readers did, too: educated Italians would in fact study French as a second language at school, and many read widely in French. It is highly probable that it had been Bazalgette himself to send the book to Aleramo. The letter, written by Bazalgette on May 14, 1908, was aimed to express the appreciation for Aleramo's novel "Una donna" ("A Woman"). Bazalgette wrote,

> Some chapters are of an absolute beauty […] As a testimony of the joy of humanity that the reading of *A Woman* has given me, I take the liberty to send you a recent volume, devoted to the glory of a great Individual, whom you are going to love, I am sure, as he represents one of the peaks of the novel consciousness.[267]

Bazalgette's words seem to indicate that he was sending to Aleramo his biography of Whitman. And Aleramo's article on the book by Bazalgette appeared only a few months later, on November 1. Aleramo must have sent the article signed as NEMI to Bazalgette, as this latter wrote, on November 10, 1908:

> Dear Madame,
> I have read with the emotion of seeing myself so entirely, so wonderfully, understood [in] the account that you gave about my book in the *Nuova Antologia.* It is a rare joy to hear talking about Walt Whitman as you did.[268]

Bazalgette appreciated Aleramo's assessment of his book on Whitman so much that he even used an excerpt of Aleramo's article as a blurb in an advertisement of the biography.[269] Significantly, Bazalgette cites the article (listing the publication venue, too) by giving Aleramo's name directly.

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[267] The letter from Bazalgette, in French, is available in the Aleramo collection at the Gramsci Foundation in Rome. All the other letters between Bazalgette and Aleramo discussed here at available in the collection. My translation.

[268] My translation.

[269] The advertisement is present in Aleramo's collection. Bazalgette probably sent it to Aleramo to acknowledge the fact that he had used part of her article as a blurb. The part used by Bazalgette

Aleramo's article closes the critical cycle on Whitman started in 1902: if the first article lamented that Whitman was still not well known in Italy, now Aleramo opens by saying that "the American bard has become this year almost a familiar presence for Italian readers," (148) thanks to the 1907 publication of Gamberale's translation. With reference to *Leaves of Grass,* Aleramo also reminds readers of how "we repeatedly discussed the ideal meaning of this wonderful work in the *Nuova Antologia.*" This statement reinforces the idea that Aleramo is the author of all four pieces published in the 1902-1908 period. The reference to Henry Bryan Binn's biography, which had appeared in the 1906 article, is repeated, and similar observations on Whitman's "complex, mysterious, […] extraordinary" personality also come back.

Aleramo admired Bazalgette's work as "a reading of passion and dream, romantic in the true sense of the word" (149). Among the many available passages, Aleramo chose one in which Bazalgette discusses the daguerreotype inserted, in lieu of the author's name, as the frontispiece of the 1855 edition of *Leaves.* Aleramo reported Bazalgette's description of the image in the daguerreotype (an image that Italian readers lacked access to):

> This young man, in workman's dress, with an indifferent attitude, and at the same time firm, modest and arrogant, with a calm, decided visage, whose glance, cast upon you, questions and follows you, appears to have arisen to justify his people, the men of the average, the silent heroes of the common people, the builders of cities, the modern Atlantes, arrived at the calm consciousness of sovereignty. The man in short sleeves who stands before you, his hand on his hip, his left hand in his pantaloons pocket, the felt hat tipped to the side, has the absolute attitude of a king. And he is, in effect, the individual-king. No court mantle could equal in majesty the insolent and natural looseness of his dress, the irreducible freedom of

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reads "The big volume of Bazalgette is, we repeat it, a conclusive and masterly biography, which has the double value of history and of art. / Sibilla Aleramo." My translation.

> his whole figure. He comes as an ambassador of a new race, charged to promulgate his life throughout the world.[270]

The choice of this passage demonstrates, once again, a socialist interest in Whitman: an interest in average men and their sovereignty, as underlined by Bazalgette with reference to Whitman. These traits had already emerged in the previous articles on the American poet (especially in the second, 1906, one), and they are highly resonant with Aleramo's political ideas, thus, once again, confirming that she is very likely to be the author of the other three articles, as well. But how about the ending of the passage, in which Bazalgette coins the expression of "individual-king" and talks about the figure in the daguerreotype emanating "irreducible freedom"? Could this part be particularly appealing for Aleramo? And if yes, why so?

The article itself, in conjunction with the rest of the articles discussed above, gives us the answer. While the 1902 article criticized readings of Whitman that depicted the poet as an exaggerated egotist, and the other articles never mentioned Whitman's individualism, but rather his generosity and benevolence for others, in this new article Whitman is called, with no hesitation, "a ferocious individualist." But this is not a contradiction. Whitman's individualism must have been appealing to Aleramo, indeed, but specifically in reference to two important components of Aleramo's ideology at this time: her readings of Nietzsche, as joined with–and as a tool for–her feminist agenda. This strong expression (stronger, even, when considering how previous articles had always tried to underline the poet's tenderness) is in fact only and specifically used when

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[270] For reproducing the discussed passage in English, I used Ellen Fitzgerald's translation of Bazalgette's book: *Walt Whitman. The Man and His Work* (Garden City-New York: Doubleday, 1920), 94.

explaining why the poet escaped from the love passion[271] he had encountered in New Orleans: because he was a "ferocious individualist" and "in order not to tie his life forever." Significantly, the only reference ever made in this cycle of articles to Whitman's individualism comes when discussing the abandonment of his supposed love relationship, of what could eventually become a tie. This seems to echo Aleramo's personal struggle, the same one she described both in *Una donna* and in *Il passaggio*: the escape from a married life and motherhood, in order to strenuously pursue her professional aspirations, and ultimately, her complete independence and self-determination. Significantly, when this last 1908 article on Whitman appeared, Aleramo was about to escape from her relationship with Cena, as well.

Aleramo finally left Cena in September 1910, and she left her job at the *Nuova Antologia*, as well. In the next couple of years, the writer wandered in different parts of Italy, and published a few articles, this time signed as Sibilla Aleramo, in various journals. One of the stops was in the Veni Valley, in the Alps. There, in the summer of 1911, she wrote (and this time signed with her name) an article, entitled "Vallate dell'Alpe" ("Valleys of the Alps"),[272] in which, by using a highly lyrical prose, she describes her time in the mountains, looking for peace.[273] "Now" she writes, "what is

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[271] Significantly, Aleramo remains generic about this love and only defines it a "love passion" without attributing it any gender specification.

[272] See Sibilla Aleramo, "Vallate dell'Alpe," *Il Resto del Carlino*, 1 settembre 1911. The article is reproduced in Sibilla Aleramo, *Andando e stando. Prose* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1922), 3-12. My translation.

[273] Aleramo sent the article to Bazalgette, who commented on it on a postcard to the Italian writer, written on September 22, 1911: "I infinitely loved such a high naturist meditation and your lines on Walt Whitman are truthful and beautiful." My translation. The postcard is available in the Aleramo collection at the Gramsci Foundation in Rome.

needed is to know how to be one and the same thing with the water and with the stone, with the musk and with the star" (9). One of her few readings, while out in her exploration and contemplation of nature, is Whitman. The passage about this reads:

> Walt Whitman is here with his "leaves of grass."[274] He is one of the few poets that can be listened to, while in the middle of nature. It is true that he tried out his stanzas by reading them out loud above the storm's music and in the silence of the fields. He does not substitute himself for the things he sees, with conceited descriptions: he is happy with saluting them, with joyful exaltation. And he enumerates with perennial freshness of tone all that in life has seemed sacred to him: from the naked human body to the idea of cosmos, from the shell of the sea to the architectures of the exposition palaces, from the face of the wounded soldier in a battle to that of the prostitute on the sidewalk. His major greatness consists in this religious unity, in this reverence, in this passionate gratitude for all the hours of his long life. Even when he suffers–and how he suffers from the subtlest interior torments, this man whose fame is that of being only a greedy and rough sensualist!–his lament is never a blasphemy. A vehement and confident heart, among the crowd and in solitude, for himself and for the world. He would have wanted that his words could sound as those of a robust friend for all the wanderers of the earth…(10-11)

The adjective "gagliardo," "robust," appears again, this time with reference to Whitman's desire to be "a robust friend for all the wanderers of the earth." The idea of closeness offered by Whitman's work, and much appreciated by Aleramo, is central in this passage: as if obeying Whitman's 1855 suggestion to "read these leaves in the open air,"[275] Aleramo brings the book with her in her walks in the mountains. "Walt Whitman is here," she writes: not Whitman as words on a page but Walt Whitman the man, she seems to imply. As all the articles in the *Nuova Antologia* had done, the piece concentrates on the man as much as on the work, and Aleramo is evidently not willing to

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[274] The title of Whitman's book is left in small caps in the original article.

[275] See Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 1855, VI. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/whole.html.

separate the two things. And just as had happened in the 1902 article, one of Aleramo's critical aims is that of debunking what she sees as false, damaging assumptions about Whitman's personality (and writing, as well, since for her the two things go together). Here, Aleramo underlines the dark and more fragile side of Whitman, arguing that he is not only the poet of joy, but also of sadness and anguish. Overall, the article is crucial in showing how Aleramo feels a particular confidence in knowing and explaining Whitman (she goes so far as to write: "he would have wanted […]), which reinforces the hypothesis that, by this time, 1911, she had read and written about him for at least a decade.

Aleramo also strikes a polemical note at the fame of Whitman as a "rough sensualist." But what is she referring to? Is she thinking of specific articles that came out in these years? Or is she referring to (or projecting) a general judgment perhaps passed by "common" readers? While she significantly lists "the naked human body," a few lines above, as the first of the many things sung by Whitman, and the face of the prostitute on the sidewalk as the last one, the Italian writer worries that Whitman's attention for the body and for sexuality, and his uninhibited tone, may be easily mistaken for a rough "sensualism." It is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that she uses the word "sacred" when introducing that list.

Aleramo's insistence on a religious lexicon pervades the whole passage ("his lament is never a blasphemy,"[276] she clarifies, and she talks about a "religious unity"). It is as if Aleramo is trying to elevate Whitman's figure, to sanctify him. And this is particularly striking, when thinking that, only a couple of months after writing "Vallate

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[276] The original Italian word, "bestemmia," specifically refers to a curse against God.

dell'Alpe," Aleramo was reading from and writing about Saint Francis of Assisi. After the Alps, in the fall of that same year, she went to Assisi. This was another important stop in her physical and spiritual wandering at this point of her life, in active search of a fuller, renewed, existential peace. And of Saint Francis, she wrote

> Saint Francis, then, is still here, he walks again in front of our eyes […] He comes, talks, sings, somebody hears him, but his voice, though, is not enough. And he takes refuge in the caves, alone, to cry out his dream. But in every hour of light he goes out again in the blue valleys, again he sings with untiring faith his *laude*. […] He was a poet: a man of rich blood, who had the strong need of extending his life, of seeing it flower, produce fruits, fuse with the Everything. A poet […] A free and unsettled man, across valleys and seas, in the caves where he cried, in the palaces where he imposed his certainty. Almost naked and barefoot he trod with his naked foot all the roads of the world […][277]

It is as if Whitman and Saint Francis have merged and become, in Aleramo's mind, one and the same thing: a mythical figure of reference, a co-wanderer that Aleramo admires, cherishes, venerates, and from whom she takes a major inspiration for both her life and her work. It is also significant that for both figures Aleramo underlines the strength, the joy and confidence, as well as the difficulties and struggles. This may directly relate to the delicate moment of her life: she had completely regained her freedom, but she also was struggling to find the next direction.

After Assisi, Aleramo went on in her wandering. She would soon be in Florence, close to the circle of *La Voce*, then in Milan, where she met the main exponents of the emerging futurism, and then Paris. In the French capital, within the stimulating literary salon of Madame Aurel, in Rue de Printemps, Aleramo spent time with Bazalgette, but also with other members of the circle of the literary magazine *Mercure de France*, which

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[277] The piece on Saint Francis is contained in Aleramo's notebook entries, collected in *Orsa Minore*, ed. Anna Folli, 63-64.

included figures like Gustave Apollinaire, Émile Verhaeren, Colette, Anatole France, Natalie Barney, and others. Aleramo entered the scene as a famous foreign writer, as her novel *Una donna* had been much appreciated in France[278] (where the book had been translated in 1908), and she had the chance to deeply interact with these people.[279] The strengthening of Aleramo's friendship with Bazalgette in the Parisian period is attested by a letter that the French translator sent to Sibilla a few years later, in February 1921. In it, Bazalgette says that he would have liked to translate an essay by her into French, if he had known about it earlier. The letter, originally in Italian, reads:

> Dear friend,
> I salute your two books[280] that reach me as a breath of resurrection. In looking at them I see two things, first of all: *Il Passaggio* will come out in French, of which I am very happy–and your essay on Slataper, whose book *Il mio Carso* will soon be published in a series that I direct.[281] If the translator had not written an introduction already, I would have asked you to send your essay to put it at the beginning of our volume. How many years without hearing from you! And what years…I still feel the weight of five of them…I can't recognize you in the portrait at the beginning of *Momenti*. I can see you more clearly in my memory. Dear friend, I am infinitely sensitive to the testimony of affection and I thank you. Maybe I can send you something this year, in exchange. But how hard and bitter are these new times and how much they try our patience …[282]

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[278] The editors of the *Mercure de France* wrote, for example, in the issue of December 12, 1916, on page 749: "We owe to M.me Sibilla Aleramo to have created a very complete type of woman, one that Italian literature had not ever analyzed, with a remarkable, and well remarked, psychological subtlety." My translation.

[279] Aleramo recalls this time in the essay "Esperienze d'una scrittrice" (originally a lecture given by Aleramo in Torino at the "Unione Culturale" on March 8, 1952), reproduced in *Andando e stando*, ed. Rita Guerricchio (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997), 12-14. On page 13 she talks, for example, about dining with Bazalgette, "the acute and passionate biographer and translator of Whitman" at a restaurant in Montparnasse.

[280] Bazalgette is referring to Aleramo's novel *Il passaggio* (1919) and her poetry collection *Momenti* (1920).

[281] The French translation of the novel by Scipio Slataper (originally published in 1912) was published, that same year, by Rieder as *Mon frère le Carso.*

[282] The letter is included in Conti and Morino, eds., 170-171. My translation.

Although they had not heard from each other for a few years, it is clear how close Bazalgette and Aleramo remained nonetheless. The war emerges from Bazalgette's letter as an ominous presence that has dramatically changed his living landscape, since the time spent with Aleramo in the *Mercure de France* circle. It is highly significant that Aleramo decides to send to the French translator her second novel and her first poetry collection, as it proves how Bazalgette had remained an important figure of reference for her. The letter also shows the common interests of the two: the fact that Aleramo had just written about the autobiographical novel by Slataper and its lyrical prose, and that Bazalgette was about to publish it, confirmed once again a shared taste.

Aleramo continued to be interested in Bazalgette's work on Whitman, and this is testified by a few entries in her notebook. These notes, originally undated in the notebook, have incorrectly been attributed by the editor of the published notebook to 1902.[283] The editor must in fact have associated the first article by NEMI on Whitman, which came out in 1902, with these notes, and hypothesized that Aleramo's notes may indicate the time when she was first reading Whitman. But in the notes, Aleramo is citing, within the same page, first of all, from the 1909 translation by Bazalgette, and, secondly, from his critical book on Whitman entitled *Le poème evangile de Walt Whitman*, which came out for the first time in 1921.[284] The notes must, then, be dated as at least from, or post, 1921. In fact, Bazalgette's indication, in the 1921 letter, that he might send something of his in exchange of Aleramo's nice gesture of sending her books,

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[283] See Anna Folli, ed., *Orsa minore*, 124-125.

[284] See Léon Bazalgette, *Le poème evangile de Walt Whitman* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1921). The citation by Aleramo in her notebook is from page 224: "Il est une âme publique qui se voudrait foulée comme la grande route."

might explain these citations: perhaps the French translator, knowing about Aleramo's passion for Whitman's work, sent the Italian writer both a copy of his 1909 translation and his 1921 newly published essay.

Aleramo's interest in Whitman did not remain isolated to her articles and to her friendship with Bazalgette. The interest spanned her entire life: in 1950, at the age of seventy-four, she wrote in her journal that *Leaves of Grass* had been "vicinissimo come forse nessun altro poema al mio essere" ("so very close to my being, perhaps as no other poem ever").[285] And important traces of this predilection can be found in another crucial aspect of the writer's life: her turbulent, intense love relationships with various Italian avant-garde writers and intellectuals. In many of these cases, in fact, Aleramo seemed to invoke Whitman in order to confirm and to strengthen an existing affinity, or to test the potentialities of an incipient one.

Let us look at a few examples. In February 1912 Aleramo published in the Florentinian periodical *Il Marzocco* a review of Giovanni Papini's collection of short stories *Parole e sangue.*[286] At the time Aleramo had just met Papini, a central figure of the Florentinian avant-garde, and the two were about to begin a short but very intense relationship, which ended in the summer of 1912. But if they had met in person only that year, the two writers had already read each other's creative and critical work, and they had

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[285] For "poem," Aleramo intends "long poem" or "work," as the word "poema" can also indicate this in Italian, See Sibilla Aleramo, *Diario inedito*, December 30, 1950. The unpublished journal is part of the Fondazione Feltrinelli collection, held in Milan at the Feltrinelli publishing house. The words are reported by Adriana Perrotta in the essay, "'Questo balsamo, la lettura': ovvero la necessità della cultura," in *Svelamento*, eds. Buttafuoco and Zancan, 117.

[286] See Sibilla Aleramo, "Le confessioni di un fantastico," *Il Marzocco* 17, 8, (February 25 1912). The essay is included in Dello Vicario, ed., 225-229.

both collaborated with the *Nuova Antologia.* Like Aleramo, Papini had published in 1908 in the *Nuova Antologia* an article on Walt Whitman.[287] In this article, Papini announced, just as Aleramo would do a few months later, the publication of the complete translation by Gamberale, and discussed, in a passionate tone, his love for the poetry of Whitman: a poetry through which, as he put it, he had for the first time "felt what poetry meant" (696). Emphasizing the duality and contradictory nature of Whitman's poetry, Papini underlined both the personalism and pantheism, the roughness and the tenderness of this poetry[288] and noted, as Aleramo had done a few times, the poet's "profound sympathy for the most humble beings of society." (706) He also discussed, at length, the universalist democratic principle at work within Whitman's attempt to "explain to the world a kind of democratic mythology." (707) To confirm the profound affinity that both writers must have felt when reading each other's articles on Whitman, in 1912 Aleramo decides to start her review of *Parole e sangue* with the translation of one of her favorite quotes from the American poet: "Give me your tone therefore o Death […]."[289]

A few months later, in Milan, when the relationship with Papini was over, Aleramo fell in love with the futurist Italian painter and sculptor Umberto Boccioni. Boccioni at first reciprocated this love, but soon started to turn Aleramo down, who suffered a great deal

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[287] See Giovanni Papini, "Walt Whitman," *Nuova Antologia* series 5, volume 135, collection 219, booklet 876, (June 16 1908): 696-711.

[288] In a striking coincidence of interests, Papini had established a parallel that Aleramo must have particularly appreciated: "to be complete, he must at the same time be as joyous as Saint Francis and as violent as Nietzsche." (703)

[289] The original quote in Italian is "Oh, morte, dammi il tuo tono! ...". The line is taken from Whitman's "Scented Herbage of my Breast" (in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 96. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html) and it appears also in Aleramo's notebook (see Folli, ed., *Orsa minore*, 125).

for this (she talked about Boccioni as "perhaps my most passionate love."[290]) Probably assuming that Boccioni, as other fellow futurists like Filippo Marinetti and Ardengo Soffici, would appreciate Whitman, Aleramo, in one of her attempts to re-establish the love that Boccioni was withdrawing, sent him, among other books, a copy of *Leaves of Grass*. This is how Boccioni, in his typical brusque tone, answered:

> The books you sent me, while showing your kindness toward me, offend my sensitivity. Books, I told you, disgust me. Even Walt Whitman bothers me. All that solemnity, that biblical tone, finds me indifferent, I don't understand it and I am disgusted by it. […] I detest all those who cling to finding analogies between themselves and those who have done great things. I want to do everything in my own way and then destroy every artistic germ within me. […] Love, you know it, I told it to you and I repeat it, love disgusts me![291]

Boccioni's rejection of Whitman mirrors his rejection of Aleramo, creating a tall wall of indifference. But the fact that Boccioni writes "*even* Walt Whitman" is significant. It seems to indicate that Boccioni is acknowledging that not appreciating Whitman is an unusual thing: perhaps Boccioni had liked Whitman in the past, and/or that the American poet is generally much appreciated in the futurist circle of which Boccioni is part.

Considering her failed attempt to seduce and re-conquer Boccioni also with the help of Whitman, it appears evident how the very first letter that poet Dino Campana sent Aleramo in 1916,[292] must have sounded particularly sweet to Aleramo's ears. Campana,

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[290] See Sibilla Aleramo, *Diario di una donna. Inediti 1945-1960* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), 462.

[291] The letter, undated (but certainly from 1913), is reported in Conti and Morino, eds., 95-96. My translation.

[292] Campana wrote to Aleramo on July 22 1916 in response to Aleramo's letter: while the two writers had never met before, Aleramo had read Campana's *Canti orfici* (1914) and had written to him to congratulate him. Campana's letter has been printed in Gallo, ed.,15. My translation.

in a move that mirrored Aleramo's one with Boccioni, wrote: "Dear Sibilla, I want to write to you but I can't. I am terribly bored. Do you know Walt Whitman? […]." A couple of days later, Sibilla answered to the crucial question:

> I have loved Walt Whitman, as a few others have. And it's been a long time. I send you a few old articles: journalism, nothing else. But in one of them I talk, in fact, as I was able to do then, with a naïve seriousness, about Walt.[293]

The ardent relationship with Campana, or what poet Mario Luzi has called a "deflagration,"[294] was off to a formidable start. While it is not clear which one of her articles on Whitman in the *Nuova Antologia* Aleramo sent, as no enclosure is present,[295] what is most important is that Aleramo acknowledges both her authorship and her long-held admiration of Whitman.

If it is clear how the interest in Whitman had deeply marked not only Aleramo's journalistic career and critical writings, but also her private and emotional life, one final question must be asked about her creative production. Is there any echo of Whitman in Aleramo's novels and poems? The first novel, *Una donna* (1906), already shows a characteristic that will distinguish all the subsequent novels: Aleramo's highly lyrical prose. But the novel, a semi-autobiography with the intent of sending a loud message about women's emancipation, does not exhibit direct stylistic or thematic consonances with Whitman's work. It is in the second novel, *Il passaggio* (1919), also semi-

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[293] The letter is also included in Gallo, ed., 16.

[294] The expression by Luzi is reported in Bruna Conti's introduction to *Un viaggio chiamato amore*, 11.

[295] As I said above, scholars Folli and Conti have hypothesized that it was the 1906 article, but they have given no clear reason for this assessment.

autobiographical, but more fragmentary[296] and even more explicitly lyrical, that various echoes from Whitman can be heard. The first one is in Aleramo's description of the anxiety, the urge, that moves her writing: a creative principle that fuses with and is embodied by the narrating persona.

> Anxiety of all comprehending, of all respecting and surmounting. Attention impatient and tireless, religious surveillance of my humanity. As if I were, instead of a person, an idea, an idea to extract, to manifest, to impose, to save.[297]

This principle-persona is then depicted as intent at empathically contemplating the world, at walking, passing through it:

> I contemplated the agitated mystery of my spirit, and the alert aspect of the universe, and many that I thought alive as me, men and women, and the beating of the veins on their foreheads. Men and women are on my path so that I can love them. […] Grace of faces and bodies, flashes of souls, glory of enjoyments and sufferings, message without an end. Words have come to me even out of deformed and unformed lives. And where I pass, unknown, almost furtively, even there I imagine to touch with my spirit those who do not see me, to distract them for a moment from themselves, in a warm vortex. High valleys, farmsteads in the fields, the grass softens the rustling of my foot. (14)[298]

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[296] This experimental style of prose writing was very fashionable in the Italian literary avant-gardes of the 10s and 20s, and especially in the Florentinian circle of *La Voce.*

[297] Original: "Ansia di tutto comprendere, di tutto rispettare e sormontare. Attenzione trepida ed instancabile, religiosa vigilanza della mia umanità. Come se io fossi, invece d'una persona, un'idea da estrarre, da manifestare, da imporre, da portare in salvo." Sibilla Aleramo, *Il passaggio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000), 13. All the passages cited from this text are translated by me.

[298] Original: "Ho contemplato l'agitato mistero del mio spirito, e il lucido aspetto dell'universo, e tanti che ho pensato vivi come me, uomini e donne, ed il pulsar delle vene sulla loro fronte. Uomini e donne sono sul mio cammino perch'io li ami. […] Grazia di volti e di corpi, bagliori d'anime, gloria di godimenti e di patimenti, messaggio senza fine. Mi sono venute parole anche dalle vite deformi e dalle informi. E dove passo ignota, quasi furtiva, ivi pure immagino talvolta di toccare col mio spirito coloro che non mi scorgono, di rapirli un attimo a loro stessi, in un caldo gorgo. Alte vallate, casolari fra i prati, l'erba smorza il fruscìo del mio piede."

Aleramo's reflections on the creative, life-giving role of readers for what she writes are also reminiscent of Whitman's continuous attention for, and invocation of, readers. The corporeal metaphor built by Aleramo takes a precise maternal configuration:

> If I write, I excavate in my thought or in my passion, and the words distill blood, I believe that I am giving myself and instead I am receiving. I am deceived because I nourish my prey with myself. But he who listens to me is like my son was when he drank from my nipple and I held him in my arms, a thing that was mine and that made my life precious. (14-15)[299]

And, right after this passage, comes Aleramo's Whitmanian declaration of a firm, single, and yet inclusive, and cosmic, identity:

> I affirm me to myself: nothing else, nothing else!
> Oh, but I affirm all that I am composed of, all that is around me and that I absorb! Nothing gets lost. And when I desire to be loved it is again my love for all things that asks to be recognized, it is the world that wants to be embraced and sung. (15)[300]

All the four passages cited here are part of the section entitled "Le ali" ("The wings"), the second one in the book. "Le ali" functions as an opening introduction, a gathering of forces, both in a creative and in a personal sense, as the narrating persona–once again a woman who leaves her marriage and motherhood–is recounting who she is and where she comes from, before starting to describe her "flight."[301]The echoes from

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[299] Original: "Se scrivo, se scavo nel mio pensiero o nella mia passione, e le parole sono stillanti sangue, credo di darmi ed invece prendo. M'illudo perché nutro di me la mia preda. Ma colui che m'ascolta è com'era mio figlio quando beveva alla mia mammella ed io lo teneva nelle braccia, cosa mia che faceva preziosa la vita mia."

[300] Original: "Affermo me a me stessa: null'altro, null'altro! Oh, ma affermo tutto ciò di cui mi compongo, tutto che mi sta attorno e ch'io assorbo! Nulla va perduto. E quando anelo ad essere amata è ancora il mio amore per tutte le cose che chiede di venir riconosciuto, è il mondo che vuol essere abbracciato e cantato." In her postface to this edition, Bruna Conti comments on this passage, and puts it close to Whitman's first lines in "Song of Myself." See "Postfazione" in *Il passaggio*, 105.

[301] Once again, as she had done in *Una donna*, Aleramo talks about her youth in terms of strength: "who made me so strong?" See *Il passaggio*, 11.

Whitman become, then, the bones at the base of this alar structure, the indispensable propulsive equipment of the novel. There are also other moments in the novel that resemble Whitman's poetry: the use of exclamations and anaphoras, the frequent invocations of the persona's soul, the final reflections on the ambivalence of death, described as "a thing of pearl […] soaked with light," (95)[302] and the seraphic farewell at the very end of the book: "With a quiet breath I go to reconcile with all that is pure and silent, I blend with the arcane smile of goodness." (95)[303]

Aleramo's early poetry[304] is characterized by a frequent use of long, free verse. The poem, "Sai bene…" ("You Know Well…"), for example, reads:

> You know well that I am attracted by the margins of the rivers,
> You know well that to the flames my restless hands I tend,
>
> You see me while I look at you in the clear water of the eyes,
> You put your forehead close to the warm bunches of grapes,
>
> And yet we have been lingering–perverse or poor?—
> And it is always that first hour in which we liked each other in silence[305].

But these early poems are still short and fragmentary, mostly confessional or at least very concentrated–and often self-indulgently so–on describing emotions and states of mind. It is only more than two decades later, at a very different stage of Aleramo's life

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[302] Original: "cosa di perla […] compenetrata di luce."

[303] Original: "Con sommesso respiro mi riavvicino a tutto che in purità tace, mi riconfondo con l'arcano sorriso della bontà."

[304] I am referring specifically to the collection entitled *Poesie* ("Poems") that includes poems from 1912 to 1928. See Sibilla Aleramo, *Poesie* (Milano: Mondadori, 1929).

[305] Original: "Sai bene che m'attraggono i margini dei fiumi, / sai bene che alle fiamme le mani inquiete tendo, / mi vedi guardarti nell'acqua chiara degli occhi / m'accosti la fronte dai grappoli caldi, / pur da tanto indugiamo —perversi o poveri?— / e sempre è quell'ora prima che tacendo ci piacemmo…" In *Poesie*, 70.

and of Italian history and politics, that the writer will more closely echo Whitman's voice, in her poetry. As happened in the case of D'Annunzio, Aleramo went back to her long-standing interest in Whitman when embarking on a new, highly politicized phase of her career as a writer. Like D'Annunzio, Aleramo resorted to Whitman as a sort of last means to justify and fully embody her ideology, only she went in a completely opposite direction compared to D'Annunzio, as we will see later in this study.

2. Gamberale's Translating Enterprises: the 1907 Unabridged *Foglie d'erba*, the 1912 Economical Edition for Workers, and the Influence on the French, Spanish and Russian Translations

Luigi Gamberale's 1907 translation of *Leaves of Grass*, mentioned in passing before, deserves direct attention in its own right. Seventeen years after the publication of the second volume of his selected translations from Whitman's poems, Gamberale was ready for a larger and more important project. In 1907, the Palermo-based publishing house Sandron published his unabridged translation,[306] and inserted it in the "Biblioteca dei popoli" ("Library of the People") series directed by Giovanni Pascoli, who had warmly encouraged Gamberale to carry on this ambitious project and who, in 1902, with the help of Girolamo Ragusa Moleti, had persuaded the publisher Sandron to give his consent to it.[307] Pascoli and Moleti in fact encountered a series of difficulties in

[306] Gamberale's translation was based on the 1884 edition published in Glasgow by Wilson & McCormick (which is a replica of the 1881-1882 Osgood edition), with the addition of "Sands at Seventy," "Good-Bye my Fancy" and "Old Age Echoes," taken from the 1900 Small, Maynard & Company edition. The physical copies of Wilson & McCormick edition, as well as other editions of Whitman's work that Gamberale used or might have consulted, are unfortunately not present in the Gamberale collection at the Agnone library.

[307] This is testified by the letter from Pascoli to Gamberale of February 14, 1902. The manuscript letter is not available in the correspondence collection in Agnone, but it is reproduced in Luigi Gamberale, *Scritti vari* (Agnone: Sammartino Ricci, 1912), 523. See also the letter from

convincing Sandron to plan on a volume dedicated to Whitman's poetry. Sandron's perplexity derived from the fact that two selected translations volumes had already come out for Sonzogno in 1887 and 1890. But Pascoli's and Moleti's argument that this new one would be an unabridged translation containing a large number of new poems finally convinced the publisher. Ragusa Moleti used these words to motivate Gamberale:

> Your version will be the the only one made until now, not only in Italy, but in Europe. Of Whitman there is not even a French translation. Europe is still either too classic or too romantic to feel the need of that genial poet. No other translators of Whitman, then, except you.[308]

Gamberale, who in 1902 was sixty-two years old and nearing retirement from his job as principal in Reggio Calabria, accepted the new challenge. After all, he must have considered it a great honor. In the letter that confirmed Gamberale's appointment as translator, Pascoli, who at this time was already one of the most well-known figures in the Italian literary scene, saluted Gamberale by reinforcing the significance of the new enterprise in these terms: "dear and good master, you will soon go far, and my heart will follow you. And you will have to work so much and I will be so proud to announce it to Italian readers. My endless wishes […]."[309] Pascoli's predictions were accurate: Gamberale's labors were extensive, and his translation would soon go very far.

In 1904, Gamberale finally retired from his job, left Calabria and went back to live in Agnone, his hometown in Molise. Relieved of his pedagogical and administrative

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Girolamo Ragusa Moleti to Luigi Gamberale of November 17, 1902, available in Agnone. The letter is signed by Moleti as "Mommino," which testifies to the friendly relation between him and Gamberale.

[308] Letter from Ragusa Moleti to Gamberale, November 17, 1902.

[309] *Scritti vari*, 523. My translation.

duties, the translator had the time and quiet needed to revise and expand his work on Whitman. Before sending his final drafts to Sandron,[310] Gamberale read, among other things, the 1905 Henry Bryan Binns's Whitman biography, the 1898 critical work on Whitman's rhythmical structures by Pasquale Jannaccone, Oscar Triggs' 1893 study on Browning and Whitman, and the chapter on Whitman included in Edmund Stedman's 1900 *Poets of America*. Now in daily contact with Whitman's work, and with the help of his 1902 Webster dictionary, Gamberale added to the substance and value of his work.

In comparison to the preface of the volume that collects the 1887 and 1890 selected translations, the preface to the 1907 edition reflects Gamberale's heightened knowledge of Whitman: the translator, thanks to quoting repeatedly from Binns's work, is much more precise in his biographical account of Whitman.[311] He also shows a finer understanding of the publication history of the different editions of the *Leaves* and of the cultural and historical background of the poet's work. But what is most evident from reading this new preface is the diminished degree of enthusiasm in Gamberale's tone: it is as if the translator, with the passing of time, has developed a more critical perspective on the American poet. The passion and excitement for the first encounter with Whitman

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[310] With reference to the translation drafts for the 1907 edition, the collection at Agnone does not include any of them, while it does include drafts for the 1912 translation (published by Bernardo Lux) and the 1923 edition (published once again by Sandron).

[311] While the biography is generally more accurate, Gamberale certainly puts too much emphasis on the events of New Orleans, especially with reference to the legend of Whitman's love relationship with a woman. Gamberale goes as far as to attribute the positive transformation of Whitman's writing to this disappointing love experience: "love and the knowledge of the Southern states had widened the targets of his poetry to America and to humanity." (XIV) Gamberale's insistence on the heterosexual elements of Whitman's poetry returns later in the preface, when discussing Whitman's "never immoral" treatment of sexuality: this sexuality, for Gamberale as for many other critics in these first phases of the reception, remains strictly heterosexual.

shown in the first collection has been replaced by a much more experienced, cultivated attitude. And, as often happens in long term relationships, Gamberale makes clear that he knows Whitman very well and is also frustrated with what he considers Whitman's flaws.

This frustration seems to derive primarily from the complexities of the translating endeavor itself: when talking about these flaws, Gamberale repeatedly mentions, in fact, his translating challenges. Whitman aims to depict an "impersonal personality" and a "universal individualism,"[312] Gamberale explains. But often, Gamberale argues, the indirections and imprecise concepts that the poet uses to achieve this risk to become too abstract, too vague. As he puts it, "While human personality abounds, at the same time, human personality is missing." (XXXV) Not only are Whitman's ideas imprecise, but his expressions are the same, Gamberale argues. And here derives the main difficulty in translating: "One must often settle for what's more probable and logical; and translation becomes interpretation." (XXXIV)

Gamberale is also bothered by Whitman's "uncertain syntax" and use of punctuation: Whitman, he ironically argues, is barely aware of the existence of the colon and semi-colon (XLV). To put a remedy to this, Gamberale announces that he has often changed the original punctuation: even while aware of how "dangerous" such a

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[312] See Luigi Gamberale, "Prefazione" in Walt Whitman, *Foglie d'erba: con le due aggiunte e gli "Echi della vecchiaia" dell'edizione del 1900* (Palermo: Sandron), 1907, XXXI. All translations from the Italian preface into English that I will use here are mine. It must be noted that Gamberale's choice to often modify the punctuation was strongly influenced by Ragusa Moleti, who in the letter of April 1903 (also available in Agnone), wrote: "Commas must be used at the end of each proposition, and not of every line. The comma between the name and its adjective, between the active verb and the object is intolerable. Syntax mistakes must also be corrected in the drafts, and everything that makes the meaning unclear should. If you don't give up, I will impose myself, and in the last drafts, I will correct everything at your betrayal. You must persuade yourself, dear Luigi, that to accept the punctuation of Whitman, is to hurt the fame of that great [poet]." My translation.

modification can be, the translator hopes that doing so can improve the poems' intelligibility (XLVI). After all, Gamberale humbly confesses to be aware of his own limits as a translator. As he had done in the previous collection of translations, with the quote from Dante he used in the epigraph, here he once again clarifies how his is only an initial attempt: "translators from the Bible, Aeschylus, Dante and Shakespeare must have met the same difficulties: the translators who succeeded them did better, but even these latter, were still not perfect." (XLVI)

Gamberale's modifications are not only limited to adding semi-colons or colons in place of the original commas: convinced, as he states in the preface, that Whitman's poetry has only an appearance of being verse, but it is "really, prose and nothing else," Gamberale can even feel as free as to structure Whitman's poetry as he pleases. Section one of "Song of Myself," for example, is formed, in Gamberale's translation, by only one stanza instead of the original four. This had already happened in the first selected translation (where, because of the general principle of selection, poems themselves would be often mutilated of entire parts). But if Gamberale had, back then, left the benefit of a doubt by stating that Whitman's writing was a mix of prose and poetry, at this point he has arrived to boldly proclaim that it is "prose and nothing else." Does this mean that the translator's understanding of Whitman's poetics has regressed instead of having progressed?

Not exactly. Gamberale's assertive and seemingly final statement about Whitman's poetry being prose may in fact consist mostly in a simplistic provocation directed to dismiss the value of analytical studies such as Jannaccone's. While Gamberale praises Jannaccone's scholarly effort, he is in fact convinced that it is impossible to

assign precise rhythmical schemes to Whitman's work, and that, in the end, "when talking about Whitman, technical questions are trifles" (XLVIII). But it is also clear that Gamberale still appreciates Whitman's innovations. As it already appears evident when reading the 1890-1891 preface, the Italian translator may not know how to explain the nature of this innovation, and may not appreciate others' attempts to do so, but he clearly suggests that the one showed by Whitman is the direction that the poetry of the immediate future should follow (L).

Gamberale seems to *feel* the overall effect of innovation, but fails to *see* what this latter is composed of. He is profoundly bothered, for example, by Whitman's enumerations, which often seem to him "an anatomical index" or the "inventory of a bazaar."[313] Thus he feels entitled to correct and distort Whitman's punctuation and length of stanzas. In the midst of this ambivalence of continual rejection and acceptance, blame and praise, comes Gamberale's definition of what he sees as the ultimate core of Whitman's poetics.

> Intending to instill in the soul of men that love that should keep them united in the moral world with the same virtue for which, in the physical world, matter is kept together by the force of adhesion, his poetry had to pour out, as a benevolent rain that could penetrate in every layer. Did he achieve this? We don't dare to answer. We only know that, either victim or priest of his own ideality, if he is not always a great artist, he is often a great poet, and always a great heart; and that he wrote not to make some books, but to make one book *aimed to help the souls of men*.[314]

Gamberale, whether deliberately or not, failed to recognize the strongly homoerotic component of this vision, but he did grasp the idea of Whitman's message of

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[313] XXXVII. In this sense, not surprisingly, Gamberale, a teacher and principal who worked in pedagogy all his life, rendered this message by finding a metaphorical image in the world he was most familiar with: he compared Whitman to a teacher who assigns themes for future bards.

[314] XLIX, italics present in the original.

love and the American poet's understanding of writing as a form of social and political activism. This remains a dominant trait in Gamberale's understanding and ultimate appreciation of Whitman: it is when discussing this, that the old enthusiasm that Gamberale had shown in the past comes back at full force, and that Whitman returns to be a "great poet." We need to jump ahead in time for a moment to see how these ideas remained essential for Gamberale. A few years later, in 1912, Gamberale set out to publish a new selected translation, in an edition divided in three volumes and published by the Roman house Bernardo Lux.[315] The contents of each volume were selected by Gamberale who called the first volume "The Program-Songs," the second volume "The Great Songs," and the third "The Songs of Maturity."[316] The actual copies were printed by the small printing house of Sammartino-Ricci in Gamberale's town, Agnone, and they

[315] Gamberale confusingly indicates, on the book cover, that this is a "third edition": what he means is that it is his third translation (after the first 1887-1890 one, and the 1907 one).

[316] Interestingly, Gamberale uses the word "canti," which literally means "songs," instead of the word for "poems." He had done the same in the 1887 and 1890 *Canti scelti*. The choice gives the title a grandiloquent and classical spin, as is quite typical of Gamberale's diction. As for the specific contents of each volume, considering how hard it is to consult the physical books, I am offering here a summary of them: the first volume contains a selection from the Inscriptions poems, "Starting from Paumanok" (in its entirety), a shortened version of "Song of Myself," a selection from "Children of Adam" and from "Calamus." The second volume contains almost all the individual poems that come before "Birds of Passage" ("Song of the Open Road" while "Our Old Feuillage," "Song of the Exposition," and "Youth, Day, Old Age and Night" are cut out). Next, there are selections from "Birds of Passage," "Sea Drift," "By the Roadside," "Drum Taps" (but only a few poems are cut from this cluster, which significantly reinforces the idea of the centrality of this part of Whitman's work within the Italian reception), and the first part of poems from "Memories from President Lincoln." The third volume contains the second part of poems from "Memories from President Lincoln," a selection from "Autumn Rivulets," a selection from "Whispers of Heavenly Death," a selection from "Noon to Starry Night," a selection from "Songs of Parting," and selections from "Sands at Seventy," "Good-Bye my Fancy," "Fancies at Navesink," and "Old Age Echoes." Significant omissions, which I will partially discuss here, are the ones from "Children of Adam" and "Calamus" and the complete absence of poems as "France, the 18th Year of These States" and "The Sleepers."

are now rarities in Italian libraries, which must be the reason why scholars in the past have completely ignored this edition.[317]

Very simple in design and made of cheap materials, with a selling price of 0,60 liras each, the volumes were intended to be popular and accessible to all. Gamberale, who in 1909 had founded a People University in Agnone to help improve the literacy and education of Agnonese workers, put a lot of energies into designing the edition, as testified by the drafts kept at the Agnone library. These books were intended to be the workers' vade mecum: the short preface written by Gamberale makes this clear from the very beginning. He writes,

> Walt Whitman has not only left to the world a message of love and fraternity, but also the example of his life. From this latter, workers can learn: they can learn how, even when being without the adequate resources, it is still possible to ascend to those moral and intellectual heights without which any democracy becomes a vulgar and wild mess; they will see what they have to do in order to create their own individuality with the sole tenacity of their own will; they will deduce that the right path–the only one–that leads to the creation of oneself, is the one that one walks on without the help of others, with his own forces and his own efforts.[318]

And while this new edition was conceived by the translator with this main aim, the occasion also allowed him to cut and select to his exclusive preference, which he could not do in 1907 and would not be able to do in 1923.[319] In this third 1912 edition Gamberale is putting out the version of Whitman most clearly shaped by his own

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[317] No mention of this edition is ever made in the major, already cited, studies of the Italian reception and of the different Italian translations.

[318] See Luigi Gamberale, "Prefazione" in Walt Whitman, *Foglie di erba. Versione di Luigi Gamberale. Terza edizione in tre volumetti* (Bernardo Lux: Roma, 1912), vol. 1, VII-VIII.

[319] This last unabridged edition would be a combination of the 1907 and 1912 translations, with minor revisions and corrections.

concerns. For this essential edition, all that Gamberale regarded as unnecessary or ugly could be left out, with the excuse that it was of no essential use. As he says in the preface,

> This economical edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* does not contain the entirety of the songs as they appear in the original: I took out those songs or parts of songs that are nothing else than lists of names of places, or parts of the human body, or of industries and inventions. I also took out those songs or parts of songs, whose content appears in other songs already included here. The reason for this selection lies in the fact that this edition is destined for workers; to these latter, naked nomenclatures are of no use. And as for repetitions, it is known how they bore all readers, workers or not. Overall, these three volumes, if not materially–but actually, also materially, as what has been omitted is not a lot–contain the whole poetic substance of Whitman, and all its patriotic, civil, human ideologies. And this is what most counts. (VII)

This results in a dramatic change in the aspect and functioning of the overall *Leaves* and of the individual clusters. Gamberale may minimize the omissions, but they are quite numerous. The guiding principle of "cutting the lists" announced in the preface is followed: in Gamberale's translation of "Song of Myself," for example, the catalogue of section 15 (which starts with "The pure contralto sings in the organ loft")[320] is omitted except for the last six lines, in which the catalogue is coming to a pacifying end.[321] The striking excision of the "The Sleepers" and "Our Old Feuillage" may result from the same cause: Gamberale's belief that catalogues were "boring." Gamberale misunderstood one of the main elements of Whitman's proto-modernism. His omissions are all the more striking in this particular edition, conceived for the reading of workers.

As argued by Jacques Rancière, Whitman's catalogues have a double, aesthetical and political meaning:[322] they provoke a break with the logics of hierarchical

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[320] See Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 39. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html

[321] See page 39 in volume 1.

[322] Rancière would actually argue that the two things always go together.

representation and they create an egalitarian procession of things, activities, sights, women and men, urban spaces and natural spaces, which are all given to readers so that they can experience them, pass through them. It is thus, Rancière argues, that Whitman contributed to the construction of a community "in possession of its own meaning."[323] But Gamberale, who in the preface talks about how this book can help readers in "the creation of oneself," completely misses this.

Gamberale's annoyance with catalogues may not be the sole guiding rationale for his omissions. For example, if we remain concentrated on the "Song of Myself" version that Gamberale aimed to offer to workers in 1912, we discover that there is a worker who has been completely erased from the text: this is "The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard" of section 13. In Whitman's original, the lyrical I describes in admiring and sensual terms the physical strength and beauty of the body of the black driver, and expresses love for him: "I behold the picturesque giant and love him […]."[324] Was this too much to handle, for Gamberale? Was the translator scandalized by what Ed Folsom and Christopher Merrill have defined a "casual and easy expression of love across races"?[325] Looking at the unabridged 1907 translation, where Gamberale did necessarily have to include the section, might give us a clue. The section does appear there, in fact, but with two significant cuts: the half-line "[..]steady and tall he stands pois'd on one leg

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[323] See Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 64.

[324] See Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 38. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[325] See Ed Folsom and Christopher Merrill, *Song of Myself: With a Complete Commentary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016), 45.

on the string-piece" and the line "his blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-band" have both been omitted. Gamberale's omissions of these powerful physical descriptions make the encounter of the lyrical I with the black driver much more blend and forgettable, and they empty that expression of "love" from any possible implication of sexual desire.

This leads us to ask another question: do these cuts in "Song of Myself" correspond to similar cuts in "Calamus"? If yes, is Gamberale's editorial and translating practice meant to fully obliterate any homoerotic allusion? This does not seem to be the case. In the 1912 edition the translator does omit a few poems with an explicit homoerotic implication (such as "We Two Boys Together Clinging" and "Behold This Swarthy Face"), but at the same time he leaves others intact. And when he translates the whole cluster in the 1907 edition, he does not hide words like "manly love" or "lovers," as some translators in other languages do, at this time. It may very well be that Gamberale does not *see* the real homoerotic charge of "Calamus." The case of the black driver scene, partially cut in 1907 and totally removed in 1912, remains, in this sense, isolated, and therefore all the more interesting: is the deletion the result of Gamberale here recognizing homoerotic content? Or is it because of the combination of homoeroticism and cross-racial attraction? Did he consider it too "promiscuous" to show a black man with a naked chest and to affirm love for him?

This edition remains particularly interesting also for the noticeable change in Gamberale's use of language: probably because of the intended audience, the translator tends to use a more colloquial and less refined lexicon than the one used in the 1907 edition. In this sense, the 1912 economical and selected edition is an important transition

point within the path toward the final 1923 edition. Gamberale also pays more respect to the structural nature of the poems he translates by keeping the stanzas separated as they appear in the original. Another striking fact is that in the preface to this edition, unlike those of 1907 and 1923, Gamberale only gives a short biographical introduction to Whitman, but does not attempt to illuminate readers about his style and about the aesthetic value of this poetry. As the concluding lines of the preface read, "this was the man, this the naked image of the message of his life. As for the message of his poetry, readers will see it in his songs. Nobody can say it better than he himself did." (XVII) Gamberale displays high confidence in the interpretive capabilities of his worker-readers, and opts for providing them only with the effective idea of the perfect equivalence of the (mythicized) figure of the man with his work.

While it was certainly not as influential and well-known as the 1907 edition, the 1912 edition printed in Agnone clearly displays the core ideas and preferences at the base of Gamberale's understanding of Whitman, and in this sense, it is a reading guide to all of his translation work. This edition also represented a mid-point opportunity for the Italian translator to revise and correct his past work. Gamberale would in fact have used much of the changes and corrections he applied in 1912 for the 1923 edition.

Gamberale paid close attention to the reviews of the 1907 translation.[326] The translation gained remarkable resonance in Italy and abroad. Gamberale's 1907 work was in fact the first unabridged translation of Whitman in Europe, and it would be highly

[326] Several reviews of the translation were published right after the publication, and some of them are included in Luigi Gamberale, *Scritti Vari*. Among the people who reviewed the translation– and generally praised it, while sometimes mentioning a few imprecisions–within major Italian journals, there were critics Domenico Oliva, Alberto Lumbroso, Alfredo Galletti, Francesco Pucci, Mrs El (Laura Cantoni Orvieto).

influential for translations into other languages. The most striking example is that of the first larger volume of selected translations from Whitman published in Spain. The translation appeared in 1912, and was authored by Álvaro Armando Vasseur. He based his translation principally on Gamberale's 1907 translation, and probably also on Bazalgette's 1909 complete translation into French, while only sporadically did Vasseur consult the 1891-92 original English edition of *Leaves.*[327] As Matt Cohen has shown, many changes and errors made by Vasseur are "the passive reproduction of Gamberale's changes or errors," but at the same time, "glaring innovations in Vasseur's translation are almost invariably his own departure *from the Italian.*" And if Vasseur also looked at Bazalgette, this latter was in turn certainly inspired by Gamberale's work, as is clear from the existing correspondence between the two.

One example of this textual convergence of the three translations can be found by observing the three renditions of the title of Whitman's poem "Song of the Open Road."[328] Gamberale strangely decides to translate it as "Canto della pubblica strada"[329] (literally, "Song of the Public Road"): he does not opt for the much more literal, and

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[327] For more on this, see Matt Cohen and Rachel Price, "Introduction to Walt Whitman, Poemas, by Álvaro Armando Vasseur," available online at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/spanish/vasseur/introduction.html. See also Matt Cohen, "Transgenic Deformation: Literary Translation and the Digital Archive," available at http://whitmanarchive.org/about/articles/anc.00165.html. It must be noted that Cohen's and Price's reference to a 1900 complete translation by Gamberale is a misunderstanding that originates in Gamberale's 1907 title *Foglie di erba con le due aggiunte e gli "Echi della vecchiaia" dell'edizione 1900* (when Gamberale cites "the 1900 edition" he means not a previous translation by him, but instead the 1900 Small, Maynard & Company edition from which he has taken the annexes).

[328] See Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 120. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html

[329] "Canto della pubblica strada," translation by Luigi Gamberale, in *Foglie d'erba* 1907, 141.

much more adequate, term "aperta" ("open"), which would have aptly conveyed the sense of unrestricted liberty of the figurative road of the original, and opts for the rigid, almost procedural-sounding adjective "public." Vasseur and Bazalgette retain the same exact word ("publica" for Vasseur, and "publique" for Bazalgette),[330] while they both could have certainly used the equivalent for "open" in Spanish and French. Both Vasseur and Bazalgette seem to look at Gamberale first, rather than at Whitman.

Another similarity of the three translations lies in the general prolixity of lines: Whitman's original lines become usually much longer and often more prose-like. Let us look, for example, at "Song of the Exposition." The first parenthetical stanza,

> (Ah little recks the laborer,
> How near his work is holding him to God,
> The loving Laborer through space and time.)[331]

becomes, in Gamberale:

> (Ah! Chi lavora poco stima
> Quanto il lavoro congiunge strettamente l'operajo a Dio,
> A lui, l'amoroso operajo, attraverso lo spazio e il tempo.)[332]

Which, in my strictly literal English back translation, reads,

> (Ah! The one who works cares little
> Of how work tightly joins the worker to God,
> To him, the loving worker, through space and time.)

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[330] See "Chant de la voie publique," translation by Léon Bazalgette, in Walt Whitman, *Feuilles d'Herbe traduction intégrale d'après l'édition definitive* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1909), 198; "Canto de la vía pública," translation by Álvaro Armando Vasseur, in Walt Whitman, *Poemas* (Valencia: F. Sempere y compañía, Editores, 1912), 19.

[331] See Walt Whitman, "Song of the Exposition" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 157. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[332] "Canto dell'esposizione," in *Foglie d'erba* 1907, 193.

Gamberale, as he often does, changes Whitman's punctuation by adding an exclamation mark and by taking out a comma. He is pretty successful in keeping the first line short, but he decides to take away the original's significant emphasis on the little degree of the worker's concern by moving the equivalent for "little," "poco," later in the line. And, still in the first line, he makes another odd choice by making the protagonist be a generical "one who works" instead of, as in Whitman, a laborer. Gamberale then makes the word "operajo"[333] appear in the second line, where the original does not have it, and for doing this he takes away the original's possessive adjective from "work." This has the effect of uselessly complicating and lengthening the line. In the third line, Gamberale repeats "to him," "the loving worker," which again lengthens, slows down the rhythm and is also quite confusing. He also does not capitalize "worker" when the term referred to God. Because of Gamberale's choices, the clean, direct parallel established in Whitman's original between the laborer of the first line and the Laborer of the third is made much more intricate. Readers may have to re-read the stanza in order to grasp an image that in the original is immediately clear.

In Bazalgette, the same stanza reads:

> (Ah! il importe trop peu au travailleur,
> Combien son ouvrage le rapproche de Dieu,
> Le Travailleur au coeur aimant à travers l'espace et le temps.)[334]

In my back translation, this equals

> (Ah! it matters too little for the laborer,
> How much his work brings him close to God,
> The Worker with a loving heart through space and time.)

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[333] An archaic diction for "operaio," worker.

[334] "Chant de l'exposition," in *Feuilles d'Herbe,* 261.

Bazalgette inherits the exclamation mark from Gamberale, and while he freely makes "little" become "too little," he is at least able to keep the French term for "laborer" in the first line, and to capitalize it when it occurs in the third line with reference to God. Bazalgette's verbal choice in the second line with the use of the verb "rapprocher" ("to come/put close") takes out the poignant sense of "hold" present in Whitman's original. But, while also longer and more prose-like than Whitman's, Bazalgette's rendition is more successful than Gamberale's.

Finally, Vasseur's stanza reads:

> (¡Ah, qué poco caso se hace del que trabaja!
> Sin embargo, su labor lo aproxima en secreto a Dios:
> A El, el amoroso obrero a través del espacio y del tiempo.)

And my back translation:

> (Ah how little it is minded of the one who works!
> Certainly, his work brings him secretly close to God:
> To Him, the loving worker through space and time.)[335]

In Vasseur, a few elements of Gamberale's and Bazalgette's versions conflate, and the result is not ideal. Gamberale's exclamation is not only maintained, but extended by Vasseur to the whole first line, which adds an over-dramatic charge to the tone of the stanza. While Vasseur keeps the "one who works" solution used by Gamberale, he at least does not make the mistake of inserting "worker" in the second line. But he gives the first line a different meaning than Whitman and the other translators: for Vasseur, people in general do not care about workers. This sounds like a sentence that could be used in a protest for the rights of workers, and in this sense, it goes far beyond Whitman's original intention.

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[335] "Canto de la exposición," in *Poemas*, 123.

Like Gamberale, Vasseur also does not capitalize his equivalent of the word "laborer" when referring to God. In fact, he decides to avoid the word God altogether and to copy Gamberale's useless repetition "To him," only with the pronoun in a capitalized form, which makes the line significantly more conventional. Vasseur looks at Bazalgette's "rapprocher" in the second line, but he also puts his original mark by freely adding the expressions "sin embargo" ("certainly") and "en secreto" ("secretly"), which have the effect of lengthening, adding a colloquial tone and a nuance of confidentiality that is not present in Whitman's stanza. Another original addition by Vasseur is the colon in the second line.

This example has shown the relations of vicinity and derivation of the three translations and the common practices of Gamberale, Bazalgette and Vasseur in terms of generally increasing the original's length and of making deliberate additions and changes. Another interesting aspect to analyze is the translators' rendition of sexually-charged images and expressions. Let us take a look at Whitman's first two lines in "The Dalliance of the Eagles."

> SKIRTING the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest),
> Skyward in air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagles,[336]

While Vasseur does not include the poem in his 1912 selection, we can look at Gamberale's and Bazalgette's versions. Gamberale's title is "La carezza delle aquile" ("The caress of the eagles"), and the expression comes back in the second line, as well:

> Fiancheggiando la via del fiume (mia mattutina passeggiata e mio riposo),

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[336] See Walt Whitman, "The Dalliance of the Eagles" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 216. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

> Su, verso il cielo, nell'aria, ecco, improvviso, uno smorzato schiamazzo, la
> carezza delle aquile;[337]

Back translation:

> Flanking the river road (my morning walk and my rest),
> Up, toward the sky, in the air, there, suddenly, a softened squawking, the caress of
> the eagles;

In Italian, the term "carezza" does not carry the same implication of casual sexual encounter, as "dalliance" does: just as the English "caress," it usually connotes a tender touch of friendly or parental affection. While in the rest of the poem Gamberale renders the physical, sexual tension of the encounter quite well (for example, by insisting on the convulsive, desiring onomatopoeic value of the long and nervous present participles), the title and its repetition in the second line only manage to convey the idea of a lukewarm tenderness.

Bazalgette does slightly better with the title: he chooses "Amours des aigles" ("Loves of eagles"), which also remains rather platonic in comparison to Whitman's title.

> Je longeais la route du fleuve, (pour ma promenade d'avant-midi, mon
> délassement),
> Lorsque soudain, venant du ciel, j'entendis dans l'aire une rumeur assourdie,
> deux aigles qui se caressaient;[338]

Back translation:

> I was walking along the road of the river, (for my morning walk, my rest),
> When suddenly, coming from the sky, I heard in the air a muffled sound, two
> eagles that caressed each other;

Here Bazalgette reveals his attentiveness to Gamberale: even if he renders the title differently, he also goes, in the second line of the poem, for "deux aigles qui se

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[337] "La carezza delle aquile" in *Foglie d'erba* 1907, 271.

[338] "Amours d'aigles" in *Feuilles d'Herbe*, 356.

caressaient" ("two eagles who caress each other"). The French "caresse" or "caresser," as a verb in this case, as the exact connotation of the Italian and the English "caress." Bazalgette also replicates Gamberale's modified punctuation, by adding a series of commas in the second line and a semicolon at the end of it.

Although it did not make it to Spain, Gamberale's "caress" went as far as Russia. In his selected translations from Whitman published in 1911, Konstantin Bal'mont would in fact include this poem with the title of "Ласка орловь" ("The caress of the eagles").

> И дя вдоль реки по дороге (это утромь мой отдыхъ, прогулка),
> Я въ воздухъ, тамь, ближе къ небу, заглушенный услышаль звукъ;
> Внезапная ласка орловь […],[339]
>
> Back translation:
>
> Walking along the river on the road (it was the morning of my rest, my walk),
> In the air, there, close to the sky, I heard a muffled sound;
> The sudden caress of the eagles […]

As these lines show, Bal'mont most probably had Bazalgette's version at his side. The Russian poet knew French well: by 1911 he had repeatedly lived in Paris (and by 1920, he would permanently move to France, where he would die in 1942). While he moves the "caress of the eagles" to the third line, Bal'mont also repeats the use of various commas in the second line and the insertion of a semicolon, as done by Gamberale and Bazalgette. In Russian, too, the term "ласка" does not carry any possible erotic nuance. This case has proven how Gamberale lessened the erotic charge of the poem with his choice of the word "carezza," and this has later propagated to Bazalgette's translation

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[339] "Laska orlov' in Walt Whitman, *Побеги травы* (*Pobegi Travy)*, transl. Konstantin Bal'mont (Moskva: Knigoizdatel'stvo Skorpion, 1911), 125.

and, indirectly, through the French version to Bal'mont. This helps us understand how Whitman's original text became blurred and also how the very notion of an original source-text is destabilized in the international and interlinguistic web of translation, reception, and remaking.

Another case in this sense is that of the poem "City of Orgies." But here the move away from the original is more gradual. Gamberale in fact translates Whitman's last line, "Lovers, continual lovers, only repay me"[340] as "Amanti, continui amanti solamente, compensano me"[341] (back translation: "Lovers, continual lovers only, compensate me"). Gamberale's rendition of the word "lovers" as "amanti" is adequate, as the Italian word has a clear sexual implication. But Bazalgette renders the same line as: "Seuls, des amis, un perpétuel cortège d'amis, me payent de retour"[342] (back translation: "The only ones, friends, a perpetual procession of friends, pay me back.") "Ami" in French, especially when preceded by a possessive adjective (which is not the case here) may suggest "lover," but the expression remains deliberately ambiguous. So Bazalgette's translation, while not fully wrong, is less accurate than Gamberale's. Vasseur seems to have looked at Bazalgette: "Amigos, un perpetuo cortejo de amigos, basta para que me sienta retribuido, pagado"[343] (back translation: "Friends, a perpetual procession of friends, is enough for me to feel compensated, paid back.") Vasseur keeps the image of

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[340] See Walt Whitman, "City of Orgies" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 105. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html

[341] "Città di orgie," in *Foglie d'erba*, 120.

[342] "Cité d'Orgies," in *Feuilles d'Herbe,* 171.

[343] "Ciudad de orgías," in *Poemas*, 30.

the "perpetual procession" used by Bazalgette, and, more importantly, he uses "amigos." But if "amis" in French still carried a certain ambiguity, the Spanish "amigos" cuts off any potentiality in this sense, since the word does not have a sexual or erotic connotation in Spanish.

This brief analysis of the different translations into various languages and of the dependence and influence they had on each other shows the value of a multinational and multilingual approach, when evaluating Whitman's reception and reinvention. I am convinced that further comparative studies of Whitman's translations across the world would lead to important discoveries. What can be concluded for now, about this phase of the reception, in which the first complete or selected (but substantially long) translations appeared in various countries, and in which Gamberale's 1907 translation had a central role?

It is first of all clear that all these translations are generally characterized by an increased prolixity, in comparison to Whitman's original. This may be due to a partial, and at times more substantial, lack of understanding or appreciation of the formal nature and value of Whitman's work. Translators aimed to concentrate on the contents, but did not grasp how these were shaped by the forms. They felt free to considerably change both semantic connotations and syntactic structures, and to often apply cuts or additions without signaling them.[344] The sexual charge of Whitman's poems and the homoerotic

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[344] The most striking case in this sense is that of Kornei Chukovsky's first selected translations into Russian, which often contained substantial cuts of entire stanzas or omission of words that were originally part of a line. See, for example, Chukovsky's complete omission of the first parenthetical stanza of "Song of the Exposition," (he retitles the poem "Muse, run away from Hellas, leave the Ionian") and his cuts of various lines and re-wording of others. Chukovsky's choice in "Song of the Exposition" is particularly significant. The poem was the opening piece in Chukovsky's 1907 collection, and starting with Whitman's invocation to the Muse to "run away" from the Western literary tradition in section two of the poem was, for the Russian translator, a

component were generally downplayed and at times fully erased. Whitman's original diction still managed to emerge in its force and charisma, but it often sounded heavier and less fresh and experimental than it actually was. Yet, reading Whitman in translation still generated an outburst of reactions, and, usually, very positive ones. Browsing once again that figurative full desk, which the collection of Gamberale's personal documents in Agnone represents, will allow us to give a glimpse into this phenomenon.

3. From Gamberale's Mailbox: Readers' Reactions

Gamberale's incoming manuscript correspondence illuminates the responses to his translations, and to the reading of Whitman generally of many readers from Italy and from abroad. The translator received letters from well-known critics and writers, from other translators and colleagues, and from a number of "common" readers.[345] The responses of ordinary readers are particularly interesting since they often get lost in reception history studies. Let us look at a few of these letters.

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way to give an appearance of classical "respectability" while at the same time immediately introducing the strictly anti-classical call of Whitman's poetry. This editorial choice exemplifies Chukovsky's desperately ambivalent enterprise: the translator wanted to depict Whitman's anarchic nature, and at the same time he wanted to make Whitman's work acceptable to the conservative Russian literary establishment. See "Muza, beghi iz Elladi, pokin' Yunyu," translation by Kornei Chukovsky in *Поэт анархист Уот Уитмен, перевод в стихах и характеристика* (*Poet Anarkhist Uot Uuitman. Perevod' v stikhakh i karakteristika*) ("Poet anarchist Walt Whitman. Translation into poetry and characteristics"). (Sankt-Petersburg: Kruzhka Molodyk', 1907), 21.

[345] The larger part of Gamberale's private correspondence is reported or summarized in Antonella Iannucci's book *Luigi Gamberale e la cultura italiana ed europea.* The book also offers a thorough and very useful biographical account of Gamberale's life and work through Iannucci's detailed study of the correspondence and work with the collections at Agnone. A few imprecisions are present (for example, Iannucci talks about Gamberale's 1908 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, while this was published in 1907).

In the early summer of 1893, Gamberale received a series of strikingly intense letters from a certain Margherita C. Haskard, a woman of Scottish origins who lived in Pisa.[346] Having read Gamberale's 1887 and 1890 selected translations, Haskard wrote to thank the translator. The initial tone of the letter strikes as informal. Haskard, who writes in Italian with a minor number of anglicisms and imperfections, and often breaks into English, called Gamberale "fratello" ("brother") and "camerata" ("camerado"). Haskard recalls how, when first reading Whitman in English in 1888 while in Edinburgh, she "jumped out of joy for knowing I was not alone any longer," [347] and how reading Gamberale's translation recreated that feeling.

Haskard then goes on to talk about herself. In an intriguing opening sentence, she declares: "you would be scared if I told you how much I suffered for being a feminine Whitman." It then progressively becomes clear why Haskard calls herself this. The daughter of a Christian pastor who has grown to be a fervid religious believer, or perhaps more precisely, a mystic fanatic, Haskard has fully conflated the figure of Whitman and the principle of open, universal love contained in his poetry with "the poet of poets": Christ. And she is trying, with her own life, to be like Christ and to testify to the message of love. Switching to English, she explains that she has written an essay entitled "Christ

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[346] None of these letter appears in Iannucci's book (they are not discussed and neither did they appear in the final catalogue), perhaps due to the fact that the handwriting is particularly hard to decipher.

[347] Letter from Margherita C. Haskard to Luigi Gamberale, May 26, 1893. This letter and all the others I will discuss in this section are available in the Gamberale collection at the Agnone public library "B. Labanca," with the exception of the letters from De Bosis and Marinetti, which are taken from *Scritti vari*. All the translations of the letters from the Italian or the French are made by me.

and Whitman" and suggests that Gamberale may want to translate it into Italian.[348] On her side, she offers to volunteer to help spread knowledge of Whitman in Italy: she has the intention of buying dozens of copies and distributing them to friends. "Italians don't read enough," Haskard complains, and perhaps it would be a good idea to "present Walt on the stage," she says. She herself had been an actress when she was younger in Scotland. Progressively, more information emerges about the woman's life: she is forty-five, she has six children, the oldest of whom is twenty-four. And she has been six months in a mental institution where, she says, she has testified how "God is love: Father-Mother, Duality" and where "the life of Christ has manifested itself in my mortal body."[349] Haskard also defines herself as "the little sister of Jesus, Whitman and Oliphant,"[350] who lives "with eternal ingenuity and candor."

In another letter, undated but presumably following the first one, Haskard goes on to talk about her life: in the mental institution where she had spent six months as a patient, in Italy, she had started to write a book entitled *The Motherhood in Fatherhood of God*, which she is now trying to print.[351] Now, while she is writing, Haskard tells Gamberale, her husband, "a rich English banker" who lives in Florence, is in London to

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[348] Haskard claims to be attaching the English manuscript to the letter, but the enclosure is not present in Gamberale's collection. She is also sending a picture of herself (and asks Gamberale for his), but the picture is also not available.

[349] Underlining present in the original.

[350] Haskard is referring to writer, traveler and mystic fanatic Laurence Oliphant.

[351] I found no bibliographic record, in this sense. Haskard says that the initial drafts were taken from her while at the mental hospital in Italy and that she had to rewrite the book once she was out of the institution, while being temporarily back in Scotland, in 1892.

try and divorce her on the basis of the contents of the book, which he has brought with him to prove his wife's madness.

What was Gamberale's reaction to reading about Haskard's difficult personal situation, mental problems, and mystical fanaticism, which the woman so enthusiastically paired with her love for Whitman? We do not know, as his letters are not present in the collection. But we do know that he responded, since Haskard addresses, if briefly, his answers and comments. Was Gamberale interested in Haskard's theorization of a Christ-like Whitman, and in her detailed and long theological discussions? Was he interested in the woman? Or both?

The letters from Haskard do have an insistent tone of intimacy. In another undated letter, Haskard writes in a bold Whitmanian move: "Camerado, accept my kiss, my embrace, this is not a letter, it is a woman, sent by the Father-Mother who are love, to rejuvenate you and give you joy and peace." In the letter of May 30, she writes:

> Who has understood Walt more than me? […] to complete his work.[352] He always said that a woman waited for him. Maybe it is me. In the mean time you understand me. You understood Walt, and many of his songs that I did not read in English, I [now] read and find [them] perfect as translated by you in Italian. – Ah, how can I thank you! I think of you. When I sit alone and alone I stay awake at night, I keep thanking you.

Still in this letter, Haskard implores Gamberale to adopt her same perspective for reading Whitman: "Open, camerado, your Gospel, and read this passage in the Apocalypse, and recognize, starting from verse 15, the spirit of inspiration of Walt." And Haskard complains about the fact that "Walt has made a mistake, he has missed badly, to not sing Christ." Blinded by her fanaticism, Haskard has missed the many direct and indirect references to Christ made by Whitman. But Haskard's reading may have left a

[352] A few illegible words are present here.

trace in Gamberale, after all. At the end of his 1907 preface, in fact, he did establish a parallel between the innovative message of Whitman and that of Christ: such a parallel was not present in the preface to the 1890 collection.

Haskard left a trace somewhere else, as well. In the speech on Whitman's poem "Years of the Modern" that he gave at the Academy of Sciences of Padua in 1894, Professor Biagio Brugi recalled being introduced to Whitman by a mysterious and unnamed

> […] fanatic Scottish lady who, all invaded by the doctrines of that sect called *Vita Nuova*, went around with three books under her arm: the Gospel, the *Scientific Religion* by Oliphant, the great pontifex of the sect, the poems of Walt Whitman. The mystical word of that not inelegant lady writer, while in front of the Tirreno sea and the blue sky from which all things emerge with sharp and radiant contours, did not leave me indifferent. And it was useful for appreciating the lines of the American poet. If the lady was not able to reduce me to be a neophyte of the Vita Nuova, she gained an admirer of her poet and she made possible the fact that, these old rooms, today, could echo the rhythm, full of modernity, of an extremely new poet.[353]

Brugi's words prove how, what Haskard had promised in her letter to Gamberale, i.e. to go around and spread Whitman's word, she had done.

On February 20, 1904, another English native speaker with a strong religious inclination wrote to Gamberale, again in Italian. This was Reverend William Edwards Davenport. In the letter, Davenport did not really introduce himself, but simply said that he was, just as Gamberale, a "Whitman enthusiast." Not much information is available about Davenport, but we do know that he was born in Connecticut in 1862 and died in Brooklyn in 1944. His brother was the eugenicist Charles Davenport. A minister of the Plymouth Church and the founder (in 1901) and director of the Italian Settlement House

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[353] See Biagio Brugi, "Una poesia di Walt Whitman ('Years of the Modern')," 150. My translation. The piece also contains Brugi's translation into Italian of "Years of the Modern." Brugi does not name Haskard and no other critic who commented on Brugi's piece has named or talked about her, but it is clear that he is referring to her.

in Brooklyn, William Davenport wrote a few articles about Whitman[354] and also few books of poems.

The letter from Davenport to Gamberale came from Campobasso, Molise, very close to where Gamberale lived.[355] It is unclear why Davenport was there, but perhaps the time he spent in Italy was somehow connected to his work for the Italian Settlement (and the same is true for his perfect knowledge of Italian). In the letter, Davenport writes that he had read and appreciated Gamberale's article on Whitman that had appeared in the *Rivista d'Italia* in 1903,[356] and that he had even translated a shortened version of it and published it in the *Conservator* in September 1904.[357] The article is enclosed in the letter. But there is something else that Davenport encloses with the letter. As he writes,

> About his [Whitman's] influence on my life it is not important to talk: but I took the freedom to send you with this letter a book of mine that can demonstrate the power of Whitman in my work.[358]

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[354] See William E. Davenport, "Walt Whitman Memorial Should Be Placed in Old Fort Greene Park," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (18 June 1925) 6:6; "Dante and Whitman," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (14 September 1921), 6:5; "Identity of Whitman's Work and Character," *Conservator* 13 (February 1903), 181-84; "Walt Whitman in Brooklyn–W. E. Davenport Recalls Some Interesting Facts About the Poet's Residence Here. Father and Son Printers. Anxious to Become a Platform Orator. Text of an Address Before Brooklyn Art Union in 1851," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (14 July 1900), 18:1-2.

[355] At the end of the letter, Davenport even suggests that he could go to Agnone and visit Gamberale, but there is no evidence that the visit took place.

[356] See Luigi Gamberale, "La vita e le opere di Walt Whitman," 181-207.

[357] See "The Life and the Works of Walt Whitman," extracted and translated by William E. Davenport, *The Conservator*, Philadelphia XV, 7 (September 1904).

[358] Letter from William Edwards Davenport to Luigi Gamberale, February 20, 1904. My translation. In her book about Gamberale's correspondence, Iannucci wrongly identifies Davenport as a friend of Whitman. See Iannucci, 136.

The book Davenport is sending is his *Poetical Sermons Including the Ballad of Plymouth Church*.[359] Many poems in the book strongly echo, if not directly imitate, Whitman's poetry. But Davenport's book is centered on the figure of Christ and on a theological interest. In this sense, Davenport's reading and re-elaboration of Whitman comes quite close to that of Haskard.

Davenport was not the only reader and admirer of Gamberale's work to send his poetry. In April 1908, G. B. Menegazzi, a teacher of Italian and foreign literatures and art history at a grammar school in Vicenza, wrote to Gamberale to thank him for his 1907 translation, which, he thought, would in the near future do much good for Italian youth.[360] Menegazzi is in fact convinced that Italian poetry is in a state of decadence and that the example of Whitman's poetry may help rejuvenate it and give it the "breath of present times […] the great pulse of the universe." A few months later, Menegazzi would write again, this time to send his own book of poetry and to ask Gamberale to express his judgment: "nobody can see better than you."[361] In the book, entitled *Malinconie, ritmi e rime,* Menegazzi has included a few experiments "on the path of Carduccian odes": a few poems that closely imitate Whitman's free verse, an attempt, Menegazzi says, to "italianize" this new poetic form.

[359] The book was published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1897.

[360] Letter from G. B. Menegazzi to Luigi Gamberale, April 12, 1908. My translation. Iannucci transcribes this letter on page 272 of her book.

[361] Letter from G. B. Menegazzi to Luigi Gamberale, November 12, 1908. My translation.

Gamberale would also receive comments on his work from overseas. On May 5, 1908, Isaac Hull Platt, author of a series of articles and studies on Whitman,[362] wrote from Pennsylvania to congratulate him. The letter reads

> […] I have just been examining with greatest interest your translation of *Leaves of Grass* into Italian. I know enough of Italian to understand the pronunciation and see how excellent you have caught the lilt and rhythm of those wonderful poems. As a friend and countryman of Whitman I wish to express my thanks and appreciation of your work and as a small token of them I am sending a trifle[363] that I myself have contributed on the same subject.[364]

This sense of gratitude pervades many other letters from these years: writer Adolfo De Bosis's one, from July 1908, talks about the excellent translation and about Gamberale's right to receive Italian people's thanks.[365] Writer Antonio Bruers wrote repeatedly, between 1916 and 1922. In his first letter, Bruers writes:

> […] I received the much appreciated gift of the new edition[366] of Whitman, which I immediately put close to the previous one [edited] by Sandron. I thank you with my heart. I always had a special cult for this poet, whom I regard among the greatest in humanity. I have *known* you for a long time, dear Sir, and precisely since when I first read Your Whitman in the little edition by Sonzogno, and I can't but express an old certainty of mine, telling you that with the unabridged translation of *Leaves of Grass* you have brought an outstanding contribution to Italian literature.[367]

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[362] See, among others, "Assailants and Defenders of Whitman," *Conservator* 18 (February 1908): 183; "The Poet Who Could Wait: Contemporary Appreciations of Walt Whitman," *Book News* 24 (April 1906): 545-49.

[363] The token Hull Platt refers to is his biography of Whitman, enclosed with the letter and still available in Gamberale's library. See Isaac Hull Platt, *Walt Whitman*, Beacon Biographies of Eminent Americans, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1904).

[364] Letter from Isaac Hull Platt to Luigi Gamberale of May 5, 1908.

[365] Letter from Adolfo de Bosis to Luigi Gamberale, July 8, 1908, reproduced in *Scritti vari*, 522.

[366] Bruers is evidently referring to Gamberale's 1912 selected translation edited by Bernardo Lux.

[367] Letter from Antonio Bruers to Luigi Gamberale, May 30, 1916. In his letter of June 10, 1922, also present in Gamberale's correspondence in Agnone, Bruers would also celebrate the forthcoming publication of the 1923 edition of Gamberale's revised unabridged translation,

In the following letter to Gamberale, Bruers enclosed his 1912 *Poemi spirituali* (*Spiritual Poems*), written in an experimental *poème en prose* style. Commenting on them, as if to explain them better to Gamberale, Bruers writes: "I myself as a critic would be embarrassed in judging whether this is a simple incapability to make verse or the choice of a form than can be historically explained […] as in the modern times [there is] a tendency to this form of literature which has even become a characteristic sign."[368] Bruers' experimentation was far from being as programmatic and self-aware as that of other Italian writers at this time: he remained insecure about the real nature of this experimentation, and he was sending the poems to Gamberale also as a way to ask for a confirmation of their value.[369] This tendency of readers and admirers to send their often experimental–or at least, believed to be so–creative work to Gamberale, as if asking for his approval, is an emblematic sign of the fact that they perceived the Italian translator of Whitman as a figure of authority in evaluating and blessing innovation. This also

calling it a "noble and historic enterprise." Note that this letter is not included in Iannucci's correspondence catalogue.

[368] Letter from Antonio Bruers to Luigi Gamberale, June 10, 1916. This letter is also interesting for Bruers' assessment of D'Annunzio's plagiarism (while we do not have Gamberale's letter, it can be inferred from Bruers' comments that Gamberale signaled a series of plagiarisms of various writers by D'Annunzio). Bruers, a follower of D'Annunzio who would also become, later in his life, the chief librarian at D'Annunzio's Vittoriale, defended D'Annunzio's originality.

[369] In the first letter of May 30, 1916, Bruers had written: "This one, of Whitman, yes, is a 'futurism' in which I have faith, […]": perhaps as a way to slightly differentiate himself from the the Italian futurists and from reclaiming his own declination of what 'real' futurism should be. Bruers's relation with the futurists is complex: his interest in spiritualism and religion prevented him from being a real iconoclast, and his writing was simply more traditional and lacking the vehemence and provocation present in the futurists. But Bruers' pre-fascist and fascist ideology also puts him inevitably close to the futurists' sensibility.

indirectly confirms that these people thought of their writing (which often gained minor recognition or remained unpublished) as being part of a Whitmanian lineage.

In 1909, it was Léon Bazalgette who write to Gamberale. Bazalgette, writing in French,[370] thanked the Italian colleague for having sent him his 1907 translation:

> Dear Mr Gamberale,
> I want to let you know all the pleasure that I felt when I received your *Foglie d'erba* (which I was familiar with already) with the affectionate phrases you included for me. It is a great thing that Italy and France have now the means to judge Walt Whitman directly, by looking at his poems, and not at the words of his commentators. And in this work of diffusion of the *Leaves* in Europe, it is you who will keep the honor of having been the pioneer, the first author of a complete translation into a foreign language. It has been four years that I have been preparing mine. […] I have asked myself many times if it will be possible to found a sort of "Walt Whitman Followship[371] of Europe": there may be something to do in this sense. What do you think? […] How was your version of *Leaves of Grass* received in Italy? […] It seems to me that the "cause" of the *Leaves* has made enormous progress and that if the Good Gray Poet was still in this world, he would have had the chance to strengthen his confidence in the fact that his work will continue to be read.[372]

In the letter, Bazalgette also included his review of Gamberale's translation.[373] It can be inferred that Gamberale, in response to this letter, informed Bazalgette of the commercial success that his translation was having in Italy. This greatly pleased Bazalgette (as evident in his next letter),[374] who was just about to publish the product of his hard work. Bazalgette's letters not only confirm the fact that, before publishing his translation,

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[370] Bazalgette wonders if Gamberale knows French and says that next time he could write in English. Gamberale must have responded positively, as the next letter is again in French.

[371] Word used in the original.

[372] Letter from Léon Bazalgette to Luigi Gamberale, April 14, 1909. My translation.

[373] Bazalgette had published the review in *La Phalange* (October 15, 1908).

[374] See letter from Léon Bazalgette to Luigi Gamberale, June 9, 1909.

Bazalgette had extensively looked at Gamberale's version and was influenced by it, but they also testify again to the vital component of transnational networking at the base of Whitman's reception in the world.

Another message of acknowledgment and appreciation, and another declaration of adhesion to the Whitmanian lineage, came to Gamberale on January 3, 1913, in the form of a book, with the following autographed dedication: "To Luigi Gamberale, to the author of the magnificent version of *Foglie d'Erba.*" The book was the collection *I poeti futuristi* ("The futurist poets").[375] And the person who had sent the book and signed the dedication was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, whose "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista" (Technical manifesto of futurist literature) was the opening piece in the collection. It is precisely from this rapid but emblematic acknowledgment that we will need to start from in the next chapter, where we will discuss the extremely varied influence of Whitman's work on the Italian early futurist and avant-gardist scene.

[375] See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, ed., *I poeti futuristi: Libero Altomare [et al…]; con un proclama di F. T. Marinetti e uno studio sul Verso libero di Paolo Buzzi* (Milano: Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1912).

CHAPTER FOUR: The Avant-Garde Scene, 1900-1915. Part two

1. "Not a destroyer, but a barbarian builder": Whitman, International Early Futurism, and the Birth (and Death) of Free Verse

As Marjorie Perloff has argued, futurism remains a "curiously misunderstood movement," intended—and often negatively discarded—as a monolithic and temporally compact phenomenon of insurrection.[376] We should look at it, instead, as Geert Buelens and Monica Jansen suggest, as a conglomerate of different subgroups and individuals, precursors, protagonists, and legacies, and also as a movement that was strongly rooted in nineteenth-century romantic and symbolist sensibilities.[377] Whitman's reception and reinvention by Italian, but also Russian, futurism, must be studied by trying to identify a series of phases, spaces, differences, internal contradictions, and lines of continuity.

Let us start from a precise point in time. In 1913, when Filippo Tommaso Marinetti sent a copy of the 1912 anthology *Poeti futuristi* ("Futurist poets") to Luigi Gamberale, complete with his autograph dedication, Marinetti thought of the anthology as the culmination of the efforts of more than a decade of literary activity. *Poeti futuristi*, which contained not only the poetry of thirteen writers, but also his own "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista" ("Technical manifesto of futurist literature"), had the clear aim, as shown by Davide Podavini, to illustrate and embody futurism and its

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[376] Marjorie Perloff, "The Audacity of Hope. The Foundational Futurist Manifestoes," in *The History of Futurism. The Precursors, Protagonists, and Legacies,* eds. Geert Buelens, Harald Hendrix and Monica Jansen (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 9-30.

[377] Geert Buelens and Monica Jansen, "Futurisms: An Introduction," in *The History of Futurism*, 1-7.

principles.[378] The anthology had come out three years after the famous "Foundation and manifesto of futurism," which was published in 1909 in a series of Italian newspapers, as well as in the French *Le Figaro*.[379] Cesare Segre notes that in the 1909 manifesto, futurism had been proclaimed as the force that could realize a "complete demolishment of literary language and of established genres" in response to "the extraordinary changes of industrial civilization."[380] Why did Marinetti send what he conceived of as the finished product of the futurist iconoclastic force that he had theorized a few years earlier to Luigi Gamberale, (whom Marinetti called "the author of the magnificent version of *Leaves of Grass*")? What did this gesture mean? What did Whitman represent for Marinetti, and for other figures of early futurism, who were close to the movement's official founder?

To answer this question, we need to consider the formation of both the movement and its founder, Marinetti. Having been educated for the most part in France, in the very last years of the nineteenth century Marinetti had come close to the French circle of the periodical *La Plume.* There he met, among others, Gustave Kahn, and read his experiments in *vers libre*. Influenced also by the work of Jules Romains, Paul Fort, and Émile Verhaeren, as a young, symbolist writer Marinetti was able to appreciate in first person that phenomenon that, in her study of the French reception, Betsy Erkkila has

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[378] The Technical Manifesto had originally appeared as a separate leaflet in May 1912. For more on the anthology, see Davide Podavini, "The Anthology *Poetri futuristi*. Poetry of Transition," in Buelens, Hendrix and Jansen, eds., 33-52.

[379] An English version of the manifesto I am referring to, here, can be found in Robert Willard Flint, ed. *The Selected Writings of F.T. Marinetti* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991).

[380] See Cesare Segre, *La letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998), 12. My translation.

called "Whitmanisme."[381] But Marinetti did not absorb the influence of Whitman solely through French literature.

In 1905, the writer started to be a fundamental mediator between French and Italian culture: he worked for the Parisian magazine *Vers et Prose*, while also founding and maintaining the international magazine *Poesia* in Italy. For *Vers et Prose*, Marinetti translated several poems by Carducci, Pascoli, and D'Annunzio[382] into French, thus having the opportunity to closely observe the characteristics and methods of three writers who—in different ways, as we have seen—had helped renovate Italian literature, also thanks to Whitman's example. Marinetti was bringing to France what he thought was the best, the most advanced contemporary Italian poetry. At the same time, Marinetti was bringing more than that. As shown by Eleonora Conti, in what look more like "poetic adaptations" than translations, Marinetti often rendered the poems of the three writers in free verse, increased the number of colloquial terms and exclamation points, and tried to give more solid, concrete images than the originals. Helped by the musicality of the French language, he also tried to experiment with sound much more than the originals did. The translations exemplify, in this sense, the line of continuity, but also of innovation, in which Marinetti's diction initially placed itself, when still far from his later futurist, exasperated and violent enforcements of novelty.

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[381] In her *Walt Whitman Among the French,* Erkkila explains how the expression "le Whitmanisme," first coined by critic Henri Ghéon in 1912, describes the phenomenon of the centrally influential presence of Whitman's work in the French literary scene of the turn of the century.

[382] Eleonora Conti has discussed these translations in her study of Marinetti's literary work in France, and his transition from symbolism to futurism. See Eleonora Conti, "Marinetti in France between Symbolism and Futurism. *Vers et Prose* and Les Guêpes," in Buelens, Hendrix and Jansen, eds., 53-80.

Fully immersed in this doubly stimulating French-Italian environment, Marinetti started to compare the trajectories of Italian and French literature. In October 1905, he first felt the necessity to promote his *Inchiesta internazionale sul verso libero* ("International inquiry into free verse"), which appeared repeatedly in *Poesia* in the years 1905-1908, and was finally collected in a volume published in 1909, where it significantly appeared in conjunction with the 1909 futurist manifesto.[383] The question Marinetti asked was straightforward: what do you think about free verse? Interestingly, Marinetti—who would eventually define himself as the quintessential destroyer even in a strictly militarist sense—was a mediator, a collector, an archivist who wanted to preserve, order and classify the responses to a phenomenon, free verse, that had been increasingly become more common in the past two decades. Marinetti's aim was also that of strategically legitimizing free verse, to explain it and to ultimately make it more acceptable to common readers.

Not all the writers that Marinetti had asked to participate responded with the same zeal and enthusiasm. Kahn and Verhaeren certainly did, but D'Annunzio, for example, dismissed the question altogether. Negri, disappointingly, declared that her ideas about the question were not clear, but that it seemed to her that the important thing was to always maintain a "rhythmical garment" in poetry. Capuana talked about his personal Italian record with the *Semirhythms.* But there was another Italian writer who took Marinetti very seriously, and whose response deeply inspired Marinetti: Gian Pietro Lucini.

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[383] See *Enquête international sur le vers libre et manifeste du futurism,* ed. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, (Milano: Éditions de Poesia, 1909). All my references to parts of the *Enquête* included here will be taken from this text. I will translate the French when needed.

A Carduccian enthusiast and (like Marinetti) an expert in French literature, Lucini described free verse in these terms:

> [it is] a general desire of the modern and European mind at this point of the century; it is an index of the revolution and evolution that took place in international literature; an episode of what in France was called decadentism and symbolism; an aspect that becomes a systematic insurrection against the "principle of authority," in politics, in the sciences, in the arts. (107)

For Marinetti, who until 1911 called himself an anarchist,[384] the idea of a systematic insurrection against the "principle of authority" must have sounded delightful. And the continuity of this insurrection with the decadentism and symbolism with which he had grown up and from which he had started, was another encouraging signal.

After having traced the influences of the precursors of free verse in European literature, Lucini moves to the Italian ones, agreeing with Capuana about his self-proclaimed record, but also indicating Carducci's progress and Negri's experimentation in *Tempeste*. Then, Lucini names Whitman, and quotes a few passages from the 1855 Preface:

> He [the poet] is not one of the chorus … he does not stop for any regulation … he is the president of regulation. […] The known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet. […] The greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals … he knows the soul. The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons but its own.[385]

This passage is used by Lucini to give a definition of free verse: an absence of regulation, or better, a regulation decided only by the president-poet. But the passage also

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[384] As explained by Perloff, it is at this moment that Marinetti dismissed the profound anarchism of his youth for embracing the "violent independence" that only war (the Libyan war is the one that Marinetti had in mind) could guarantee. See Perloff, in Buelens, Hendrix and Jansen, 17.

[385] See Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 1855, V; VII. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/whole.html.

illuminates the fact that, while Lucini is strongly encouraging the diffusion of free verse, he makes clear in various parts of his piece that free verse should not become the sole new form of writing poetry, imposed on every single new poet.

Unwilling to be part of any school or tradition, while he was close to early futurism and to Marinetti, Lucini never wanted to be labeled as a futurist, and when this movement assumed stronger nationalistic and militaristic tones, Lucini would deny any possible tie that he had with it. But in 1909, when the inquiry on free verse came out, Marinetti was still trying to convince Lucini to join futurism. 1909 is in fact the year in which Lucini's collection of poems *Revolverate* ("Revolver shots") came out. Significantly, Lucini wanted the title to be *Canzoni amare* ("Bitter songs") but Marinetti, who wrote the preface, convinced Lucini to change it. In the preface to the collection, Marinetti writes

> He [Lucini] declared himself not to be a sectarian of Futurism. But if we don't share what we love, we share what we hate. […] Lucini has strenuously fought against these worn-out forms, in his masterful work *Free verse,*[386] which is undoubtedly one of the highest, one of the most dazzling peaks of human thought. […] Of Free Verse he has made, in the end, a poetic reason that surpasses the very value of his work and becomes the canon of every aesthetical evolution of the future. Not a destroyer, but a barbarian builder. […] Our affinities are vast. If he negates them, he is wrong. And the volume that appears under our flag, only with his threatening and disturbing title, demonstrates this. A gun doesn't get shot unless there is a target to point the gun at. And anyway, all the heroic attitude of this man, in life and in art, proves his aboriginal nature of futurist. Herald of literary evolution, Gian Pietro Lucini has considered Free Verse as the symbol and the most natural instrument of that evolution.[387]

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[386] Marinetti is referring to Lucini's book *Verso Libero, Proposta* (Milano: Edizioni di Poesia, 1908).

[387] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Prefazione" a Gian Pietro Lucini, *Revolverate* (Milano: Edizioni di Poesia, 1909), 10-12. My translation.

Marinetti's words about Lucini are also perfectly fitting to describe the perception of Whitman's role in this phase of futurism: "not a destroyer, but a barbarian builder."

Notwithstanding Marinetti's words of conciliation, Lucini, who strongly disagreed with the 1909 manifesto, would soon free himself from this forced association with futurism,[388] and he would not be part of the 1912 anthology that Marinetti sent to Gamberale. But Marinetti's words clarify the centrality assigned to free verse in the early years of futurism, and how Marinetti's conception was influenced by Lucini's theorization of this poetic device. Citing both Lucini's treatises *Free Verse, Proposal* and his *Poetic reason and Program of Free Verse* (also published in 1908), Marinetti assigned them in fact even a higher value than Lucini's creative work as poet. In both the treatises, Lucini discussed and quoted Whitman who deeply shaped his conception of free verse. He even called him "l'Omero dell'oggi" ("The Homer of today").[389]

Echoes from Whitman can also be frequently heard in Lucini's own poetry, even though it remains (unlike Whitman) strongly witty and satirical, characterized by a high, extremely educated register, and by a closeness to themes and tones of the Italian Scapigliatura. The long poem "Per tutti gli Dei morti e aboliti" ("For all the Gods dead and abolished") celebrates the divinity of individuals:

> Mystery is for Us, inside Us,
> in this incalculable quiver,

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[388] See Lucini's article "Come ho sorpassato il futurismo," published in *La Voce* on April 10, 1913. In February 1909, Lucini wrote to Marinetti: "As Verlaine did not recognize Symbolism, promoted in large part by him, so I do not recognize Futurism, which derives from me and [yet] which makes me feel ashamed." Letter to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, February 14, 1909, included in Isabella Ghidetti, ed., Gian Pietro Lucini, *Prose e canzoni amare* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1971), 460. My translation.

[389] See Gian Pietro Lucini, *Ragion poetica e programma del verso libero* (Milano: Edizioni di Poesia, 1908), 58.

> which attracts, judges and rejects,
> in this passion exalted
> by all the senses, all the pores of our flesh,
> in the energy that makes you say and long for,
> and bite and pray and die and be born again,
> hidden God, the causer, the revealer.
> God is in Us,
> we carry him as a saint ostensory of Robustness
> for Beauty and for Will:
> it is in our value,
> the red and violet flower
> for him who is thirst and is dying of love.
> God is in Us;
> nature insures the miracle to this immortality of ours,
> completes History with the times to Come
> for the crisis and infinite genesis
> of the traveling Humanity.
> Reason stays silent, the Soul affirms itself;
> it confirms its divinity in its freedom.[390]

Lucini's diction is striking for its ability to create a rhythmical, cyclical fluidity. Not only the general theme of this poem and the urgency of the writing, but also the use of anaphoras and of the capitalized, almost theatrically—personified—words, are highly reminiscent of Whitman. The relevance given to Whitman by Lucini appears in the very last reflections that the Italian writer dedicated to free verse, in a section included in the autobiography completed by Lucini before his death, in 1914.

> Free verse represents a modern modification of our conscience. […] Free verse is the long poetic word that explicates and closes a concept in its form, in its warmth, in its harmony, as it is born directly in the mind of a poet. It is the medium through which, without losses or additions, a thought becomes manifest. It must then be painting, sculpture, music, suggestion. I believe I have been the first one to use it in Italy; my first rough attempts can be dated to 1887. […] the other day on the *Mercure* [*de France*] D'Annunzio was baptized as the one who introduced free verse in Italy. […] In France [they] look at the very Italian D'Annunzio: I, the French Lucini, carried the italic tradition to the extreme and, contemporarily to Kahn, I was able to find new metrics in Italy. But who was the

[390] The poem is included in *Revolverate*, 267-268. My translation.

> father of them all, then? There is somebody who is called Walt Whitman, as if we said Dante, isn't this true?[391]

Here, Lucini, in an outburst of pride, contradicts what he had said in the "Inquiry" about Capuana being the first Italian writer to experiment with free verse. He also assesses Kahn's equal contribution in France. But, at the same time, he assigns to Whitman the ultimate fatherhood, significantly pairing him, after Homer, with Dante.

Lucini's acknowledgment and celebration of Whitman's contribution to modern poetry can be seen as the peak of the gradual process of comprehension of the value of Whitman's forms that had started with Carducci, Negri, D'Annunzio, Pascoli, Aleramo. The context in which Lucini was writing about Whitman and free verse, by the end of the first decade of the century, had certainly favored this achievement: not only had the French *vers-libre* become an established phenomenon in the international literary scene, but a number of Italian writers, in addition to Lucini himself and to Capuana, had also been increasingly adopting it. Poets Enrico Thovez, Adolfo de Bosis, Paolo Buzzi, Enrico Cavacchioli, Corrado Govoni, among others, had been using it.[392]

The work of many of these poets was included in the 1912 anthology *Poeti Futuristi.* As Podavini notes, the anthology itself is at odds with Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto" that precedes the poems.[393] Principles listed in the manifesto, such the abolishment of adjectives, the preponderance of the infinitive tense, the destruction of the

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[391] Gian Pietro Lucini, "Autobiografia," in *Prose e canzoni amare*, ed. Ghidetti, 117. My translation.

[392] For the influence of Whitman on some of these poets, see Caterina Ricciardi, "Walt Whiman and the Futurist Muse," 265-284.

[393] See Podavini, in Buelens, Hendrix and Jansen, eds., 36-37.

syntax, were almost never followed by the writers, not even by Marinetti himself, whose poems, both in French and Italian, are included at the end of the anthology. Adjectives are profusely used in the anthology, and while there certainly is a programmatic insistence on futurist ideas such as velocity, destruction, violence, rebellion, physical strength, there is as also an equivalently strong persistence of decadent and often melancholic tones.

But if there is one unifying element that appears consistently all across the anthology, it is the long line written in free verse. This technique is everywhere: all thirteen writers employed it, if in different ways. And this is not a coincidence. Free verse had in fact appeared again as the main principle to be followed by the futurists: the anthology also includes a short piece on this subject, signed by Paolo Buzzi.[394] It is in the adoption and remaking of free verse that Whitman's influence on Italian futurism is most pronounced. The futurists also often echoed his use of exclamations and anaphoras, and his experimentation with a renovated poetic sound.

Thematically, again, the anthology remains a mix: close to decadent and also classical subjects, but also starting to exalt technology, velocity, exuberance, and to

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[394] Buzzi's piece in the anthology, entitled "Il Verso Libero" was taken from the "International Inquiry" published in 1908. In it, Buzzi defined free verse as "a complex of rhythms which is constantly influenced by a musical sensation" (43-44). Buzzi's poems are also highly reminiscent of Whitman. One example is his poem "Poeti" ("Poets"), which was included in the 1912 anthology (147): "Great is the one who feels the desperate night song / and sings it, as it supporates from his heart, /out on the streets, between the rays of the sewers and the stars. / If the world is in a poet, / this who wakes while others sleep and walk, / this who looks at the lights and shadows of every step / with all the colors in the face […]." Original: "Grande è chi sente il notturno disperato / e se lo canta, come gli suppura su dal cuore, / via, per le strade, fra i raggi delle fogne e delle stelle. / Se il mondo è in un poeta, / questo che veglia mentre gli altri dormono e cammina, / questo che guarda le luci e le ombre d'ogni passo / con faccia di tutti i colori […]" My translation. Buzzi's poem "Poema dei quarant'anni" ("Poem of my forties"), with a section dedicated to Whitman, is reported and translated by Ricciardi, in Camboni, ed., 275.

promote militarism. With reference to Whitman, as Marina Camboni has suggested, many futurists would appropriate the poet's emphasis on strength, health, self-confidence, and exuberance, and turn them into "[the symbol of] an anarchic, comradely life of rebel youths, thirsty for blood and violence."[395] While these ideas can be found with a number of poems in the anthology, there are also many others that show a consonance with Whitman's celebration of life, joy, nature, humbleness.

Ultimately, to retrace Whitman's presence in the anthology that Marinetti sent to Gamberale, there is no better place to start from than Marinetti's own poems included in the anthology. Marinetti included poems both in French and in Italian, mostly taken from a collection, *Destruction* ("Destruction"), that had appeared, in French, in 1904, and that Marinetti had dedicated to Gustave Kahn. In the long poem "Le Démon de la Vitesse" ("The Demon of Velocity"), Marinetti writes:

> O! The identical ebb and flow of the tide
> that lifts with ecstasy and rupture
> our hearts madly in love,
> plunging with delight and then springing
> out of the bitter foam, like a swimmer launched
> among the flight of waves that balance themselves
> to the cadenced rhythm of these tribes of Stars
> migrating in silence toward the great summer nights!...
>
> […]
>
> Calm, my soul, your superhuman fever,
> because we have an exquisite hour to savor,
> in freedom, as we please,
> in lounging and loafing with our desires
> at the will of the pacifying fans of silence!
>
> […]
>
> Hurrah! … let us go, my soul, let us escape

[395] See Camboni, "Le Foglie d'Erba di Walt Whitman," 365.

> beyond the energy of contracted muscles,
> beyond the frontiers of space and time,
> out of the possible black, into the absurd blue,
> to follow the romantic adventure of the Stars![396] (300-301; 303; 309)

The poetic persona's invocation of the soul, the use of present participles, anaphoras, and the inciting exclamations, the image of the liberating "lounging and loafing" are all resonant with Whitman's poetry. Marinetti's long poem, divided in sections, is composed of very long lines, and there is no trace of the lack of traditional syntax. This is true also for all the poems that Marinetti inserted in the anthology. Even the two poems he did not take from his 1904 *Destruction*, but from his 1912 *Le Monoplan du Pape* ("The Pope's Monoplane"), are in fact written in free verse, with no attempt to destroy syntax.

The poems taken from *Le Monoplan,* explicitly militaristic in tone, are important as they signal the beginning of Marinetti's full embracement of interventionism and of the celebration of violence. While the idea of "war being the only hygiene of the world" appeared already in the 1909 manifesto, Marinetti gave it fuller force only around 1911, when the Italian-Turkey War exploded. This strong interventionism, which originated primarily in the ardent nationalism and irredentism that dated back to Marinetti's youth,[397] puts an end to the initial phase of futurism and starts the second, led by the

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[396] Original: "Oh! L'identique flux et reflux de la marée / qui enlevait d'extase et de ravissement / nos coeurs fondus éperdument, / plongeant avec délices et puis rejaillisant / hors de l'écume amère, tel un nageur lancé / parmi l'essor des vagues qui se balancent / au rhythme cadencé de ces tribus d'Etoiles / émigrant en silence par les grand soirs d'été! …/ […] / Calme donc, ô mon âme, ta fièvre surhumaine, / car nous avons une heure exquise à savourer, / en liberté, à notre guise, / en prélassant nos grands désirs flâneurs, / au gré des pacifiants éventails du silence! …/ […] / Hurrah! …partons, mon âme, évadons-nous / par-delà le ressort des muscles déclanchés, / par-delà les confins de l'espace et du temps, / hors du possible noir, en plein azur absurde, / pour suivre l'aventure romantique des Astres!" My translation.

[397] For more on this, see Perloff in Buelens, Hendrix and Jansen, eds., 17.

manifesto "Guerra sola igiene del mondo"[398] ("War the only world hygiene"). In this latter, Whitman's name appears once, together with that of Zola, Kahn, and Verhaeren: the writers that Marinetti had loved in his youth remained as tutelary deities, as names to invoke in Marinetti's increasingly exasperated race to modernity. But the interest in free verse had at this point completely ceased: significantly, the expression appears in this manifesto only twice, one with reference to Kahn, and the other when Marinetti assesses free verse as still useful, but only for futurist theatre.

The poetry of this new, more fully militaristic futurist phase had in fact been theorized in 1913, in the manifesto *Distruzione della sintassi*. *Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà* ("Destruction of syntax. Imagination without threads. Words in freedom"). In it, Marinetti declared free verse to be dead. Now, Marinetti argued, it was time to radically pursue the destruction of any conventional syntax and to put the ideas of "images without threads" and "words in freedom" into practice. Words had now to be completely disconnected from each other, they had to become pure electrical flashes, they had to rupture any linguistic order, to shock, explode and exalt.

Interventionism and the official abolition of free verse were too much to tolerate for writer Corrado Govoni. As Lucini had already done, Govoni, whose work was indeed included in the 1912 anthology, abandoned Marinetti and the the futurists soon after.[399]

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[398] The manifesto was first published in French in 1911 and later, in 1915, in Italian.

[399] Govoni's poems included in the anthology (and previously published in Govoni's 1911 collection *Poesie elettriche* [*Electrical poems*]) are strikingly reminiscent of Whitman. Perhaps the most significant poem in this sense is "Fascino" ("Fascination"), where a collective lyrical "we" (presumably standing for an entire generation) is intent to express their love of life, often by using joyful exclamations, long catalogues, and a large number of explicitly sensual images. The last lines, for example, read, "In all the most humble things / we discovered a profound signification; / from everything came an admonishment; / in everything we found an unknown consolation. / And we loved life in its being multiple and in having a multitude of souls / with all

The anthology remains an important document that stands at the crux of futurism's two phases: it closes the early phase and opens the second one. Similarly, the fact that Marinetti sent the book to Gamberale seems to symbolically put an end to the phase of Marinetti's work in celebrating and legitimizing that revolutionary form he had learned from Kahn and from Whitman: free verse. Soon after, he would find the form not revolutionary enough, at least not enough for chanting the war.

Marinetti's first Whitman had certainly been that of the French *Whitmanisme*, that of Lucini, Buzzi, and Govoni, that of free verse. And it is not a coincidence that this was also the first Whitman of the Russian futurists, who, inspired by the first Italian manifestoes, started their own literary revolution by embracing and echoing Whitman's free verse. In 1909, Velimir Khlebnikov wrote, in a long poem that was dedicated to the master of Russian primitivism, Vyacheslav Ivanov (and therefore, indirectly, to Whitman, who had inspired Ivanov):

> O Garden, Garden!
> Where the metal is akin to a father who reminds his sons that they are brothers and stops a bloody fight.
> […]
> Where a camel knows the clue of Buddhism and suppresses the smirk of China.
> […]
> Where a hawk's breast resembles the cirrus clouds before a storm.
> […]
> And that the reason that there are so many animals in the world is that they can see God in different ways.
> Where animals, tired of roaring, stand and look at the sky.
> […]
> Garden, Garden, where the stare of an animal tells more than heaps of finished books.

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its joys and pains, / with its spring and with the fatal winter, / with its continual renewal and decline, / eternal fascination." (281-282) Original: "In tutte le più umili cose / scoprimmo una profonda significazione; / da tutto ci venne un grave ammonimento; / in tutto trovammo un'ignota consolazione. / Ed amammo la vita molteplice e moltanime / con tutte le sue gioie e i suoi dolori, / con la sua primavera e il fatale inverno, / con il suo continuo rinnovarsi e morire, / fascino eterno." My translation.

> Garden.
> […]
> Where an eagle sits with its neck to the public, the wings oddly spread. Does it daydream it's soaring high in the mountains? Or is it praying? Or just suffering from heat? […][400]

As argued by Elena Evich, Khlebnikov's words "the stare of an animal tells more than heaps of finished books" echo many similar passages in Whitman's poems. Evich also establishes further connections between this poem and Whitman's "Song of Myself."[401] But I would go even further and say that Khlebnikov's diction in "Zoo" anticipates that of Allen Ginsberg: in both poets, in fact, the Whitmanian long lines and oratorical tone become shouted, and almost parodical. There is in fact, in Khlebnikov, the same dose of humor that will appear in Ginsberg.

Unlike Marinetti, Khlebnikov never abandoned free verse, the device with which he had started his creative revolution. But in the 1910s, Khlebnikov did continue to embark on various other technical and linguistic experiments, especially in the realm of the so-called "zaum," i.e. the trans-mental or trans-rational experimental pre-language or

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[400] Original: "О, Сад, Сад! / Где железо подобно отцу, напоминающему братьям, что они братья, и останавливающему кровопролитную схватку. / […] / Где верблюд, чей высокий горб лишен всадника, знает разгадку буддизма и затаил ужимку Китая./ […] / Где грудь сокола напоминает перистые тучи перед грозой./ […] / И что на свете потому так много зверей, что они умеют по-разному видеть бога./ Где звери, устав рыкать, встают и смотрят на небо./ […] / Сад, Сад, где взгляд зверя больше значит, чем груды прочтенных книг./ Сад./ […] / Где орел сидит, повернувшись к людям шеей и смотря в стену, держа крылья странно распущенными. Не кажется ли ему, что он парит высоко над горами? Или он молится? Или ему жарко?" Available online at http://rvb.ru/hlebnikov/tekst/02poemy/195.htm. The English translation used here is authored by Joseph Brodsky and taken from his "The Meaning of Meaning" (Review of *The King of Time: Selected Writings of the Russian Futurian by Velimir Khlebnikov.* Transl. by Paul Schmidt, edited by Charlotte Douglas. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1985]), *New Republic* (January 20, 1986): 32-35.

[401] Elena Evich, "Walt Whitman in Russian Translations" Whitman's 'Footprint' in Russian Poetry," available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (http://whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/russian/evitch.html).

Ursprache of phono-symbolism theorized by him and other Russian futurists, and aimed to create new forms of non-traditional semantic meaning. Whitman remained a stable, inspiring presence throughout all of Khlebnikov's writing career.

In 1921, in an untitled poem, the Russian poet wrote:

> Attentively I read the springtime thoughts of the Divinity in designs on the speckled feet
> of tree-toads,
> Homer shaken by the awful wagon of a great war, the way a glass shakes at a wagon
> passing outside.
> I have the same Neanderthal skull, the same curving forehead as you, old Walt.[402]

The poem makes clear that Whitman is perceived by Khlebnikov in primitivist terms. Whitman is, once again, the DNA-provider: his role is read not in terms of destruction, but of transmission of a genetic heritage of innovation. For Khlebnikov, Whitman is (as Marinetti said of Lucini) "not a destroyer, but a barbarian builder."

2. The Presence of Whitman in *La Voce*: Giovanni Papini, Ardengo Soffici, Piero Jahier

The Italian avant-garde scene of the first fifteen years of the twentieth century has often been given a second, alternative name: that of "age of the periodicals."[403] This

[402] Original: "Внимательно читаю весенние мысли бога на узоре пестрых ног жабы. / Гомера дрожание после великой войны, точно стакан задрожал от телеги. / Уота Уитмана неандертальский череп с вогнутым лбом. / И говорю: всё это было! всё это меньше меня!" Available online at http://ruslit.traumlibrary.net/book/hlebnikov-ss06-02/hlebnikov-ss06-02.html#work002130. Khlebnikov's untitled poem [1921] is included in *Velimir Khlebnikov, Selected Poems*, ed. Ronald Vroon, transl. Paul Schmidt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 93.

[403] For more on this, see Eugenio Garin, *Cronache di filosofia italiana, 1900-19* (Bari: Laterza, 1966), 23-24; Aurelio Benevento, *Primo novecento* (Napoli: Loffredo, 1986), 8; Edoardo Sanguineti, *Poesia italiana del Novecento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1969), XXXIX-XL.

definition is due to the large number of literary periodicals that were started in these years, and for their central role in the cultural scene of the time: various innovative cultural and literary movements that were active in this period gravitated, in fact, around the magazines themselves. We have already begun to observe this phenomenon when discussing the cases of Aleramo's writings in the *Nuova Antologia* and *Il Marzocco*, and of Marinetti's *Poesia*. But, here, I will concentrate on what remains an understudied case in Whitman's Italian reception:[404] the responses to his poetry by the members of the modernist Florentine periodical *La Voce* ("The Voice"), which was active from 1908 to 1916. The case of *La Voce* is particularly interesting if seen in relation to early Italian futurism: to what degree was *La Voce* influenced by this latter? How did the two modernist movements differ? How were they similar?

La Voce obviously emerged from the same historical context in which Marinetti's futurism developed. In politics, the shortcomings of the bourgeois liberal state during the post-unitary years caused widespread dissatisfaction with an evident socio-economical and cultural under-development that had certainly not helped Italy in its attempt to fashion a new collective identity. In literature, classicism and decadentism were only slowly fading away to leave space for more modern forms. Periodicals like *La Voce* were explicitly founded with the aim of being an antidote to this situation, and it was neither the only nor the first such initiative. In fact, in 1908, *La Voce* was founded by the

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[404] The general case of Whitman and the circle of *La Voce* has not previously been analyzed. Nonetheless, I have benefited from numerous more focused studies, including those by Freeth, Grippi and Camboni on Giovanni Papini's and Piero Jahier's responses to Whitman. Also useful is Caterina Ricciardi's discussion of D'Annunzio, De Bosis, Thovez, and a few futurist writers.

intellectual and literary critic Giuseppe Prezzolini as an ideal successor of *Leonardo,* the periodical that he had directed, together with Giovanni Papini, from 1903 to 1907.

Leonardo had been programmatically centered on philosophical pragmatism and on the Bergsonian imperative of cultural renewal via secular religion. As noted by critic Walter Adamson, the *leonardiani* had worked on the idea of "synthesizing international modernist and Tuscan regional perspectives in a call for a national renewal."[405] But the idiosyncrasies internal to the group had brought the *Leonardo* to a dead end. *La Voce*, then, was created by Prezzolini with the aim of keeping a coherent unity notwithstanding the diverse intellectual itineraries of its protagonists. *La Voce*'s "general harmony of disharmonies"[406] was grounded both in a collective avant-garde activism highly motivated to create a new culture and a new way of living, as noted by Antonio Gramsci,[407] and on a common desire to update readers about the most revolutionary creative forces that were operating internationally. Many *vociani* had, or were still having, formative experiences in Parisian avant-gardes, and the idea of helping to renovate Italian culture so that it could take an active part in the international avant-garde scene, but also in the re-making of Italian society, was highly stimulating.

The literary program of *La Voce* consisted first and foremost in overcoming decadent aestheticism through forms of writing that could be capable of a concrete, moral

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[405] See Walter L. Adamson, "Modernism in Florence: The Politics of Avant-Garde Culture in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Italian Modernism. Italian Culture between Decadentism and Avant-Garde,* eds. Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), 229.

[406] See Luigi Iannone, *Conservatore atipico: Giuseppe Prezzolini intellettuale politicamente scorretto* (Roma: Pantheon, 2003), 88.

[407] See Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1954), 9.

engagement with reality. Among other things, Prezzolini insisted on the virtues of sincerity and "authenticity" in writing, on the importance of addressing readers directly and on the need to look at poetry as a *sensorium* of experiences. Stylistic innovation was warmly recommended, and the attempt to revitalize Italian literature undertaken by authors who gravitated toward *La Voce* can in this sense be considered successful. Prezzolini's periodical was able to make a number of young and new voices heard: the periodical was popular and influential. Benito Mussolini was, for example, a faithful reader.[408]

The poet and critic Giovanni Papini, who had been a co-founder of *La* Voce, was a great admirer of Whitman's poetry, as we have already seen when discussing, in connection to Sibilla Aleramo, the article that Papini dedicated to Whitman, published in *Nuova Antologia* on June 16th, 1908. In it, Papini not only had discussed Whitman's democratic universalism, and had compared the American poet to both Nietzsche and Saint Francis of Assisi: he also described his work in terms of a moral, didactic mission. For Papini, Whitman "does not sing with the purpose of singing, but with the purpose of waking people up, to educate them and encourage them."[409] But in order to be an educator, Papini argued, Whitman had to be rude and with no affectations. In this sense, the lesson that Italian writers who wanted to contribute to the moral renovation of society had to take from Whitman, was that of

> […] getting rid of the literary dust that fills our eyes and kills our pure capacity to see things. We–and I mean especially us, Italians–are too literate and courteous.

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[408] This does not mean that *La Voce* should be regarded as proto-fascist. By reading the periodical, Mussolini probably learned how to distrust his former positivism and combine his revolutionary socialism with philosophical idealism and pragmatism.

[409] See Papini, "Walt Whitman," 700. My translation.

> We are gentlemen even in front of the earth, which does not want to receive any compliment: even in front of poetry, which does not like too much politeness. We must put back in our dried up veins of amateurs, polished citizens, and ladies' men, a little bit of that good blood of the farmers, of the mountain men, of the swindlers. […] We must become barbarians again–maybe even a bit boorish–if we want to rediscover poetry. If Whitman did not teach us at least this, then all the translations and all the talking that has been made about him were completely useless. (711)

These ideas had to have a strong appeal for the *vociani,* who were looking out for models of international poets to follow, and who wanted to become, themselves, poet-educators, poets who could finally change Italian society through a radical cultural renovation. The poet Arturo Onofri, for example, in a letter to Papini on June 15th, 1911, wrote:

> I too am among those who recur to the great American to ask him to give me the strength to win over the last temptations and intermittent perplexities; and yes, finally, I too feel that the best will can blossom in the vastness of that desert, in that genuine rudeness, together with the usual heroic energy of a new song.[410]

In this case, the name of Whitman is not even explicitly made, but it is clear that Onofri is referring to him. Onofri's remarks are rather generic and they mostly insist on the idea that Whitman's poetry works as a liberating inspirational source. But Papini's ideas about a primitiveness to be regained, in association with a weak masculinity to be shunned and a bourgeous mindset to reject, are definitely subtler and more ideologically charged. In this sense, Papini's assessment of the "barbaric" element in Whitman is far from Khlebnikov's primitivist understanding of the American poet, and it takes one step further Marinetti's idea, applied to Lucini, of "barbarian builder." As argued by critic John Champagne, who has recently carried out a study of the connections between aesthetic modernism and masculinity in fascist Italy,

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[410] The letter is included in Carlo D'Alessio, ed., *Carteggi Cecchi Onofri Papini* (Milano: Bompiani, 2000), 81.

> Papini's call for barbarism not only invokes a "healthier" past as an antidote to the present but also contains the seeds of fascism's critique of the "soft" bourgeoisie, emblematized in the fascist imagination by the Giolitti years and the liberal government fascism replaced. It is thus not difficult to imagine how Whitman's poems could have been manipulated to serve fascism.[411]

Papini's emphasis on masculinity would always remain a fundamental element of his ideology. Later in the years, Papini would insist on the sexist idea that the backwardness of Italian literature was due to the fact that "all the men are dead and that only women are writing now."[412]

Another interesting case of Whitman's appearance within the correspondence of the *vociani* can be found in the letters that Papini exchanged with Ardengo Soffici. When Papini, in December 1907, sent Soffici a copy of Gamberale's recently published unabridged translation of *Leaves of Grass*, the Tuscan painter and writer had just returned to Italy after having lived in Paris for four years.[413] The gesture of giving *Leaves of Grass* as a gift appears once again, in this history of the Italian reception, as an unmistakable sign of profound sharing and empathy. In Papini's letter that announces the gift to Soffici, Whitman appears in the middle of other things: a planned exhibition, the comments on Soffici's work. And then, unexpectedly, Papini writes: "I bought for you Walt Whitman (*Leaves of Grass*) a volume of 600 pages where there is *all* W.W."[414] Soffici certainly

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[411] See John Champagne, *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 128.

[412] See Giovanni Papini, "Miele e pietra," in *Eresie letterarie [1905-1928]*, (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1932), 53.

[413] In France, Soffici studied with Cezanne, among others, and was an active presence in the literary and cultural circles of *La Plume* and *Le Mercure de France.* Papini repeatedly visited Soffici there, and the two often went to visit other writers and artists, including Picasso.

[414] Letter from Giovanni Papini to Ardengo Soffici, December 28, 1907, included in Richter, ed., *Carteggio*, *Giovanni Papini-Ardengo Soffici*, *Carteggio I 1903-1908. Dal "Leonardo" a "La Voce"* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1991), 167. My translation.

knew Whitman's work, but only superficially, as he admits in his answer to Papini. Reading Gamberale's translation was a groundbreaking moment for Soffici. His answer to Papini reads

> Dearest Giovanni,
> Having given me the book by Whitman has been, on your side, a brotherly sign of affection for which my soul will always be grateful, but it has also been a sort of disaster for me (sweet, in the end). Already when reading the (mediocre) preface I recognized that even the facts of life he has stolen from me–look at page X around the middle!—Apart from this, there is an infinity of ideas and images that have been swirling around in my head for years and that are expressed in his songs, and this is exasperating! Do you still believe that my work will be worth something even after this? What makes me confident and brave–at least after the first disappointment—will be the thought and the awareness of my sincerity and spontaneity and Italian-ness. […] Your company fills me each time with the courage and fire for work and of hope for life. It is absolutely necessary that we do something great for Italy.[415]

Soffici exhibits anxiety about his extreme closeness of style and purposes with Whitman similar to the discomfort felt, almost twenty years earlier, by Ada Negri. But the letter is also important for that element of difference that, as Soffici declares, might save the originality of his work: "Italian-ness." As the editor of the correspondence Mario Richter explains, this is the first time that Soffici uses this term in his letters to Papini. And this is a crucial concept for both Soffici's work, and for the cultural and political agenda that he shared with Papini and that resonated with the main goal of both *La Voce* and *Lacerba* (the periodical that Soffici and Papini would found together in 1913): to do "something great for Italy." It is important to note that, around the same time when Papini sent Soffici Whitman's *Leaves*, he also sent him a few books by Mazzini, and the two friends started fantasizing about founding a Mazzinian political party called "Partito dell'Anima"

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[415] Letter (undated) from Soffici to Papini, in Richter, ed., 168. My translation.

("Party of the Soul"), which never came to life. It is clear then how Whitman was once again read from a (post)risorgimental perspective: his work was exemplary and had to be imitated and adapted to the most urgent political need: to fully realize Italy as a nation.[416]

In the letters, Papini and Soffici repeatedly talk about their affection for each other and their shared political and artistic ideology in terms of "brotherhood." And the relevance of the role assumed by Whitman in their imagination is made clear by Papini in his January 3, 1908 letter to Soffici: "Walt will be our third brother. Love him for me."[417] In 1908, both writers published pieces that invoked Whitman directly: Soffici wrote a poem, and Papini the already mentioned essay on the *Nuova Antologia.* Soffici's poem, published in the first and last issue of the periodical *Il Commento* on February 16, 1908, was entitled "Risposta a Walt Whitman per il suo 'Canto dell'esposizione'" ("Answer to Walt Whitman for his 'Song of the exposition'"). The poem reads

> No, Walt, brother, the one you saw was not
> A widowed immigrant woman. She was the Muse
> Whom the sea, through the sky, brought to you.
> Pulled by the proud appeal, she came, and remained with you
> And she kissed your superb forehead and smiled to your songs; but in her heart
> She brooded the return and the farewell.
>
> Not ash and wind, not nailed coffins and ruins,
> Not all dead was her ancient homeland!
> […]
>
> And she came back. With wet trembling lips
> She closed your eyes, and came back to her gardens along the sea.
> Now she is here, Walt, she is here, I feel she is close to me,
> I smell the springy scent of her breath …

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[416] For more about this political project and for the appropriation of the risorgimental ideology by early fascism, see Simon Levis Sullam, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Origins of Fascism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[417] Letter from Papini to Soffici, January 3, 1908, in Richter, ed., 174. My translation.

> She touches my hair, I embrace her, I press her to my breast with passion,
> Lovingly, with robust arms, and I sing![418]

The Muse whom Whitman had invoked to "come migrate from Greece and Ionia" to America is proudly called back by Soffici to his side of the ocean. Soffici employs not only a Whitmanian tone, but also highly sensual images that call to mind numerous scenes in Whitman's work. Soffici's poem is also striking for the exhibition of the virility of the lyrical I: the connotation of the Muse is that of a woman who is not "widowed," who is still married with a man, the poet, who passionately embraces her. It is clear how Soffici's answer to Whitman corresponds to both a recognition of admiration and "brotherhood," but also to a challenge, and to a metaphorical claim to re-possess, regain, one's own "property."

Soffici's challenging tone would not end here. The publication of Papini's piece sparked a debate between Papini and Soffici that reveals the continued existence of an old prejudice about Whitman's work. Having read Papini's article, Soffici, notwithstanding his love for Whitman's poetry, wrote to Papini saying that, in his opinion, Whitman could not be seen as better than, or even on the same level as, Dante or Baudelaire. Here is how Soffici justified this position:

> W.W. is not a poet; he is something better –according to somebody—and for others he is something less—he is somebody who is in love. He is the most

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[418] Original: "No, Walt fratello, quella che vedesti non era / Una emigrata vedova. Ben era la Musa. / Che sulla groppa celeste a te recava il tuo mare. / Tratta dal fiero appello, venne ella e si stette con te / E ti baciò la fronte superba e sorrise ai tuoi canti; ma in cuore / Covava il ritorno e l'addio. / Non cenere e vento, non conficcate bare e ruine, / Non tutta morta era la sua patria antica! / […] / Ed ella tornò. Con umide labbra tremanti / Ti chiuse gli occhi, e tornò ai suoi verzieri in riva al suo mare. / Ora è qui, Walt, è qui, la sento aggirarmisi intorno, / Respiro l'odore primaverile del suo fiato… / Mi tocca i capelli, l'abbraccio, la stringo al mio petto in sussulto, / Perdutamente, con le gagliarde braccia, e canto!". My translation. Ardengo Soffici, "Risposta a Walt Whitman per il suo 'Canto dell'esposizione'" in Soffici, *Marsia e Apollo: poesie giovanili 1901-1908* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1961), vol. 4, 707.

> extraordinary lover that I know, among the saints. […] [but] with all this love, he lost his creative will. […] The real greatness in general, I think that it consists in restraining, dominating oneself, and the creative will that builds style. […] Dante, Cervantes, Dostoyevsky, Baudelaire, etc. The work of these people is limited, tamed, subjugated to their will […][419]

When Papini tried to defend Whitman, arguing that he actually does select and carve quite a lot,[420] Soffici still remained of the opinion that “generally he lets himself be overwhelmed by the enormity of his love and he escapes too often from [using] the brake of art.”[421] Once again, Soffici’s criticism of Whitman proved to be strongly centered on his own agenda for Italian art. Specifically, Soffici discussed what he regarded as the main flaw of Whitman’s style to emphasize a point to Papini: what Italian art needed was not so much to liberate, but to restrain itself, to acquire more self-awareness and more precision. Soffici conflated Whitman and Nietzsche, affirming that the widespread reliance of Italian avant-gardes on Nietzsche’s theories advocating a liberating, if not altogether destructive, impulse, was actually not beneficial for them. Soffici wrote

> Summing up, what I wanted to say [about Whitman] is that the great artist must concentrate and restrain himself in order to become compact and conclusive, rather than expanding himself and loose strength and light for having abused strength and light. This can be connected also with what I told you about Nietzsche, which is that we, a free race by tradition, do not need to liberate but rather to restrain ourselves, and rather than our *rights,* we must affirm our duties.[422]

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[419] Letter from Soffici to Papini, July 28, 1908, in Richter, ed., 277-279. My translation.

[420] See letter from Papini to Soffici, August 7, 1908, in Richter, ed., 284-286.

[421] Letter from Soffici to Papini, August 8, 1908, in Richter, ed., 286. My translation.

[422] Letter from Soffici to Papini, August 1, 1908, in Richter, ed., 282. My translation.

Soffici's perspective defines an interesting counter-tendency within the international reception where, as we have seen, Nietzsche and Whitman were often conflated and appropriated as a radical outburst of invigorating energy.

Although Papini was clearly not a very talented poet (he was certainly more apt to write in prose and to work as a critic and intellectual) it is interesting to look at his work and search for echoes of Whitman's poetry. These echoes confirm Papini's reading of Whitman in terms of a Nietzschean exuberance, energy, freedom from inhibition. There is, for example, an interesting connection with the image of the hawk in Whitman's section 52 of "Song of Myself" (and, more generally, with Whitman's frequently recurring identification of the lyrical I with a bird). Papini's "Decima poesia" ("Tenth Poem") could be seen as a creative response to the accusation that the spotted hawk made to the lyrical I of "Song of Myself": "The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and of my loitering."[423] In Papini, the lyrical I *has become* the hawk: "I am a bad hawk with a few words to say / I dissipate my life as I want."[424] And it is probably not a coincidence that in a further poem in this same collection, the "savage" lyrical I expresses his hatred for the city (probably as simplistically contrasted to the

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[423] [423] See Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 78. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[424] Original: "Sono un falcaccio di poche parole. / Sperpero la mia vita a modo mio." Giovanni Papini, "Decima poesia" in *Opera prima* [1917], (Genova: San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2008), 49. My translation.

country) in this way: "I belch out my hatred over the constructed city,"[425] which is resonant with the famous "belch'd words" of section 2 of "Song of Myself."[426]

An occasional use of exclamations and of anaphoras in Papini's poetry make for some superficial similarity with Whitman's style. However, the formal nature of Papini's poetry is significantly different from that of the American poet: Papini makes a constant use of alternate rhyme; he always writes in quatrains, and although he theorizes the need for a poetic "unusual language,"[427] he uses a very high and erudite lexicon which does not leave any space for colloquialisms or neologisms. To put it simply, Papini's poetry remains far from the formal innovations carried out by most of his contemporaries and by the futurist group, nothwithstanding the theoretical importance he assigned to the need for a renewal of Italian literature. Strangely enough, Papini's love for Whitman did not work as a liberating force from the chains of that classicist poetic diction that Papini had so violently criticized (and not only when writing about Whitman). In the end, critic Asor Rosa is right to call Papini "a conservative revolutionary."[428]

The ideological approach to Whitman's poetry that Papini cultivated during his years at *La Voce* revealed its full strength in the new periodical called *Lacerba* that he founded with Soffici in 1913 after having abandoned *La Voce.* Paradoxically enough, in Papini's and Soffici's minds *Lacerba* should have given more space to literary and

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[425] Original: "Erutto spregio verso la costrutta / città […]." Giovanni Papini, "Dodicesima poesia" in *Opera prima,* 53. My translation.

[426] See Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 30. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html

[427] For more on this, see Giovanni Papini, *Eresie letterarie* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1932), 173.

[428] Asor Rosa's definition of Papini is reported in Iannone, 100.

artistic topics in comparison to *La Voce* (which they thought was too dedicated to political issues). But only one year later their *Lacerba* became one of the preferred showcases for militaristic and interventionist futurist proclamations. *La Voce,* on the other hand, shifted toward an almost exclusively literary dimension in 1914, when Giuseppe De Robertis became the new director of *La Voce* in place of Prezzolini.

An important echo of a Whitmanian line is the *trait d'union* between the work of Papini and that of Piero Jahier. This example is useful in demonstrating the essential contrariety of the readings and re-inventions of Whitman by these two *vociani* poets. The line is "Who has gone farthest? For I would go farther" from Whitman's poem "Excelsior."[429] Papini translated the line literally and used it as an epigraph to a chapter of his autobiography titled *Un uomo finito* ("A Man Finished,") which was published by La Voce Press in 1913. The chapter in question was dedicated to his career as an intellectual and writer.[430] Elsewhere in the book, Papini declared that a writer had to be "a saint and a genius,"[431] a Nietzschean *Übermensch,* and his use of the Whitman's line sounds like a solemn proclamation of this precise mission.

Jahier's first line in one of his most famous poems, "Ritratto dell'uomo più libero" ("Portrait of the Freest Man,") which was published in *La Voce* on July 28th, 1914,[432] seems to be a direct answer to Papini's epigraph. Jahier's line reads: "Who has

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[429] See Walt Whitman, "Excelsior" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 363. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[430] See Giovanni Papini, *Un uomo finito* (Firenze: Libreria de La Voce, 1913), 145.

[431] Papini, *Un uomo finito,* 267.

[432] Original: "Chi è salito più in alto?—Perché io voglio scendere quanto è salito." Jahier's poem is also included in the posthumous collection *Poesie in versi e in prosa* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981), 27. My translation. All the poems by Jahier that I am discussing here are taken from this

gone highest? - Because I want to go just as far down." It is evident how Jahier overturns the verse: first of all, he adds a vertical dimension to the first half line, which is absent in both Whitman's line and in Papini's translation of it, and then he declares an aim which is no longer that of excelling, of standing out among others and surpassing them to become their guide, but of going down. What can Jahier mean? While Papini felt that his mission was that of becoming an exemplary *Übermensch*, Jahier wanted to create a renovated poetry that had to go back to reality and to common people. His verse can in this sense be read as an intentional polemic against Papini's use of Whitman's verse.

Unlike Papini, Jahier fully understood and extended the formal innovation of Whitman's poetry. Considered by critics as the quintessential *vociano,* Jahier combined a moral engagement (carried out through a constant interest in discussing collective ethical values) with rhythmic and metric innovations. His poetry, which often takes the form of *poème en prose,* is characterized by the usage of phonetic and rhythmic iterations, anaphoras and syntactic parallelisms. Jahier expressed on various occasions his admiration for Whitman's work,[433] and he never hid how, together with reading the Bible and the work of the French writer Paul Claudel, Whitman's tone had been one of the major inspirational sources for the formation of his lyrical voice.[434] Jahier's extensive

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collection, except the last one, "Reclute," which is taken from *Con me e con gli alpini* (Firenze: "La Voce" Società anonima editrice, 1920), 11. All passages reproduced here are translated by me.

[433] See for example his correspondence with Cesare Pavese in the 1940s, when Jahier collaborated as a translator with Einaudi, the publishing house for which Pavese worked. In various letters, the two writers and translators repeatedly discussed Whitman's poetry and the possibility of translating *Leaves of Grass* for a new edition that Pavese wanted to prepare (the translation would have eventually been executed by Enzo Giachino in 1950). See Cesare Pavese, *Lettere 1924-1950* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), vol.1.

[434] For more on this, see Benevento, *Primo Novecento*, 137; 146; 224.

knowledge of the Bible originated in his childhood: his father had infact been a Waldensian pastor and Jahier's own religious beliefs, although characterized by a dismissal of dogmas, were strong, as is evident from the ethical component of his writings.

The same poem we have cited in relation to the use of the Whitmanian line from "Excelsior," "Portrait of the Freest Man," will help us analyze Jahier's style and the themes that are central in his work:

> Then I discovered: in the morning it is to resurrect with the warm ideas that were set aside in the universe that holds me by hand.
> When I discovered what it is to rest:—how flowers open towards the tired eye, just as towards the sun;–how birds take off and fly, one toward each other.
> When I discovered the small profit: they know your heart is somewhere else; they won't buy what they can't have.
> When I discovered a buried treasure: yes, instead of dusty old habits, an uncontrolled passion always at hand.
> […]
> When I discovered my faith: ah! Don't tell me you believed that faith is not needed to live a life without faith! (27)[435]

Jahier's long verse almost feels like prose, even if the anaphoras and the allitterations of the Italian text are able to create a peculiar rhythm that repeats and consolidates itself as to almost form a fixed structure. The cited passage is also representative of Jahier's typical rhetorical gesture of addressing the reader directly and of making a large use of exclamations. Even if he often deals with class issues, social marginalization, work alienation, Jahier never abandons a positive undertone of hope and faith that emerges

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[435] Original: "Allora scopersi: la mattina risuscitare colle idee calde serbate nell'universo che mi dà la mano. / Quando scopersi il riposo: —proprio verso l'occhio stanco si aprono i fiori come verso il sole; —proprio gli uccelli si spiccano incontro. / Quando scopersi il piccolo guadagno; sanno che è altrove il tuo cuore; non pagheranno quello che non possono avere. / Quando scopersi un tesoro giacente: sì, al posto di abitudini polverose, sempre sottomano la più sfrenata passione. / […] /Quando scopersi la mia fede: ah! credevate che non ce ne voglia per vivere di fede!".

through quick flashes of joy, which usually correspond to exclamatory moments. But probably the most revolutionary feature of this poetry is Jahier's use of the long dash for rhythmical purposes. The dash had hardly ever been used in Italian poetry before, and we can hypothesize that Whitman's poetry played a significant role in its adoption. These passages from "Canto del Camminatore" ("Song of the Walker"), a long poem divided in seven sections and published in two separated parts in *La Voce* first on October 16th 1913 and then on December 25th 1913, are a good example of Jahier's use of this particular punctuation mark:

> But for one day at least—give a vacation to the mortified body—let me for one day walk while fasting,
> So that I can recognize the stations of my identity—and try out the anchors of my destiny—and interrogate my full young blood—far from the contamination of lazy chatty life.
> […]
> Then—if the the insect is born while the thyme blossoms,
> If the planet comes back on time, if it crosses its fire in the scattered sky of the earth,
> Then—my place in life is right. (13; 15)[436]

"Song of the Walker" can be considered as Jahier's *manifesto* of poetics: art and life, just as well as soul and body, have to be united. Poetic art must follow the rhythms of natural and daily life. It has to be a peripatetic poetry in which both body and soul experience the world: "To walk—in the infinity of these lively things—with my hands immersed in the

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[436] Original: "Ma un giorno almeno—vacanza al corpo mortificato—fatemi un giorno camminare in digiuno, / Affinché riconosca le stazioni della mia identit—e provi le ancore del mio destino—e chieda risposta al mio sangue intero giovanile,—lontanato il contagio della pigra vita chiacchierativa./ […] / Certo—se nasce l'insetto contemporaneo alla fioritura del timo, / Se torna il pianeta puntuale, se rincrocia il suo fuoco nel cielo scarso terrestre, / Certo—è giusta la mia collocazione in vita."

regurgitating treasure chest" (14).[437] Conversations of the lyrical I not only with his soul, but also with his body, suggestively recall Whitman:

> My body, even if I never directly asked your opinion, I spent you as a good coin.
> You were not raised in a rich greenhouse, but in a sane excercise of poverty, patience and subjection.
> Little span of seeding land, how can you give bread to many mouths? And how can you give crumbs to the birds of the sky, and, also, how, squeezing your heart, can you give a sprout of saint poetry, as a stick that blossoms?
> (13)[438]

It is also crucial to note how Jahier's poetic language is a *pastiche* of tuscanisms, latinisms, erudite, technical and colloquial terms. And this innovative lexicon sounds even more innovative when the poet experiments with syntax, through a large use of infinite tenses and nominal style.

Politically, Jahier was explicitly anti-fascist,[439] so much so that he was a constant target of fascist repressive control and threats. With respect to his involvement with First World War, Jahier voluntarily enlisted in the alpine troops in 1915 and soon became a lieutenant, but his poetry was never militaristic. Jahier was convinced that the war had to be looked at as a matter of ethical responsibilty. To fight meant to contribute to a just cause. His collection of war poems, *Con me e con gli alpini* (1920) ("With me and the alpines") conveys a sense of fraternal solidarity and of a choral suffering shared by

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[437] Original: "Camminare—nell'infinito di queste cose viventi—immerse le mani nel forziere rigurgitante."

[438] Original: "Mio corpo, quantunque mai ti abbia chiesto parere per decidermi, molte volte ti ho speso, come la buona moneta. / Non sei stato cresciuto in serra agiata, ma in salutare esercizio di povertà, di pazienza e soggezione. / Magro palmo di terra da semina, come renderesti pane per molte bocche? E, ancora, chicchi per gli uccelli del cielo, e, ancora, strizzando il tuo cuore, un germoglio di santa poesia, come un bastone che fiorisce?".

[439] See, for example, Jahier's three contributions to Piero Gobetti's antifascist periodical *Rivoluzione liberale* (1922-1925). The contributions have been collected by Paolo Briganti in "Jahier e la *Rivoluzione liberale,*" *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 11 (1975): 211-221.

humble soldiers, who usually came from the poorest and most marginal classes of Italian society, to which Jahier always felt very close. Jahier's voice is one of encouragement and sympathy, as in the poem "Reclute" ("Recruits") where, while supervising his platoon in the dormitory, he calls his soldiers "piccoli figli" ("little sons"):

> I walked among the abandoned bodies in the grey light.
> Everything the same, everything identical;
> And each of them with his own memories and with his own affections;
> And each man with his story.
> I felt the need to give them a sign of affection.
> I said: goodnight, little sons.
> And they answered: goodnight.
> Nobody was sleeping. (11)[440]

Jahier never used Whitman's poetry as a virile Nietzschian instigation of blood sacrifices and, ultimately, of war.

This brief comparison of Papini's and Jahier's reinventions of Whitman has proved how divergent were their approaches, despite their shared context of *La Voce*. While Papini can be seen as close to the fascist readings of Whitman that would be carried on within the second phase of futurism, he also missed a major point that the futurists had absorbed: Whitman's formal innovation. As for Jahier, while there certainly are thematic consonances (the poem I just cited, for example, calls to mind Whitman's *Drum-Taps*), the closeness of Jahier's poetry with Whitman's is to be primarily identified in a formal sense. Jahier took the example of Whitman's innovative diction immensely farther than Papini.

3. From Florence to New York, in the Name of Whitman: Emanuel Carnevali

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[440] Original: "Camminavo in mezzo ai corpi abbandonati sul grigio. / Tutto uniforme, tutto uguale; / eppure ciascuno i suoi ricordi e i suoi affetti; / ciascuno una sua storia di uomo. / Ho sentito bisogno di dar loro un segno di cura. / Ho detto: buonanotte figlioli. E tutti han risposto: buonanotte. / Nessuno era addormentato."

Jahier's poetry has often been associated with that of a poet who cannot be fully considered a *vociano* for mere chronological reasons, but who had deeply admired the products of that cultural movement: Emanuel Carnevali. Carnevali had even translated a poem by Jahier into English for his special section "Five Years of Italian Poetry (1910-1915)" published in *Poetry* in January 1919.[441] For critic Gabriel Cacho Millet, Carnevali and Jahier shared the same syntactic experimentalism, the same "disregard for grammar" and the same "poetics of the common man."[442]

Carnevali had left Florence in 1914, when he was only seventeen, to migrate to the United States. In New York, initially, he worked at different jobs and he lived in poverty, while trying to realize his biggest dream: to make poetry. The only available contemporary Italian poetry that he could find to read in New York was that of *La Voce* and *Lacerba*: the two Florentine periodicals were in fact part of the New York Public Library's collection. *La Voce* became for Carnevali a sort of indispensable poetic textbook while he was writing his first poems and sending them to American literary periodicals. Notably, the poems Carnevali published were in English: from 1918 until his death, Carnevali only wrote his poetry and prose in English, even when he was back in Italy. He was in fact convinced that a poet should choose his own expressive language and that this latter should not necessarily correspond to that same poet's native language.

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[441] See Piero Jahier's "Richiamati," *La Voce* 7, 12 (15 June 1915): 752-753. Carnevali translated this poem and then wrote a poem that contains many reminiscences of it: "Utopia of the Men Who Come Back from the War" which was published in *The Touchstone* in July 1919. Carnevali's translation of Jahier's poem was published in "Five Years of Italian Poetry (1910-1915) with translations from Corrado Govoni, Salvatore Di Giacomo, Piero Jahier, Aldo Palazzeschi, Umberto Saba and Scipio Slataper," *Poetry* 13, (January 4 1919): 209-219.

[442] See Gabriel Cacho Millet, ed., "Introduction," in Emanuel Carnevali, *Voglio disturbare l'America: lettere a Benedetto Croce e Giovanni Papini e altro* (Firenze: La Casa Usher, 1980).

Perhaps Carnevali had not remained indifferent to Papini's words in *Opera prima*: "l'ideale sarebbe: a poeta nuovo lingua nuova" ("the ideal [thing] would be: to [each] new poet, a new language.") (173)

What is certain is that *La Voce* accompanied Carnevali in his poetic debut. The initial program of *La Voce* echoed Carnevali's own aim to write an essential poetry that could get away from the classicist and decadent tradition he personally disliked: Carnevali wanted to write a poetry that addressed problems of daily life, and attempt to change and improve reality. He started writing to Papini and to another *vociano,* Carlo Linati. Perhaps because of his spatial and temporal distance from the experiment of *La Voce*, Carnevali had somehow idealized the periodical, as well as Papini's critical iconoclastic tones, as is clear both from the correspondence with Papini and from the article that Carnevali wrote about him and which was published in *The Modern Review* in 1922.[443]

Carnevali sent his first poems for publication in 1918 and started to join the bohemians in Greenwich Village.[444] He soon met numerous American writers, including Carl Sandburg, Lola Ridge, William Carlos Williams, and Alfred Kreymborg, and started to collaborate with them. Having been awarded the first prize for poetry by Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* in March 1918*,* he moved to Chicago in 1919 to become associate editor of the magazine. Carnevali had in mind, together with the above mentioned writers, to found a new periodical that he wanted to call *New Moon.* In his letters to

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[443] In this article he wrote that *La Voce* had been one of the best periodicals ever appeared. See "Giovanni Papini," *The Modern Review* I, 1 (Autumn 1922): 11-14.

[444] For more on this, see "The Day of Summer. *Emanuel Carnevali*" in *Italoamericana. The Literature of the Great Migration, 1880-1943*, ed. Francesco Durante (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 867-876.

Papini, Carnevali asked for advice: *New Moon* should have made up for what *Poetry*, according to Carnevali, lacked: that is, a decent connection with other international avant-garde scenes. Carnevali wanted to imitate *La Voce*, because he thought it had been successful in updating Italian readers about international literary news. Papini's collaboration, Carnevali said, would have been indispensable. But *New Moon* was never founded, and Carnevali himself went back to Italy in 1922 because of a serious illness, and remained there until his death in 1942.

Carnevali's experience within the context of the American modernist scene is a significant moment for the history of the reception and reinvention of Whitman's poetry.[445] With his admiration for *La Voce* and for writers like Papini or Jahier, Carnevali entered the world of American modernist poets who were, on their side, intensely looking back at Whitman to carve the new wood he had broken, to use the famous Poundian expression. While he was close to these poets and was actively collaborating with them, Carnevali also criticized them: he thought that they lacked authenticity, and that they were too concentrated on technical details. Carnevali's accusation did not remain unheard, and in fact, many writers pleaded guilty to it and were thankful to Carnevali for opening their eyes. The New York poets of the magazine *Others* that, as put by Mario Domenichelli, "Carnevali had attacked […] with a violence rooted in his own utter, real,

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[445] And yet, no mention of Carnevali's case is made in the previously cited studies and articles dedicated to the Italian reception of Whitman. Carnevali's 1919 poem "Walt Whitman," which I will discuss later, importantly appears in *Walt Whitman. The Measure of His Song*, eds. Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom and Dan Campion, (Duluth: Holy Cow! Press, 1998), 123.

otherness,"[446] were so grateful for the constructive criticism that they even dedicated the last issue of the magazine to the Italian poet.

Carnevali tried to bring back that authenticity, that sincerity that he thought was lacking, and Whitman was a great source of inspiration, in this sense. In May 1919, Carnevali wrote a short poem called "Walt Whitman." The poem seems to conjugate Papini's reinvention of Whitman with that of Jahier's. It reads

> Noon on the mountain!—
> And all the crags are husky faces powerful with love for the sun;
> All the shadows
> Whisper of the sun.[447]

Here, Jahier's long verse, use of long dash and formal experimentation meet Papini's sense of primordial strength. But Carnevali's fuller and more original reinvention of Whitman's poetry takes place in other poems, where it even seems to anticipate Ginsberg's Whitmanian jeremiads:

> O altars of a little comfort, altars of a dyspeptic god gone crazy in America for lack of personality (hamburger steak, Irish stew, goulash, spaghetti, chop suey and curry!) O lunch-room counters!
> O tripods of a little secure religion, tripods of a little secure beauty! O kitchen fires!
> […]
> My malediction on the cowards who are afraid of *the word* (*the word* is a kind sweet child, a kind sweet child!) Malediction on the sacrifices of the dumb and deaf!

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[446] See Mario Domenichelli, "Emanuel Carnevali's 'Great Good Bye,'" in *Beyond the Margins: Readings in Italian Americana*, eds. Paolo A. Giordano and Anthony Julian Tamburri (Plainsboro, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1998), 84-85. See also Menichelli's discussion of Carnevali's criticism of the Poundian's idea of impersonality. While Domenichelli's piece is important for its general presentation of the figure of Carnevali and for the description of his relationship with American modernist writers, it does not make any mention of the influence of Whitman on Carnevali.

[447] See Emanuel Carnevali, *Il primo Dio* (Milano: Adelphi, 1978), 186. My translation. All the poems by Carnevali that I discuss here are taken from this posthumous collection.

> Hesitating everywhere, hesitating fearfully,
> The few poets, they who weigh with delicate hands,
> Walk in unfrequent roads,
> Maundering,
> Crying and laughing
> Against the rest. (204)

This connection with Ginsberg is particularly interesting if we consider that the main element that Ginsberg appreciated in Whitman's poetry (and the main thing he learned from it) was, as he claimed, "candor." Ginsberg's idea of candor comes strikingly close to Carnevali's idea of "authenticity."[448]

Like Whitman, Carnevali often concentrates on Manhattan, with its vivid "sacred crowds" ("Afternoon") which are one of his favorite subjects. And then, in the poem "Evening," Carnevali invokes Walt Whitman himself. The poem is reminiscent of the sunset skies of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and Whitman's masterful connection of the past with the future through the present, contemplating, and eternal poetic moment:

> Tender and young again, feminine, sky of the evening of summer is blushing.
> Round, long and soft like a draped arm, sky of the evening over the poor city resting.
> Spaces of cool blue are musing—
> They will hold all our sadness, O spaces of cool blue.
> *O city, there lived in you once, O Manhattan, a man* WALT WHITMAN.
> Our hands are wasted already, perhaps; but enough for contribution to Beauty,
> Enough for great sadness, will be,
> Evening of summer, evening of summer going to sleep
> Over the purple bed, over the light flowers of the sunset.
> Many other evenings have I in my heart—I have loved so much, so long and so well —don't you remember cool blue spaces brooding?
> I shall recall you,
> I shall recall you if insanity comes and sits down and puts her hands in my hair.
> Once I touched things with religion, once a girl loved me, once I used to go hiking with young folks over the Palisades,
> Once I cried worthily. (208)

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[448] See John Lofton's interview with Ginsberg, "When Worlds Collide: from 'The Puritan and the Profligate,' an Interview," *Harper's Magazine* 280 (1990): 1676.

The analysis of the work of Carnevali in terms of a textual *locus* of encounter of the two, Italian and American, avant-gardes, and of their different interpretations of Whitman, in particular, remains open to future studies. When Carnevali wrote to Papini that, in New York, to give voice to that feverish modernity, "a new man like Whitman is needed,"[449] he repeated the same idea that had circulated in the Florentine avant-garde. Carnevali tried to be that new man, and he tried to do it in the name of Whitman, in the land of Whitman, and in the language of Whitman.

In *La Voce*, within a complex and contradictory scene—given to different, if not opposite, poetic and political orientations—the name of Whitman had stood for the declaration of a breakage with tradition. The name of Whitman had meant an active, and often exasperated, search for the new. It is fascinating to think of how, for Carnevali, this strong sense of breakage and of a push toward the new led him to abandon, once and for all, his native language, and to deliberately and programmatically choose, even once he went back to Italy, American English, as an exiliant poetic language of otherness.

4. The Longest Day: Dino Campana and Whitman Across Italy and South America[450]

[449] See Carnevali's letter to Papini of May 16, 1919, in *Voglio disturbare l'America,* 77. My translation.

[450] This section has been previously published. See Caterina Bernardini, "The Longest Day: Dino Campana and Walt Whitman Across Italy and South America," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 33 (2015), 4-20. The version reproduced here has been slightly modified and updated according to my new findings.

According to Roger Asselineau, Dino Campana (1885-1932), author of the collection *Canti Orfici* [*Orphic Songs*] (1914),[451] was the Italian poet most influenced by Walt Whitman.[452] Yet, the connections between these poets have not been thoroughly explored nor have critics assessed the implications of Campana's decision to take *Leaves of Grass* with him in 1907, when he left from Genoa on a ship for Argentina in what would become his transformative journey to South America.[453]

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[451] This is the only volume of poetry published by Campana (the book was released in 1914 in his hometown, Marradi, by the printmaker Bruno Ravagli). But there are also a few other poems that were published separately, in periodicals, and also various drafts and miscellaneous materials that came to light after the writer's death. Additional materials have been combined with the original 1914 bulk of poems a in a second edition, published by Vallecchi in 1928 without the writer's authorization, and have often been used for later editions. (This is why editions of Campana's work after 1914 are usually entitled *Canti Orfici e altre poesie*, i.e. *Orphic Songs and Other Poems*). In this essay, I will mostly concentrate on poems that were included in the 1914 edition, but I will indicate in the notes when the text I am using was not contained in the original volume.

[452] See Roger Asselineau, "Whitman in Italy," 273.

[453] According to Gabriel Cacho Millet, the source of this information was Campana's uncle, who had accompanied the poet to the harbor when leaving for South America. See Millet, "L'ultimo dei Campana," *L'informatore librario* 8, 5 (May 1978). Campana's journey to South America has been questioned, especially by the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, who even talked about "mythomania" because of an apparent lack of official documents that could prove that the journey did take place (see Piero Bigongiari, *Capitoli di una storia della poesia italiana* [Firenze: Le Monnier, 1968], 359). While scholars have now agreed about the fact that the journey did take place, also thanks to Caroline Mezey's retrieval of the document that proves that Campana was granted a passport in September 1907 (see her "Documenti inediti per la biografia di Dino Campana [1906-1913]," *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 32 [April 1986]), there is still no conclusive proof about the exact dates and length of the journey. While in the above quoted article Millet indicates February 1908 as the date in which Campana left Genoa, he later hypothesized that the poet might have left already in the fall of 1907. See Millet's *Dino Campana sperso per il mondo: autografi sparsi, 1906-1918* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2000), 32-35; "Introduction" to *Il cantore vagabondo: Dino Campana* (Milano: *Corriere della sera*, 2012), available online at campanadino.it. See also Gianni Turchetta, *Dino Campana: biografia di un poeta* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2013), 78-79. According to Millet and Turchetta, Campana spent about one year in South America—mostly in Montevideo and Buenos Aires—as the first traces of him being back in Europe correspond to February/March 1909. In South America he worked on railway embankments, but he was also a miner, a fireman, and a juggler. At times, he just wandered like a nomad. At other times, he played the piano in brothels, stoked coal on a ship, and worked in a rifle range.

Campana—who has been regarded (and perhaps stereotypically stigmatized) as the Italian *poète maudit* par excellence, because of his mental illness,[454] his extravagant and rebellious ways of living, his turbulent social interactions, and the explosive power of his poetic voice—was, with this journey, abandoning himself once again to the roaming life that he deeply loved. But this time the poet was going much farther than on previous sojourns to Paris, or Switzerland, or Mount of La Verna in the Tuscan Apennines, which he loved to climb and get lost in for weeks. This time, Campana was going far away to start a new life in the American hemisphere that he had encountered through the words of Whitman, so it was fitting to bring *Leaves of Grass* along. With reference to his journeys and experiences in South America, Campana wrote with a mythopoetical and very Whitmanian perception of the American landscape and its imminent potential (especially in the poems "Journey to Montevideo," "Pampas," "A Trolley Ride to America and Back," "Dualism," and in the early draft of "Pampas," "The Fiery Train on the Tawny Pampas").[455] These poems can be read as Campana's creative response to Whitman's idea

[454] The poet was diagnosed early in his life with dementia praecox and neurasthenia and was often hospitalized in psychiatric institutions. He spent the last fourteen years of his life (1918-1932) in a mental institution.

[455] All the English translations used in this essay when quoting Campana are by Luigi Bonaffini, as they appear in Dino Campana, *Canti orfici e altre poesie. Orphic Songs and Other Poems*, trans. and introduction by Luigi Bonaffini (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). The only exception is for the early draft of "Pampas," "The Fiery Train on the Tawny Pampas," which I took from *Dino Campana: Orphic Songs,* trans. I. L. Salomon (New York: October House, 1968), 129. When quoting from these translations, I will abbreviate Bonaffini's translation as LB and Salomon's as ILS, within the references in parenthesis. The original passages in Italian, which are offered in endnotes with page references, are all taken from Dino Campana, *Canti Orfici e altre poesie* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), except for "Nella pampa giallastra il treno ardente" ("The Fiery Train on the Tawny Pampas") which I took from Dino Campana, *Inediti*, ed. Enrico Falqui (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1942), 139-140. It could be argued that the translations into English significantly modified the tone of the original. I do not think this is the case, as both Bonaffini and Salomon have rendered Campana as accurately as possible. The iterations and gerunds and the nominal style are clearly present in the original, as one could notice by looking at the Italian. Perhaps the

of "America" as the source of an extra-European newness, freedom, and regeneration. For Campana, just as for Whitman, to be a poet in "America" and *of* "America" meant to move toward modernity and experimentation, to embody a bardic voice that sings a future land of equality and democracy, to pursue a personal, social, political, and also creative liberation.[456]

Dino Campana represented a figure of radical alterity within the context of the avant-gardist Italian literary scene of his time—a scene that he repeatedly and desperately tried to enter, but also a scene from which he naturally stood out because of his highly idiosyncratic manner, characterized by a mixture of stylistic innovations and archaisms and by a daring expressionist tone. Although he studied in a prestigious grammar school in Faenza, took part in university cultural life in Bologna, and did his novitiate in the circles of *Lacerba* and *La Voce* and the literary cafè "Giubbe Rosse," Campana refused to adhere to the literary edicts of the futurist avant-gardes that rejected values of the nineteenth century and that urged the emergence of a new intellectual class ready to make sense of the new industrial society. As a result, Campana was shunned and misunderstood by these circles during his lifetime and also excluded from the mainstream canon after his premature death. His poetic vision remains singular. Labels classifying him as the "Italian Rimbaud" or "visionary poet" have done as much to distort our understanding of his work as have the harsh words of the poet Umberto Saba, who judged Campana to be "crazy,

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translators are not always successful at accomplishing the extremely difficult task of rendering the archaic terms and dignified nuances that Campana sometimes uses, but they do faithfully render in English the rhythm, the syntactical oddities, the imagery, and the overall tone of the original.

[456] Throughout this section, I place in quotation marks the word "America" when I refer to the idea or myth of "America" as opposed to the reality of North and South America.

only crazy."[457] We should recognize Campana instead as someone with serious mental issues that had the effect of radicalizing his verse and making it, as poet and critic Edoardo Sanguineti said, "enact a sort of cultural sabotage that led [him] to be completely alone to face things in their nakedness."[458]

Eugenio Montale's description of Campana as "a tramp who read Rimbaud and Whitman"[459] (and, we could add, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Poe, Goethe, and Nietzsche) reminds us that, while spending weeks hiking in the mountains, incarcerated for months here and there, and travelling penniless around Europe and South America, Campana imbibed from the very sources of western poetic modernity,[460] and one key source was Whitman. Campana read Luigi Gamberale's 1907 translation of *Leaves of Gras*s, and, according to the poet Camillo Sbarbaro, Campana "used to walk around Genoa with the

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[457] My translation. Saba's words are quoted by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo in *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1978), 277.

[458] See Edoardo Sanguineti, *Poesia italiana del Novecento* vol.1*,* LIV-LV.

[459] See Eugenio Montale, "Sulla poesia di Campana." Montale is one of the few critics who understood the relevance of Whitman's work for Campana's poetry. He wrote, for example, that "there is a certain Italian poetry that goes from the best followers of D'Annunzio (like Adolfo De Bosis) to the early Futurism and Campana, which could not be explained without recurring to names such as Poe and Walt Whitman" (my translation). See Eugenio Montale, *Il secondo mestiere. Prose 1920-1979* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006), 2, 2033-2034.

[460] References to Campana's readings of European and American writers (including Whitman) of the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth are made in Giovanni Bonalumi, *Cultura e poesia di Campana* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1953); Cesare Galimberti, *Sulla formazione di Campana* (Milano: Mursia, 1964); Mario Costanzo, *Critica e poetica del primo Novecento. Boine, Campana, Sbarbaro, Rebora* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Filosofia, 1969); *O poesia tu più non tornerai. Campana moderno*, ed. Marcello Verdenelli (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2003); *Dino Campana: una poesia europea musicale colorita (Giornate di studio, Università degli Studi di Macerata, 12-13 maggio 2005)*, ed. Marcello Verdenelli (Macerata: Eum, 2007).

book in his hands, as if it was a sort of Bible."[461] It is also evident that the Italian poet consulted the original: Campana, who knew English quite well, quoted some of Whitman's lines, both in his notebooks and in his book, in the original English. And while there is no definite proof of which edition in English he consulted while in Italy, we do know that, during the time he spent in Geneva in 1915, Campana repeatedly requested the Rossetti edition at the public library.[462]

As I mentioned before, Campana chose Whitman to open his first letter of July 1916 to his soon-to-be lover, Sibilla Aleramo: "Dear Sibilla, I would like to write to you but I can't. I am terribly bored. Do you know Walt Whitman?"[463] Aleramo responded immediately, and with great enthusiasm: Whitman worked as a love potion, as had happened in the relationship of Ada Negri and Ettore Patrizi, discussed previously.

Campana's fascination with Whitman is revealed in a number of striking analogies between his and Whitman's poetic style. Like Whitman with *Leaves of Grass*, Campana was almost exclusively concentrated on writing one single, Mallarmean book that he kept on revising, in a continual rewriting process that aimed to produce an open, plural, polysemic work. His mixing of verse and prose was extremely innovative. Not only did he write full *poèmes en prose*, but he also created heterometrical poems which are the result of his deliberate intermingling of traditional verses with hypermetrical

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[461] See Renato Martinoni, "Introduzione" in Dino Campana, *Canti Orfici e altre poesie* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), XIX; Carlo Pariani, *Vite non romanzate di Dino Campana scrittore e di Evaristo Boncinelli scultore* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1938), 56.

[462] See Alberto Petrucciani, "Dino Campana alla biblioteca di Ginevra," *Biblioteche oggi* XXXII, 8 (October 2014), 28.

[463] See *Sibilla Aleramo e Dino Campana: Un viaggio chiamato amore,* ed. Bruna Conti, 43.

ones. Campana's poetry abandons any strophic partition and plays with iterative parallelisms, obsessive repetitions, and rhythmical dissonance. Like Whitman, Campana had a preference for a nominal style made of catalogues, present participles, gerunds, juxtaposed adverbs and adjectives, as well as anaphoras and homoteleuta (or near rhymes). Like Whitman, he built a multilingual text by using English, French, German, vernacular, and dialectal forms, but also by mixing classical, erudite terms and archaisms with popular and technical ones. Like Whitman, he was "afoot with [his] vision," carrying out an initiatory journey in order to look for point of pure, electric (an adjective that Campana, like Whitman, used profusely) contact with nature and with its cosmic cycles, battling against common certainties and assumed cultural and social clichés, trying to catch the shapeless flow of reality at its core source, in which past, present, and future could converge.

Another interesting connection between Whitman and Campana involves Enrico Nencioni's 1879 assessment of Whitman's poems as "veri canti orfici senza tradizione," "real, unprecedented orphic songs."[464] Significantly, Campana entitled his 1914 book *Orphic Songs.* This striking combination of a Whitmanian and an Orphic lineage extends to the present: contemporary writers Giuseppe Conte and Roberto Mussapi, for example, both define themselves as "neoorphic" poets as well as direct descendants of Campana, and, at the same time, both have translated Whitman's poetry, written critical pieces

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[464] See Enrico Nencioni, "Walt Whitman," *La Fanfulla della Domenica* 1 (December 7, 1879). My translation. It is quite plausible that Campana had read Nencioni's essay, even if the critic wrote it when Campana had not yet been born. Campana was an extremely avid reader of both foreign literatures, and Nencioni's work on them was still extremely influential. For more on this, see *Le più belle pagine di Enrico Nencioni*, ed. Bruno Cicognani (Milano: Garzanti, 1943); Benedetto Croce, *La letteratura della nuova Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1943), 2, 116-124.

about it, and are clearly inspired by Whitman's work.[465] Within the twentieth-century Italian literary scene, Campana's work functions, then, not only as an inspirational text *per se*, but also as an important mediation site for the diffusion and appreciation of Whitman's poetry.

Direct quotes by Campana from *Leaves* appear both in his notebooks (including passages from "So Long," "To a Locomotive, in Winter," "Bivouac on a Mountain Side," and "Whispers of Heavenly Death") and in *Orphic Songs* itself. A more complex intertextual case consists in the fact that Campana's original manuscript for what would eventually become *Orphic Songs* was initially called *Il più lungo giorno* (*The Longest Day*).[466] A few Campana scholars have suggested—although without being able to provide any conclusive proof—that the title might derive from Gabriele D'Annunzio's 1910 novel *Forse che sì, forse che no*, in which the solstice of summer, and the specific expression "il più lungo giorno" (repeated seven times across the book) appears as an important leitmotif.[467] Campana did indeed read D'Annunzio and often echoed him—although their poetic voices remained conflictually different—so, in this sense, the hypothesis is perfectly plausible. But these scholars have completely overlooked the

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[465] See Maria Antonietta Grignani, "Momenti della ricezione di Campana," in *Dino Campana alla fine del secolo. Atti del convegno di Faenza*, 15-16 maggio 1997, ed. Anna Rosa Gentilini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 169-188; and also Roberto Mussapi's critical notes on Campana, included in *Il centro e l'orizzonte. La poesia in Campana, Onofri, Luzi, Caproni, Bigongiari* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1985).

[466] Campana gave this manuscript to Ardengo Soffici in 1913; it was lost for nearly sixty years, thus forcing Campana to reconceive what later became *Orphic Songs*.

[467] See Antonio Corsaro, "La prosa narrativa di D'Annunzio nell'opera di Dino Campana," in *Bibliografia campaniana (1914-1985)*, ed. Marcello Verdenelli and Antonio Corsaro (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1985), 95; Simona Costa, "Dino Campana: un rendiconto dannunziano," *Paragone* 330 (1997): 79; *Dino Campana, Il più lungo giorno*, ed. Stefano Giovannuzzi (Firenze: Le Càriti, 2004), 23-24.

existence of a deeper, more crucial intertextual connection: line 18 of Whitman's poem "Salut au Monde," "Within me is the longest day." It becomes clear, then, not only how Campana, who extensively read and studied the *Leaves,* might have as well found the expression there, rather than in D'Annunzio's novel, but, most importantly, how D'Annunzio himself most certainly derived the image from Whitman.

I am convinced of this for two reasons: first, it is notable that, while in the Italian language it is much more common to have the adjective follow the noun, Campana and D'Annunzio opt to retain the comparative adjective before, and not after, the noun (they both have "il più lungo giorno" instead of what would be much more common and expected, i.e. "il giorno più lungo"). In other words, the fact that both Italian poets not only use the same exact expression of Whitman, but also the same (odd, in Italian language) syntactical order is a strong indicator that Whitman is indeed the underlying source. But, secondly, it is once again the precious copy of Rossetti's edition of Whitman's poems, bought by D'Annunzio while in Paris, around 1909-1910, and available in his private library, to give us confirmation of this hypothesis. By looking at the physical book, in fact, the poem "Salut au Monde!" appears not only read, underlined and annotated by the poet, but there is even a bookmark (one of three in the whole book) to keep the page at hand. And this becomes an even more striking coincidence when we think that the final drafts of *Forse che sì, forse che no* were sent to press in 1910, while D'Annunzio was still in France, and around the very same time that he had bought the Rossetti edition there.[468]

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[468] In my published paper (see note 17) I had already hypothesized that D'Annunzio's himself may have also borrowed the expression from Whitman's poem, but it is by looking at the book at the Vittoriale (which I did in the summer of 2016) that I received confirmation of this.

Another intriguing sign of Whitman's presence in Campana's book is in the final epigraph of *Orphic Songs*: an adaptation (and significantly without reporting Whitman's original authorship) from Section 34 of the deathbed edition version of "Song of Myself," which reads: "they were all torn and cover'd with the boy's blood," instead of the original "the three were all torn and covered with the boy's blood." It is clear, then, how Campana had somehow started with Whitman, with the initial title *The Longest Day* for his book, and then, in the later, final version of it, he had changed the title, but still finished with Whitman by including this epigraph. In a 1916 letter, the poet told the critic Emilio Cecchi to consider these words of the epigraph, which he did, in that occasion, acknowledge to be taken from *Leaves of Grass*, as the most relevant words in the whole book.[469]

This acknowledgment has raised the attention of scholar Francesca Roberta Seaman. In her 2007 dissertation on Campana, which offers a psychoanalytical interpretation of recurrent figures and chromatic images that reveal the centrality of the sense of loss and despair in Campana's writing, Seaman repeatedly argues that the epigraph taken from Whitman stands within Campana's collection as an emblem of the existential tragedy inherent to his poetry.[470] But in Campana's work, anguish is offset by many luminous moments of serenity and optimism. And even the epigraph, although it

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[469] See Cesare Galimberti, *Dino Campana* (Milano: Mursia, 1967), 47.

[470] See Francesca Roberta Seaman, "A Poetry of Loss: Love, History and Mental Illness in the Writings of Dino Campana" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2007), 1. Seaman argues that "Whitman's verse could stand as an epigraph to all of Campana's poetic work," but her use of the word "verse" instead of "line" is misleading. Seaman's remark seems to encompass all Whitman's poetry, but in fact her dissertation focuses on the dark implications evoked by a single line (the one from "Song of Myself," adapted and used as epigraph by Campana) and does not venture into any larger comparative evaluation of the work of the two poets.

contains a dramatic image, signifies, as indicated by Roberto Coppini,[471] more than the actual suffering that Campana endured in his life and reflected upon in his writing. Rather, it evokes Campana's perception of Whitman's poetry as a strong, energizing encouragement for him to break with past formal rules, legitimate his distancing himself from them, and declare his almost heroic, creative alterity, his absolute faith in a new, independent poetry—a faith that could even result in martyrdom and bloodshed. In this sense, Campana's journey to South America, accompanied by Whitman's book, should be read as a literal enactment of a Nietzschean and messianic quest for a poetical territory of revolt and regeneration.

Campana's three week journey across the ocean was on a ship bound to Buenos Aires, Argentina through Montevideo, the coastal capital of Uruguay. The central image of his poem "Journey to Montevideo" is that of a physical and metaphysical, almost Dantean, "crossing" of the ocean, reminiscent of Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."[472] Here the lyrical "I" remembers what he saw when approaching the new continent. There are many affinities with Section 3 of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," mostly due to a similar insistence on evoking the visual experience: "I saw from the deck of the

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[471] See Roberto Coppini, "Su Dino Campana," *Revue des Langues Romanes* 89 (1985): 135-156. In this essay, Coppini argues that the epigraph adapted from Whitman has not been taken into sufficient consideration by critics, but that it represents a crucial key in reading Campana's work. Coppini shifts his attention away from the possible biographical reference that the citation might seem to make, to Campana's will to declare, in the name of and through the words of Whitman, his break with past literary traditions and his difference from the futurist group. Coppini's essay is also very useful for a larger contextualization of the influence of Whitman on Italian poets of Campana's generation.

[472] This is also a recurrent image in other poems by Campana as "Ship's Voyage," "Humanity Teeming on the Spur," and "Genoa" (while the latter poem was part of the original 1914 *Orphic Song*, the first two poems were first published in the 1942 *Inediti* and often included in later editions of *Orphic Songs and Other Poems*).

ship / . . . We saw rising in the enchanted light / . . . And I saw like whirling […]”[473] (LB 103, 105). Analogous images of birds floating in the sunset sky, lit by the last sun beams, occupy the central part of both poems: in Campana's,

> The pale-blue evening languished on the sea:
> From time to time the golden silences of wings also
> crossed Slowly in the deepening blue. . .
> Distant tinged with various colors
> From the most distant silences (LB 103; ellipsis in original)[474]

And, in Whitman's:

> Watched the Twelfth month sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating with motionless wings, oscillating their bodies,
> Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in strong shadow,
> Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south.[475]

The vivid prefiguration of the New World is in Campana's poem embodied by “. . . a bronze-colored girl / Of the new race [who] appeared to us / Eyes shining, and clothes in the wind!” (LB 105)[476] which brings to mind the women of Whitman's “A Woman Waits for Me”: “They are tann'd in the face by shining suns and blowing winds.”[477]

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[473] Original: “Io vidi dal ponte della nave / . . . Noi vedemmo sorgere nella luce incantata / . . . E vidi come cavalle” (56, 57).

[474] Original: “Illanguidiva la sera celeste sul mare: / Pure i dorati silenzii ad ora ad ora dell'ale: / Varcaron lentamente in un azzurreggiare… / Lontani tinti dei varii colori / Dai più lontani silenzii” (56)

[475] See Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 130. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[476] Original: ““. . . bronzina / Una fanciulla della razza nuova, / Occhi lucenti e le vesti al vento!” (57).

[477] See Walt Whitman, “A Woman Waits for Me” in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 88. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

The connections are not only thematic and imagistic. As in Whitman, the use of flowing free verse and of iterated gerunds (highly unusual in Italian poetry)—"celando" (hiding), "varcando" (crossing), "battendo" (beating)—allows Campana to create a vision that dwells in a mythical time between real and unreal, old and new, personal and public, past and present. "Journey to Montevideo," like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," aims at seizing an eternal moment of stillness and presence from the incessant whirlpool of life. And it is also a Ulyssean journey (notice the "shipwrecked hearts" of line 16 [LB 103])[478] toward a savage shore and an endless prairie, toward what's unknown, primordial, archaic, old and new at the same time.

It is a journey toward an ideal reintegration of the self within a profound, ahistorical, universal harmony that the lyrical I of the *poème en prose* "Pampas" seems to have reached, having left behind the cultural preconditioning baggage and restraints of old Europe. It is significant that Campana finally chose the *poème en prose* structure here, having first tried to compose the poem in hendecasyllables as one can see in his 1911-1912 notebook.[479] The lyrical prose of the final version of "Pampas" is characterized by a radical use of minimal punctuation, except for a number of colons, which are in many cases followed by relative pronouns, as in the following quotation:

> My thoughts wavered: my memories drifted by in quick succession: that delightfully seemed to submerge and reappear in the distance now and then

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[478] Original: "naufraghi cuori" (56).

[479] Piero Bigongiari discusses this draft in *Capitoli di una storia della poesia italiana*, 376. The draft was first published, with the title of "Nella pampa giallastra il treno ardente" ("The Fiery Train on the Tawny Pampas") in the volume entitled *Inediti* (i.e. *Unpublished Materials*), published in 1942 by Vallecchi and edited by Enrico Falqui.

> lucidly beyond the human, as if through a deeep mysterious echo, within the infinite majesty of nature (LB 149).[480]

This is an unusual, unconventional stylistic choice that produces a sort of rhythmical shock, and that also seems to be an odd re-creation of line breaks and enjambments within a prose structure. It is this peculiar structure that allows Campana to experiment with free verse and the mingling of poetry and prose, while he tends to stay attached to more traditional modes of versification in other poems, such as "Pound the Ground" or "La Petite Promenade du Poète." "Pampas" is full of Whitmanian echoes, beginning with the symbol of the Argentinian grassy prairie[481] and the image of a bivouac under the stars. The Italian word used by Campana, "bivacco," is the translation of "bivouac," a word of French origin that Whitman used in "Bivouac on a Mountain Side":

> Stretched on the virgin grass, facing the strange constellations, I was gradually giving in to the mysterious play of their arabesques, delightfully rocked by the muffled noises of the camp. . . Slowly gradually I was rising to the universal illusion: from the depths of my being and of the earth, across the paths of the sky I followed mankind's adventurous journey toward happiness through the centuries. Ideas shone with the purest starlight . . . A star flowing in magnificent flight marked in glorious line the end of a course of history (LB 149).[482]

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[480] Original: "I miei pensieri fluttuavano: si susseguivano i miei ricordi: che deliziosamente sembravano sommergersi per riapparire a tratti lucidamente trasumanati in distanza, come per un'eco profonda e misteriosa, dentro l'infinita maestà della natura" (93).

[481] The "pampas" are vast fertile lowlands that occupy part of the territories of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil.

[482] Original: "Gettato sull'erba vergine, in faccia alle strane costellazioni io mi andavo abbandonando tutto ai misteriosi giuochi dei loro arabeschi, cullato deliziosamente dai rumori attutiti dal bivacco. . . Lentamente gradatamente io assurgevo all'illusione universale: dalle profondità del mio essere e della terra io ribattevo per le vie del cielo il cammino avventuroso degli uomini verso la felicità a traverso i secoli. Le idee brillavano della più pura luce stellare. . . . Una stella fluente in corsa magnifica segnava in linea gloriosa la fine di un corso di storia" (93, 94).

The key symbolic elements of this *poème en prose* are stars and constellations that seem to be comets indicating a new path for mankind. Here, while "for a wonderful instant the eternal destinies alternating immutably in time and space" (LB 151),[483] the moonbeams illuminate the prairie enough to see "an army that hurled throngs of horsemen with their lances couched, sharp-pointed and gleaming" (LB 151).[484] This description resembles "The shadowy forms of men and horses, looming, large-sized, flickering, / And over all the sky—the sky! Far, far out of reach, studded, breaking out, the eternal stars" of "Bivouac on a Mountain Side."[485] But, for Campana, the army is made of "Indians dead and alive" who seem to be offered, in this ahistorical dimension of primordial freedom, the possibility to "reconquer their dominion of freedom. The grasses bent in a light wail at the wind of their passage" (LB 151).[486] The grass here, as in Whitman, is a polyseme standing for nature, democracy, connection with the past, and renewal of life. But Campana's use of the word "illusion" is also highly significant. The Italian poet is aware that he will have to go back to Europe, and, most of all, he is aware that even the "new" land of South America bears the signs of history and human violence and injustice. But the dream goes on for a moment, and the lyrical "I" reaches out for cosmic forces:[487]

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[483] Original: "per un meraviglioso attimo immutabilmente nel tempo e nello spazio alternandosi i destini eterni" (94).

[484] Original: "un esercito che lanciava torme di cavalieri colle lance in resta, acutissime lucenti" (94).

[485] Walt Whitman, "Bivouac on a Mountain Side" in *LG* 1891-1892, 235. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[486] Original: "alla riconquista del loro dominio di libertà in lancio fulmineo. Le erbe piegavano in gemito leggero al vento del loro passaggio" (94).

[487] As he explicitly does in another poem set in Argentina, "Dualism."

> I was on the speeding train . . . the Pampas racing toward me to take me into their mystery . . . Where was I? I was standing: I was standing: on the pampas in the rushing winds, standing on the pampas that were flying toward me: to take me into their mystery! A new sun would greet me in the morning! Was I speeding among the Indian tribes? Or was it death? Or was it life? . . . Stretching out on the iron flooring, concentrating on the strange constellation fleeing among light silver veils: and my whole life so similar to that blind fantastic irresistible rush coming back in bitter vehement streams. . . . The light of the now impassive stars was more mysterious on the infinitely deserted earth: a vaster homeland had destiny given us: a sweeter natural warmth was in the mystery of the savage good earth (LB 151; 153).[488]

The poetic persona is represented on a train completely absorbed by the rush, and the hope, of finding a "new sun," a "vaster homeland." The 1911-1912 draft of "Pampas" (mentioned above), "The Fiery Train on the Tawny Pampas," is significantly indicative of a Whitmanian isomorphism of the lyrical "I," the continent, and the book: "The fiery train on the tawny pampas / Always ran its triumphant race / And vertiginously upset / The virginal infinite endlessly / Kissed me on the face and the grotesque and enormous / Continent changed its postureimmediately endlessly / So my book: and here it: / Here it comes on crippled feet / My sonnet a salute to you / Accept it kindly . . ." (ILS 129).[489]

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[488] Original: "Ero sul treno in corsa: . . . la Pampa che mi correva incontro per prendermi nel suo mistero: . . . Dov'ero? Io ero in piedi: Io ero in piedi: sulla pampa nella corsa dei venti, in piedi sulla pampa che mi volava incontro: per prendermi nel suo mistero! Un nuovo sole mi avrebbe salutato al mattino! Io correvo tra le tribù indiane? Od era la morte? Od era la vita? . . . Lo stendersi sul piatto di ferro, il concentrarsi nelle strane costellazioni fuggenti tra lievi veli argentei: e tutta la mia vita tanto simile a quella corsa cieca fantastica infrenabile che mi tornava alla mente in flutti amari e veementi. . . . La luce delle stelle ora impassibili era più misteriosa sulla terra infinitamente deserta: una più vasta patria il destino ci aveva dato: un più dolce calor naturale era nel mistero della terra selvaggia e buona" (94, 95).

[489] Original: "Nella pampa giallastra il treno ardente / Correva sempre in corsa vittoriosa / E travolto vertiginosamente / Il vergine infinito, senza posa / Mi baciava sul viso, e il continente / Grottesco e enorme cambiava la posa – immantinente, senza posa / Così il mio libro: ed ecco che: / Ecco che viene colle gambe storte / Il mio sonetto a voi per salutare / Accettatelo bene" (*Inediti* 139).

Campana's words are reminiscent of Whitman here, both in his sensual, even carnal, embrace of the continent and in his ultimate entrusting of his book to his readers.

"Pampas," as noted by critic Piero Bigongiari, seems to have a "genetic function, with its labor pains, propitiating the birth of the new man" (377). But the "new man being born" is a "free man" at the end of the text, a man finally born to freedom in the American space:

> And it was then that in my final torpor I felt with delight the new man being born: man being born reconciled with nature, ineffably sweet and frightening: delightfully and proudly vital juices being born to the depths of being: flowing from the depths of the earth: the sky like the earth high above, mysterious, pure, deserted of shadows, infinite. I had stood up. Under the impassive stars, on the earth infinitely deserted and mysterious, from his tent free man extended his arms toward the infinite sky undefiled by the shadow of Any God (LB 153; 155).[490]

This vitalistic, Nietzschean, mythical regeneration, far from the chains of tradition and morals—and instead, blessed by a reconciliation with nature—contains the quintessence of Campana's perception of "America," and with it, of the renewed, innovative, modern poetry that Italy was still struggling to achieve. Campana's stylistic experimentation here becomes vehement, in its feverishly appositive style, reinforced by the use of iterated colons that disconnect the lines only to give way to semantic repetitions that have the opposite effect—a rush toward the craved conclusion.

Carlo Bo and Gabriel Cacho Millet, two critics who have noted (if only briefly) the fact that Campana brought *Leaves of Grass* with him in his journey to Argentina,

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[490] Original: "E allora fu che nel mio intorpidimento finale io sentii con delizia l'uomo nuovo nascere: l'uomo nascere riconciliato colla natura ineffabilmente dolce e terribile: deliziosamente e orgogliosamente succhi vitali nascere alle profondità dell'essere: fluire dalla profondità della terra: il cielo come la terra in alto, misterioso, puro, deserto dall'ombra, infinito. Mi ero alzato. Sotto le stelle impassibili, sulla terra infinitamente deserta e misteriosa, dalla sua tenda l'uomo libero tendeva le braccia al cielo infinito non deturpato dall'ombra di Nessun Dio" (95, 96).

have rightly observed that Whitman's poetry served as a cherished companion for this journey, but they argue that *Leaves of Grass* did not serve as Campana's guide or model.[491] In contrast, what interests me is the evident closeness of Whitman's and Campana's utopian and mythopoetical perception of American possibility: both poets share the common European myth of "America" as the land of the barbaric, the new, the *tabula rasa* both in political and poetical terms.

The critic Silvio Ramat offers an attractive hypothesis: playing with the word "chimera" (as defined by Bonaffini, a "hauntingly complex apparition, a fleeting sign of metaphysical opening, present throughout Campana's work and prefiguring the poetic mission itself"),[492] he anagrammatizes it as "America." For Ramat, Campana's true object of desire is "America," "the new continent of poetry: the most modern and most primordial one."[493] And yet, if "America" does help Campana to find contact with personal freedom and poetic inspiration, innovative diction and experimental strength, he chooses not to root his poetry exclusively in such a real and ideal territory: he wants to be able to create an authentically transnational poetry. As he writes in "Dualism," Argentina has been a place where "for a moment my life came into contact again with the forces of the cosmos" (LB 127),[494] but he has to go back "toward the calm oases of old Europe's

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[491] See Carlo Bo, "Nel nome di Campana," *Dino Campana oggi. Atti del convegno, Firenze 18-19 marzo 1973* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1973), 14; Gabriel Cacho Millet, *Dino Campana sperso per il mondo*, 36.

[492] See Luigi Bonaffini, "Introduction" in *Canti Orfici e Altre Poesie*, xxxv.

[493] See Silvio Ramat, "Qualche nota per 'La Chimera'," in *Dino Campana alla fine del secolo*, ed. Anna Rosa Gentilini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 38.

[494] Original: "la mia vita ritrovò un istante il contatto colle forze del cosmo" (73).

sensibility"(LB 129);[495] it is no accident that, in several poems about this journey, he insists on the idea of a "round trip"). The secret, as the title "Dualism" implies and the poem makes clear, is to be able to profit from both, and perhaps to understand that a separation does not even exist—it is artificial—and that Europe and America are inevitably interconnected. Another significant poem in this transnational sense is "Fantasy on a Painting by Ardengo Soffici," where Soffici's work as a painter is intrasemiotically translated into poetry by Campana within an American setting that resonates with tango:

> Face, anatomical zigzag that dims
> The grim passion of an old moon
> That watches hanging from the ceiling
> In a tavern American
> Café chantant: the red speed
> Of lights *rope-dancer that tangoes*
> *Ashen Spanish girl*
> *Hysterical with lights dissolves in tango:*
> That watches in the American Café
> chantant:
> On the hammered piano three
> Red flames lit up all by themselves (LB 109).[496]

Campana saw Soffici's painting at a Futurist exposition in Florence, at the Libreria Gonnelli, in November 1913. The painting, called *Compenetrazione di piani plastici. Tarantella dei pederasti* (later destroyed by the artist), was abstract and made no explicit reference to an American and/or Argentinian setting, and yet, as noted by critic Gabriel

[495] Original: "verso le calme oasi della sensibilità della vecchia Europa" (74).

[496] Original: "Faccia, zig zag anatomico che oscura / La passione torva di una vecchia luna / Che guarda sospesa al soffitto / In una taverna café chantant d'America: la rossa velocità / Di luci *funambola che tanga / Spagnola cinerina / Isterica in tango di luci si disfà*: / Che guarda nel café chantant / D'America: / Sul piano martellato tre / Fiammelle rosse si sono accese da sé" (58).

Cacho Millet,[497] it reminded Campana of a dance he saw in the Argentinian café chantant where he worked as a pianist. Thus, the aesthetic perception of a work of art produced in the context of Italian Futurism and, more largely, of European avant-gardes of the beginning of the twentieth century, fused with the poet's experience in another cultural context and became a new, independent, and yet always interconnected, transcultural poem. I think this exemplifies how Campana's poetry should be read in relation to Whitman's work and to his idea of "America." More generally, this reminds us of the polyvocal, intertextual dialogue that texts constantly, though sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly, contain and enact. In this specific case, it would be possible to extend our consideration to include Ruben Darío's poems about his visions of "America," in this dialogue between Whitman and Campana. Perhaps such mediating critical acts are finally what can make us enjoy a "longest day" under the extended, double light with which we can see as both European Americans and American Europeans.

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[497] See Millet's *Dino Campana sperso per il mondo*, 40.

CHAPTER FIVE: The 1915-1930 Period. Between Fascism and Communism, Toward a New Phase

1. Whitman's Continuing Presence in Futurism

As we have seen before, in 1911, in French, and then in 1915, in Italian, Marinetti invoked Whitman in the manifesto controversially entitled "War the Only World Hygiene." In those same years, Marinetti proceeded to declare the death of free verse and to proclaim the new strategy of his poetic revolution: the employment of "free words" or "words in freedom." The majority of futurist writers embraced the new technique, but a few others did not, or at least not fully. If Whitman had deeply influenced the first phase of futurism, primarily with regards to the employment of free verse, what role did he play in this second phase?

In 1915, many Italian futurist writers and artists were drafted to fight in the war, some died in it. In 1918, Italian futurism officially aligned itself with the fascist regime, with which it remained affiliated until the end of the regime itself. Literary history has often emphasized this fact only. As Willard Bohn puts it, "according to the prevailing myth, [Italian] Futurist poetry concentrated on three subjects, which it explored almost exclusively: modern machinery, warfare, and the Fascist dream. Poem after poem supposedly praised modern inventions, glorified violence, and engaged in political propaganda. In reality […] Futurist poetry was much more diverse."[498] Whitman was certainly, and especially in this second phase, as symbolized by Marinetti's 1915 manifesto, associated with values that were closely tied to fascism: masculinity, rebellion,

[498] See Willard Bohn, "Introduction," in *Italian Futurist Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 9.

deletion of the literary past, and even violence. We can find an example of this in Auro d'Alba's [Umberto Bottone] 1915 poem "Orchestra lirica" ("Lyric Orchestra"):

> In a single night in a single hour in a single moment
> freeing oneself from the past   need
> to shout   shout at the top of one's voice red
> purple insults as sharp as arrows
> at the start punctuation fragile
> ancient literature –to the sentimental
> lights awaiting the tardy bourgeois
> on a remote street corner
>
> AIR air LIFE life
>
> Diagonal hail of arrows   thunderbolts –rattlesnakes
> to arms   roofs   houses
> rooms   roads   cluttered tables
> rolling in the sky   cauterizing
> the yellow wounds   blocking all the doors
> driven   smashing all the barricades
> at the battlefront
>
> […]
>
> a vein ruptures violently (light
> slashing the heart of darkness)   a satyr's
> mouth   scalpel on severed carotid
> current of millions of veins
> capillaries sonorous tributaries of the
> GREAT FUTURE RIVER
>
> blaring fanfares of horns   running
> footsteps   automobile rhythm
> *Motor's* dizzy drumming   wings
>
> […][499]

[499] Original: "In una notte in un'ora in un attimo / liberarsi di tutto il passato   necessità / di gridare   gridare a squarciagola insulti / rossi paonazzi / acuti come frecce / alle stelle punteggiature frangibili / vecchia letteratura ai fanali pederasti / sentimentali in attesa del tardo borghese / sull'angolo di una via remotissima / ARIA aria VITA vita / Saettamenti obliqui fulmini-serpenti / a sonagli   all'armi   tetti   case /   stanze   camini tavoli ingombri / rotolarsi nel cielo   causticarne / le gialle ferite   bloccare tutte le porte / sospinte   sfondare tutte le barricate / sul fronte di combattimento / […] / una vena si strappa violenta (sfregio di / luce nel cuore della tenebra) /   bocca di satiro   bisturi su carotide squarciata / corrente di milioni di vene / capillari   sonori affluenti del / GRAN FIUME FUTURO / squilli   fanfare di

Since he retains free verse, D'Alba does not fully embrace Marinetti's "words in freedom," but he does experiment with capitalization, the visual emergence of words from the blank page and from unorthodox spacing. Here, Whitman's catalogues and energizing diction are echoed, but brought to much more extreme consequences. Whitman's yawp has become "purple insults as sharp as arrows," and the image of the "smoke of my own breath" has turned into a capitalized "AIR" that hosts, and launches, these arrows. The cosmic embrace of a very Whitmanian "great future river" is accompanied by the violent rupturing of veins: the river is, in fact, a river of blood.

But it is also important to remember how many other futurist and modernist writers were looking at Whitman for very different reasons. One example is that of British and cosmopolitan writer Mina Loy. A member of the expatriate community of writers in Florence (from 1906 until 1916, when she migrated to New York), an active contributor to Italian Futurism and author of the Feminist Manifesto, Loy regarded Whitman's depiction of sexuality as exemplary and inspiring for her own poetry. In her Manifesto, Loy wrote that "there is nothing impure in sex—except in the mental attitude to it—." Loy found this idea perfectly exemplified by Whitman's work. As she wrote in a 1915 letter to Carl Van Vechten: "I believe we'll get more 'wholesome sex' in American art—than English after all—though you are considered so suburban—but that is to be expected—we haven't had a Whitman."[500] One example of Loy's work on sexuality can

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corni   passo di / corsa   battuta d'automobile   tamburo / vertiginoso di Motore ali [...] Auro D'Alba, "Orchestra lirica," originally published in D'Alba's *Baionette; versi liberi e parole in libertà* (Milano: Edizioni futuriste di poesia, 1915), 97-98. The English translation is included in Bohn, ed. and transl., *Italian Futurist Poetry*, 48-51.

[500] Loy's letter is reported in Virginia Kouidis, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (Baton Rouge-London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 27.

be found in the thirty-four poem collage "Love Songs to Joannes" (1915-1917), first published in the magazine *Others*, in which Loy wrote about her relationship with Giovanni Papini. Sections IX and X of the poem read,

> When we lifted
> Our eye-lids on Love
> A cosmos
> Of coloured voices
>
> And laughing honey
> And spermatozoa
> At the core of Nothing
> In the milk of the Moon
>
> Shuttle-cock and battle-door
> A little pink-love
> And feathers are strewn[501]

Loy is here intent to depict sex in its raw nature. As put by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, the poem is "filled with sex-radical evocations of pleasures both sexual and intellectual, and the equal meeting of the partners on a sexual terrain."[502] Loy also deeply admired another characteristic of Whitman's writing: she shared the same faith of Whitman in the renovating contribution that a polyglot American language could make to modern poetry. In the essay "Modern Poetry," Loy writes:

> It was inevitable that the renaissance of poetry should proceed out of America, where latterly a thousand languages have been born, and each one, for purposes of communication at least, English—English enriched and variegated with the grammatical structure and voice-inflection of many races […] This composite

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[501] The poem is included in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 56.

[502] See Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm': Sexual Intercourse and Narrative Meaning in Mina Loy" in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, eds. Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1998), 45-74.

> language is a very living language, it grows as you speak. For the true American appears to be ashamed to say anything in the way it has been said before.[503]

Loy's observations on poetic language are highly consonant with Whitman's. And her declaration of poetics is also relevant. To Julien Levy she said that "I was trying to make a foreign language because English had already been used."[504] Loy's long poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" (written in 1923-1925) employs what Marjorie Perloff calls a "mongrelization of linguistic registers"[505] and it deeply relies on foreign words, neologisms and on locutions and syntactic structures taken from African, Latin American, and Asian as well as various European cultures, in order to create a polyglossia that reflects not merely her own autobiographical "Anglo-mongrel" ancestry and her condition of expatriate in adult life, but her programmatic will to radically reinvent poetic language.

These passages from a later poem by Loy, written in 1949, "Letters of the Unliving" also exemplify her linguistic poetics.

> As erst my body and my reason
> you left to the drought of your dying:
> […]
>
> Can one who still has being
> be inexistent?
>
> I am become
> dumb

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[503] The essay, first published in *Charm* 3, no. 3 (1925), is also included in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 158-159.

[504] Loy's words to Levy are reported in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 361.

[505] See Perloff's "English as a 'Second' Language: Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose'" in *Poetry On and Off the Page–Essays for Emergent Occasions,* available online at http://jacketmagazine.com/05/mina-anglo.html.

in answer
to your dead language of amor
[…][506]

In this love poem Loy employs free, extremely short lines, an archaism (the adverb "erst") in conjunction with an odd, broken, and highly expressive syntax and a Latin and/or Spanish expression ("amor"). The result is a radical estrangement, and at the same time a powerful revision, of classical lyricism. Certainly, Loy's polyglossia, like that of other high modernists, is different from Whitman's in at least two aspects: it is less, if at all, oriented toward the building of a collective and polyphonic identity. Its focus is, rather, on showing the fragmentation and multiplicity of identity and the limitations of language itself. Secondly, it derives from a real (multi)linguistic proficiency that Whitman lacked. Whitman's multilingual experiments, in this sense, are clearly less sophisticated, and yet, still fascinating, perhaps also because they don't sound as orchestrated as those of many modernists.

Another figure of Futurism—but this time Russian Futurism—who was inspired by Whitman was Vladimir Mayakovsky. Critics have already identified parallels and differences[507] (especially with reference to Mayakovsky's construction of an epic voice and of a collective democratic identity), but less attention has been devoted to evaluate Whitman's influence on Mayakovsky with reference to what I consider a crucial element

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[506] The poem is included in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker,* 129-131.

[507] See Clare Cavanagh, "Whitman, Mayakovsky, and the Body Politic," in *Rereading Russian Poetry*, ed. Stephanie Sadler (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1999), 202-222; Dale E. Peterson, "Mayakovsky and Whitman: The Icon and the Mosaic," *Slavic Review* 28, 3 (Sept. 1969): 416-425; Yassen Zassoursky, "Whitman's Reception and Influence in the Soviet Union," in *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street*, ed. Geoffrey Sill (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 286-289; Stepanchev, "Whitman in Russia," 300-313.

in the general history of the transnational reception: the poetry written in the United States by non-American writers who knew of and appreciated Whitman. The case of Mayakovsky is in this sense similar to those of Campana and Carnevali that I have treated before. During his three-month trip to New York in 1925, Mayakovsky wrote, among others, the poem “Бру́клинский мост” (“Brooklyn Bridge”), which strongly echoes Whitman. The poem reads,

> Give, Coolidge,
> A shout of joy!
> I too will spare no words
> about good things.
> […]
> I clamber,
> in pride,
> upon Brooklyn Bridge.
> As a foolish painter
> plunges his eye,
> sharp and loving,
> into a museum madonna,
> so I
> from the near skies
> bestrewn with stars,
> gaze
> at New York
> through the Brooklyn Bridge.
> New York,
> heavy and stifling
> till night,
> has forgotten
> its hardships
> and height;
> […]
>
> I am proud
> of just this
> mile of steel;
> upon it,
> my visions come to life, erect—
> here’s a fight
> for construction
> instead of style,

an austere disposition
of bolts
and steel.
If the end of the world
befall—
and chaos
smash our planet
to bits,
and what remains
will be
this
bridge, rearing above the dust of destruction;
then,
as huge ancient lizards
are rebuilt
from bones
finer than needles,
to tower in museums,
so,
from this bridge,
a geologist of the centuries
will succeed
in recreating our contemporary world.
He will say:
[…]

here
men
had ranted
on radio.
Here
men
had ascended
in planes.
[…]
I see:
here
stood Mayakovsky,
stood,
composing verse, syllable by syllable.
I stare
as an Eskimo gapes at a train,
I seize on it
as a tick fastens to an ear.
Brooklyn Bridge—
yes…

That's quite a thing![508]

Stephen Tapscott has briefly argued that the poem, which utilizes "the metaphor of the Whitmanian bridge," celebrates a "gloriously technological future for all."[509] This re-inscribes Mayakovsky's appreciation of Whitman within a monolithic vision of Futurism as celebratory of technology and advancement. Mayakovsky's "erect" vision of the future, *via* the bridge, is undoubtedly enthusiastic. But it must also be noted how this vision includes a certain nostalgic attitude toward a powerful present-future that will soon become past, the matter of study for a geologist. In this sense, the poet is not only projected to chant technological progress, but he also willfully reclaims the a-temporal, persisting value of his poetic gesture: "here/ stood Mayakovsky,/ stood,/ composing verse, syllable by syllable." As in Whitman's idea of "crossing" in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Mayakovsky is also importantly concentrated on founding a poetry capable of connecting ages. Once again, the futurist reinvention of Whitman proves to be a complex

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[508] Original: "Издай, Кулидж / радостный клич! / На хорошее и мне / не жалко слов. / […] / влезаю, / гордый, / на Бруклинский мост. / Как глупый художник / в мадонну музея / вонзает глаз свой, /влюблен и остр, / так я, / с поднебесья, / в звезды усеян, / смотрю / на Нью-Йорк / сквозь Бруклинский мост. / Нью-Йорк / до вечера тяжек и душен, / забыл, / что тяжко ему / и высóко; / […] / Я горд / вот этой / стальною милей, /живьем в ней / мои видения встали — / борьба / за конструкции / вместо стилей, / расчет суровый / гаек / и стали. / Если / придет / окончание света — / планету / хаос / разделает влоск, / и только / один останется / этот / над пылью гибели вздыбленный мост, / то, как из косточек, / тоньше иголок, / тучнеют / в музеях стоя́щие / ящеры, / так / с этим мостом / столетий геолог / сумел / воссоздать бы / дни настоящие. / Он скажет:/ [..] здесь / люди / уже / орали по радио,/ здесь / люди / уже/ взлетали по аэро./ […] / Я вижу — / здесь стоял Маяковский,/ стоял / и стихи слагал по слогам. — / Смотрю, / как в поезд глядит эскимос, / впиваюсь, / как в ухо впивается клещ. / Бру́клинский мост — / да... / Это вещь!" Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Бру́клинский мост" ("Brooklyn Bridge"), first published in *Прожектор* (Prozhektor) 24, (December 31 1925). Available online at http://v-v-mayakovsky.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000003/st063.shtml. The English translation of Mayakovsky's poem by Max Hayward and George Reavey is contained in *I Speak of the City: Poems of New York,* ed. Stephen Wolf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 57-61.

[509] See Stephen Tapscott, *American Beauty: William Carlos Williams and the Modernist Whitman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 84.

phenomenon, not solely intent to use Whitman's audacity and energetic faith in the future, but also his attempt to establish an innovative and at the same time classical and timeless, poetic presence. This recognition also highlights Mayakovsky's profile as a poet who was not satisfied with simply chanting the surfaces of the Soviet wonders and who always strove to attain a poetry capable of a deep existential grasp.

2. From Fiume to Moscow to Rome: Political Usages of Whitman's Works

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, thanks to the appearance of the first unabridged translations and the increasing number of critical and creative responses, the knowledge of Whitman's work around the world spread rapidly and reached new heights. Despite all the important new work, past readings of Whitman also remained influential. In particular, what remained productive was the idea of looking at Whitman's poetry as an exemplary form of national identity construction and myth-making: the post-risorgimental fervor that had animated the first readings of Whitman's work in Italy and in Europe, was still quite strong. And this fervor was heightened by major events like World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, events that put national and political identities under discussion. The appreciation of Whitman's work assumed, then, a heightened political meaning. And Whitman's work, which had by now become much more well-known, was often employed and manipulated in order to carry out precise political agendas.

As mentioned before, Gabriele D'Annunzio recuperated, in the time that immediately preceded the first World War, the first Rossettian-Nencionian reading of Whitman that he had been familiar with in his youth, and he did it for a precise political,

and more specifically, nationalistic and irredentist, agenda. Notably, Rossetti's 1886 edition and a copy of Bazalgette's 1909 translation were two books to be found, after D'Annunzio's death, in the poet's "Officina," the office overlooking the lake that he used exclusively for his creative writing, and where he kept the books which were most influential for him and which he habitually consulted. Both Rossetti's edition and Bazalgette's biography contain the label of a Parisian bookshop in Rue de la Banque, which leads me to think that D'Annunzio bought them when living in France from 1910 to 1915. The Rossetti edition also contains three bookmarks, all of which are marked by D'Annunzio's handwriting, but in French, not in Italian. When living in France, D'Annunzio privileged using French rather than his native language.

Two bookmarks appear in the pages of "Salut au Monde!," and D'Annunzio wrote on them: "France" and "Le original Amerique," while another was used to mark the poem "France, the Eighteenth Year of These States." D'Annunzio was evidently struck by the significance of Whitman's use of French language and by the American poet's references to, and celebration of, the French revolution. In "France, the Eighteenth Year…," he underlined the lines: "Was not so desperate at the battues of death—was not so shocked at the repeated fusillades of the guns," and "And I do not deny that terrible red birth and baptism." These same exact lines were underlined by the poet also in his copy of Bazalgette's translation (perhaps in an attempt to improve his understanding, as his French was certainly better than his English). In both the Rossetti edition and in the Bazalgette translation, D'Annunzio also underlined, seemingly with the same pencil, the same exact passage from "The Poet" (in "Drum Taps"): "I see but you, warlike pennant! O banner so broad, with stripes, I sing you only."

It is particularly fascinating to see that D'Annunzio, in the 1910s, had decided to buy and read, with the help of the French Bazalgette translation at his side, the Rossetti edition that, at least three decades before, had been so crucial in shaping his mentor's and friend's Nencioni views.[510] It is as if D'Annunzio was going back to the first source of his introduction to Whitman: back to Nencioni's "Poet of the American War," to the Whitman of "Salut au Monde!" (which Nencioni translated and repeatedly quoted), back to a Mazzinian, Risorgimental Whitman. This was not a nostalgic gesture, but an extreme re-actualization of the same positions which had animated Nencioni via Rossetti.

Italy was in fact in these same exact years preparing for what Italian historians have called "the fourth war of independence," what was seen as the final fulfillment of the process of unification, especially with reference to the so-called "unredeemed lands" that had remained under foreign dominance after the unification. D'Annunzio fervidly lined up with the interventionists before the war (and repeatedly referred to the glorious Roman past, and to Risorgimento heroes such as Garibaldi). Although he was fifty-two years old, he decided to volunteer as a fighter pilot, and he undertook an astute, and successful, operation of self-heroization.

D'Annunzio's ardent nationalism and militarism turned into full authoritarianism and pre-fascism in 1919, when he led two thousand men (among whom were some Italian Futurist writers) who blockaded the city of Fiume (now Rijeka, in Croatia), the population of which was mostly Italian, but which had not been annexed. As part of the post-war agreements, Italy had obtained the cities of Trento and Trieste, but not Fiume and the Dalmatia region, and this led to acute Post-risorgimental frustration over the

[510] D'Annunzio used the second printing of Rossetti's edition (which is almost identical to the first).

"unredeemed lands," and with the idea that the Italian victory in the war was "mutilated" and that "Italy was not complete."

Whitman's voice and the idea of America's necessary and just war accompanied the poet-leader in this desperate, expansionist enterprise: in October 1919, in Fiume, D'Annunzio delivered an appeal entitled "To the Italians of the United States." D'Annunzio's appeal to Italian people residing and working in the United States was motivated by the fact that, after the war, the United States had been among the fiercest opponents to Italy's request, made during the Paris Peace conference, to annex Fiume. In the speech, D'Annunzio invited Italian people in the United States to "collect, across the Ocean, the cry of Fiume and pick it up."[511] D'Annunzio rhetorically asked: "Can the American people allow that the pure victory of Italy gets lacerated by the claws of a flock of robbers?" He urged Italian migrants to repeat the question: "Ask it yourself, brothers, to the people of George Washington, to whom you give your assiduous work and your faithful devotion."

D'Annunzio insisted on his ideological admiration of America. For him, the American Civil War had been: "a spiritual sign for all the rebel nations to defend the most beautiful cause that man ever fought for […] here we want to remain and fight and die for that cause of armed America: for an ideal reason, for a heroic vindication." Significantly, toward the very end of the speech, D'Annunzio invoked Whitman's name as the flag of this cause:

> Tell it to the people who are hosting you and adopting you; tell it also in the name of that fighting poet who, while celebrating the march of armed America, remembered the song of John Brown. Tell it in the name of the defender of

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[511] The speech, delivered on October 12, 1919, and printed in Fiume, is available online at http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums763-i001. My translation.

> Fiume, for that branch of lilac offered by Walt Whitman to the coffin of Abraham Lincoln. […] He had shouted one day: "Liberty! Let others despair of you! I never despair of you."

The line cited by D'Annunzio[512] is from the poem that Whitman had first (in 1850) called "Resurgemus" and that later became "Europe, the 72nd and 73rd Year of These States." By calling Whitman a "fighting poet," D'Annunzio gives prevalence to the Rossettian-Nencionian reading, and then builds a parallel between Whitman and himself, "the defender of Fiume." It is curious to notice how D'Annunzio's desperate search for the consent of the Italian expatriates leads him to resort to the pathos of the sentimental image of Whitman's lilac branch for Lincoln. D'Annunzio's pairing of the cause of the abolition of slavery and freedom with the aggressively expansionist and irredentist enterprise of Fiume is paradoxical, if not completely deranged, and the employment of Whitman's name and words in the appeal remains one of the most radical and extreme political usages of the poet's work.

But Whitman's poems of "liberty" dedicated to European revolutionary history were not at this time used by D'Annunzio only. Just a little earlier, that same year, 1919, the American poet's name appeared in a completely different venue, standing for a completely different cause. Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci had planned on publishing, in the issue of June 7, 1919 of his socialist weekly periodical *L'Ordine Nuovo*, the Italian translation (executed by Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti) of Whitman's poem "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire." But the Turin censorship did

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[512] For his citation, D'Annunzio used Gamberale's Italian translation of the poem.

not allow the publication of the poem.[513] In the first page of the following issue (June 14), Gramsci commented on the decision of the censors:

> We wanted to commemorate, in the previous issue, the first centenary of the birth of Walt Whitman (May 31 1819) in the most respectable way: translating and printing one of the best songs of the great American poet: "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire." The Turin office for publication revision has inexorably whitened the poem: they have even imposed to suppress the bibliographic note in which we wrote that the poem had first been published in 1856 with the title "Liberty Poem for Asia, Africa, Europe, America"[514] and published again, with additions and corrections, in the years 1867 and 1871, with the title "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire." The delegates of public security, the lawyers and the ex-journalists who exercise the power of censorship assigned to them by the democratic State—parliamentary, bureaucratic, police-state—are not required to know that Walt Whitman was never an agitator, a man of action, an "instigator," for whom poetry was a means of revolutionary propaganda: they have offended poetry, they have obscenely insulted beauty and grace. As drunk monkeys, they have obscenely pounced on beauty, on the pure creation of artistic fantasy. […] And we get even more angry, when we think of the prejudice, widespread among the so-called intellectuals, that the workers' movement and Communism are enemies of beauty and art. […] No, Communism will not obscure beauty and grace: […] The effort that Russian Communists have made to multiply schools and theatres and concert halls, to make galleries accessible to the masses; […] demonstrates how the proletariat that has gained power tends to establish the reign of beauty and grace, tends to elevate the dignity and freedom of the creators of beauty. In Russia the two Commissioners of the people of Public Education that have until now been in charge, have been a very fine aesthete, Lunacharsky, and a great poet, Maksim Gor'ky.[515]

Gramsci's deemphasizes the political value of Whitman's poetry to serve a specific rhetorical and ideological aim: that of showing how Communism cares about art

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[513] Grippi mentions the appearance of the poem in Gramsci's periodical in his final bibliography, but he does not discuss it in depth and does not explain what happened with the censorship. Freeth briefly mentions the case in her two entries on Gramsci, as contained in the bibliographic appendix to her article "La fortuna di Walt Whitman in Italia," 64-65.

[514] Perhaps for space reasons, Gramsci cuts the full title of the 1856 version of the poem, which is "Liberty Poem for Asia, Africa, Europe, America, Australia, Cuba, and the Archipelagoes of the Sea."

[515] See Antonio Gramsci, "Cronache dell' 'Ordine Nuovo'," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1, 6, (June 14 1919): 39. (Note that the page numbers I refer to belong to the 1966 Feltrinelli reprint edition of the periodical). My translation.

and encourages its production and consumption. But Gramsci did think that Whitman's poem had a political relevance, and this becomes clear when one reads the note that accompanied the poem, when it was finally published in the issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo* of July 12 of the same year. On July 1, 1919, censorship was in fact abolished, and Gramsci was finally able to publish the translation. The note reads: "the abolition of censorship finally allows us to give to our readers this song […], which is rich with ideas that are still nowadays of the utmost relevance."[516]

In the 6-13 December issue of the same year, another poem by Whitman appeared in Gramsci's periodical, again in a translation executed by Togliatti. The poem was "Europe, the 72nd and 73rd Year of These States," but the title was shortened by Togliatti as simply "Europe."[517] Not even two months after D'Annunzio's citation of the poem in his appeal to Italian-Americans for support for his Fiume exploit, Gramsci and Togliatti were using the same poem to launch an opposing ideological message. Both messages were rooted in a similar post-risorgimental discourse, a shared dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the Risorgimento. For Gramsci, in fact, Italian Risorgimento had been a wasted opportunity for a real revolution of the common people. But for Gramsci, that revolution could still happen.

Gramsci's interest in Whitman must also be connected to how the work of the American poet was being read, at this same time, in the Soviet Union. In Gramsci's June 1919 editorial complaining about the censorship of Whitman's poem, he praised Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Commissar of Education, who wrote the

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[516] See "A un rivoluzionario vinto d'Europa," trans. Palmiro Togliatti, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1, 9 (July 12 1919): 68.

[517] See "Europa," trans. Palmiro Togliatti, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1, 29 (December 6-13 1919): 226.

introduction to Chukovsky's 1918 translation of Whitman. Lunacharsky's piece, entitled "Whitman and Democracy," aims to redefine the way of understanding Whitman's democratic poetry, and to redefine it, precisely, in communist terms. Whitman's democracy, Lunacharsky clarifies, should in fact be read not in terms of individualism, but as in direct opposition to individualism. As he writes,

> The power and grandiose beauty of Whitman consist in the opposition to that [precise] democratic principle [individualism] – [it consists] in communism, in collectivism, which in the psychological interpretation of a young Jules Romains was called unanimism, which is the principle of unanimity. […] Not the equality of grains of sand, but the equality of brotherly strength, of united cooperation, and therefore – of friendship and love. […] Here is Whitman […]: in the victory over the individual, in the celebration of humanity, in the death of egoism and the resurrection of personality, as the conscious wave of a single ocean, as an essential, distinctive note of a sole symphony. This expands the heart, it opens it. Whitman – is a man with an open heart.[518]

Lunacharsky's communist assessment of Whitman would take root in the Soviet Union, where it remained the dominant one for many years.[519]

As happened with D'Annunzio, another writer whom we have already encountered in our study recuperated her long-time admiration for Whitman with a political turn at a later stage in her life: Sibilla Aleramo. Aleramo, who in 1925 had signed the manifesto of antifascist intellectuals, but who had later supported the fascist regime, which provided her with the economical security she desperately needed,[520]

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[518] See Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, "Whitman i Demokratia" ("Whitman and Democracy"), in Kornei I. Chukovsky, *Поэзия грядущей демократии (Poeziya Gryadushchei Demokratii*)(*The Poetry of the Future Democracy*), (Petrograd: GIZ,1918), 150–153. My translation.

[519] For more on this, see Stepanchev, "Walt Whitman in Russia," 300-338.

[520] The writer was granted an award by the fascist cultural institution called Royal Italian Academy and was also granted a monthly stipend by the regime.

finally went back to the socialist and humanitiarian beliefs of her youth. Aleramo in fact officially adhered to the Italian Communist Party in 1945 and even went to the USSR. In a September 1948 letter to Palmiro Togliatti, Aleramo wrote:

> Dear comrade Togliatti,
>
> I would be happy if you found this poem that I drafted on my way back from Poland, even if rough, worthy of being published in *Rinascita*.[521] You who translated Whitman. I proposed it to *Unità,* but young Ferrara found it too long, or whatever. Sure, I wrote in the past better poems, but these are dear to me as the beginning of a new activity, *our activity.* What do you think? Will you let me know, in all honesty? […][522]

Here, Aleramo is appealing to Togliatti's translation of Whitman's "Europe, the 72nd and 73rd Year of These States" (which had been republished in *Rinascita* just the month before, in August 1948, nearly thirty years since its first appearance in *L'Ordine Nuovo*[523]) as an implicit symbol of commonality and immediate understanding. And the appeal was successful, as Aleramo's poem, "Tre ricordi di Polonia" ("Three Memories from Poland") was published in *Rinascita* in November of the same year.

In Poland, Aleramo had participated in the Conference of the Partisans for Peace, and the poem she sent to Togliatti recalls the experience. Like most of her later poetry, the poem is characterized by an oratorical timbre and an extremely long, free verse employed to emphatically convey the strong political credo of the writer in the last fifteen years of her life. The last stanza of the poem reads

> […]

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[521] *Rinascita* had been founded by Togliatti in 1944 as the official publication of the Italian Communist Party.

[522] The letter to Togliatti appears in *Sibilla Aleramo e il suo tempo*, eds. Bruna Conti and Alba Morino, 308. My translation.

[523] See "Europa" in *Rinascita* 5, (August 1948): 310.

But now, in remembering, Poland, be thanked.
For the brave face for your ardent face
that we have all seen, all of us from forty-five nations,
and for having reinforced our heart,
you, resurrecting from death, with your example
Poland, you, believer in a more genuine humanity,
be thanked, generous and dear,
for that will of acting that you have recognized in us,
united until the last breath,
so that never such an abomination as the war will repeat,
never again by the hand of men
any extermination of countries and races will take place.[524]

Aleramo's earlier poetry, as we have seen, did not particularly echo Whitman: it remained fragmentary and autobiographical, and it lacked any epic weight altogether. But in this phase of her life, Aleramo seems to have consciously taken on the bardic voice of Whitman. Her diction has rhetorically adjusted to the amplitude of her renovated poetic/political vision: now she uses catalogs, anaphoras, exclamations. As she declares in another poem, written in 1949,

Help me to say! So big is
what rouses my breast,
deep vision of the future,
love of time that prepares itself
and passion and pride for the suffering of an hour,
so big, help me to say!

Not only in my chest, in many other countless
in the earthly immense space
the immense certainty breathes
of the world as it will finally be tomorrow
human world of compact justice
[…]

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[524] Original: "Ma ora, nel ricordo, Polonia, sii ringraziata. / Per il volto coraggioso per il volto ardente / che tutti ti abbiam visto, noi di quarantacinque nazioni, / e per averci rinsaldato il cuore, / tu risorgente dalla morte, con il tuo esempio / Polonia, tu credente in una umanità più vera, / sii ringraziata, generosa e cara, / per quella che indomabile in noi hai ravvisata, / volontà d'agire uniti sino al respiro ultimo, / affinchè mai più obbrobrio di guerra si ripeta, / mai più per mano d'uomini / sterminio di paesi e razze avvenga." In addition to being published in *Rinascita*, the poem also appears in the 1956 collection *Luci della mia sera* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1956), 32-34. My translation.

Countless we are in preparing
that limpid globe of joy
[…]

So big, help me to say,
the wonder of this ardent union
[…]
high idea that combines all who believe in it,
from those who strongly work,

plow the nude earth
raise babylonian towers
load up boats beat up metals,
to the wise people who scrutinize the motion of the stars
or to the ones who in soft soft syllables try to
secure the rhythm and the melody of eternal seasons.

So big, help me to say,
this, that in my chest and in countless other
in the earthly immense space
immense certainty breathes
[…][525]

Aleramo's mythopoetical projection of the future takes a patriotic turn in a poem that she significantly dedicates to Togliatti. In the poem, entitled "Mia Italia un dì" ("My Italy One Day") and composed in 1954, the lyrical I takes a Whitmanian walk throughout Italy, among factories, workers, fields:

As if throughout dreams I went throughout the years
Along so many of your roads Italy loving you

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[525] Original: "Aiutatemi a dire! Così grande / quel che il mio petto sommuove, / visione fonda dell'avvenire, / amore del tempo che si prepara / e passione e orgoglio per la sofferenza d'ora, / così grande, aiutatemi a dire! // Non solo nel mio petto, in altri innumeri / nel terrestre immenso spazio / immensa certezza respira / del mondo, qual sarà ne l'atteso domani, / umano mondo di compatta giustizia, / […] / Innumeri siamo a prepararlo / quel limpido globo di gioia / […] / Così grande, aiutatemi a dire, / la meraviglia di questa ardente unione, / […] / alta idea che tutti accomuna i credenti in lei, / da quelli che rudemente faticano, // arano la nuda terra / alzano babiloniche torri / caricano navigli picchiano metalli, / ai sapienti che il moto degli astri scrutano / o a quelli che in lievi lievi sillabe tentano / fissare il ritmo e la melodia de le stagioni eterne. // Così grande, aiutatemi a dire, / questa che nel mio petto e in altri innumeri / nel terrestre immenso spazio / immensa certezza respira / del mondo qual sarà ne l'atteso domani,/ […]" See Sibilla Aleramo, "Aiutatemi a dire" in *Luci della mia sera*, 29-31. My translation.

But only now in this that I am saying is the evening of my life
Only now I am discovering our great people Italy

[…]

and among the women in the lombardian rice fields,
and among the women who in Liguria harvest olives and flowers
and among the artisan women who in Valenza engrave gold
and among day laborers in Emilia and in the padan fogs
and the dock workers of Ancona and the dock workers of Trieste
and the Sicilian workers of the solfataras and the maremman woodsmen
and everywhere bricklayers fishermen construction workers
and typographers and tram drivers and railway workers

oh humble and modest list of millions of arms
millions and millions of working arms
Peninsula and Islands supported by these arms
oh humble and powerful list of arms who make you live Italy
[…][526]

Aleramo's communist appropriation of Whitman's diction has allowed us to take a look into a post-war scene in which the name of the American writer would frequently be invoked by intellectuals and writers of the left wing who pursued Italy's rebirth after the long regime and the war. We will now see how this ideological reading of Whitman – and of American literature in general—had started to form already in the 1920s and 1930s, when fascism was at its peak.

3. From Gamberale's Last Edition to Pavese's Dissertation, Critical Work and Translations: Toward a New Era

[526] Original: "Come tra sogni andavo attraverso gli anni / per tante tue strade Italia amandoti / ma solo ora in questa che dico ed è sera di mia vita / ora solo scoprendo vo nostra grande gente Italia / […] / e fra le donne nelle risaie lombarde / e fra le liguri raccoglitrici d'olive e fiori / e fra le artigiane che a Valenza incidon l'oro / e fra i braccianti in Emilia e nelle padane nebbie / e i portuali d'Ancona e i portuali di Trieste / e gli zolfatari siculi e i boscaioli maremmani / e ovunque muratori pescatori sterratori / e tipografi e tramvieri e ferrovieri // oh lista umile e senz'enfasi di milioni di braccia / o lista umile e possente di braccia che ti fan vivere Italia / […]" The poem is included in *Luci della mia sera*, 76-81. My translation.

When evaluating Gamberale's final translation of *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1923 by Sandron (the same publisher who had issued the 1907 translation), scholars have overlooked two important facts. The first one is that Gamberale, who in 1923 was eighty-three years old, did not work, at this moment, at extensively revising the 1907 translation, or at translating full poems anew. Instead, Gamberale used the revisions he had made years earlier, for the edition that, as I explained before, has gone unnoticed in previous studies, and that the Italian translator had conceived as his final work on Whitman: the 1912 Bernardo Lux economical selected translation for workers.

If one compares the 1923 edition with the 1912 one, it becomes apparent that the poems that appear in both editions (since the 1912 is selected, not everything appears there[527]) are identical. And in the case of those poems or parts of poems that do not appear in the 1912 selected edition, Gamberale does not translate them anew, but uses the 1907 translation versions, and usually revises them only slightly, if at all. This means that the 1923 edition should be regarded not as a new, independent and isolated product of Gamberale's creativity that emerged in the early 1920s, sixteen years after the first unabridged translation. Instead, it is a re-enactment of the 1912 translation, mixed with a few elements of the 1907 translation, including a few additions and corrections. And this is not surprising: Gamberale thought of the bulk of his work on Whitman as already finished by 1912, and when the project of a new edition came in place in the early 1920s, Gamberale revived his 1912 publication. Gamberale's reluctance to intensely work anew

[527] I have listed in detail the contents of the 1912 selected edition in chapter three.

and to offer a radically different reading of Whitman is also seen in his 1923 preface, which is almost identical, except for minor changes, to the 1907 one.[528]

This new understanding of the textual nature of the 1923 translation can help us clarify how it fits into important historical and political contexts. Marina Camboni has noted that Gamberale's translation of the word "atom" appears not as "atomo," but as "drop" ("goccia") for the "Song of Myself" line "every atom of my blood." She connects the change in the 1923 edition to the "change of cultural atmosphere produced by the rise of fascism," arguing that "the fascist mystic of sacrificial blood had penetrated in Whitman's text."[529] This intriguing insight about Gamberale's diction can be preserved, though we must now note that the relevant context is 1912 (as the change appeared already in the Lux edition) and the very beginning of futurist militarism.

Another overlooked element of the 1923 edition is the editorial work of Paolo Emilio Pavolini, who was at the time the director of the "Biblioteca dei Popoli" ("Library of the People") series in which Gamberale's new edition appeared. Pavolini was a scholar of Sanskrit and of other Indo-European languages. The collaboration between Gamberale and Pavolini did not get off to a great start. In his letter of February 6, 1922, Pavolini wrote, with an annoying tone of superiority:

> When I assumed the directorship of the "Library of the People," I agreed with the Publisher that I would revise the drafts of each work published or republished within the series. How this revision is more than needed has been proved by the *Leaves of Grass.* The comparison with the original […] has made me discovered a

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[528] The Bernardo Lux edition had a very short preface, conceived for the reading of workers, which would have been inadequate for the Sandron edition: thus, Gamberale decided to go ahead and use the old 1907 one.

[529] See Camboni, "Le *Foglie d'erba* di Walt Whitman e la ricezione italiana," 370. My translation.

> quantity of slips, inaccuracies, and even full translating mistakes, that I needed to amend.[530]

Pavolini then listed a series of small and large mistakes, often accompanying them with exclamation marks in parenthesis in order to ironically express his displeasure. And he then asked Gamberale to acknowledge his editorial contribution in a final note.

Notwithstanding the humiliating tone used by Pavolini, Gamberale's response was controlled and polite, but the upset felt by the translator is evident in another letter, this time to the publisher Sandron. In April of the same year, Sandron in fact wrote to Gamberale, saying that Pavolini wanted "all of his corrections to be used, since he has dedicated to them a lot of time and done conscientious and accurate work."[531] Gamberale rebelled at this idea. He answered that he would not accept anything *a priori.* And in fact, not all of Pavolini's corrections would ultimately be employed.[532]

Significantly, the copy of the draft annotated by Pavolini is part of Gamberale's collection in Agnone. The translator requested, in fact, to see the draft and the corrections, and it is possible that he then sent a new, final draft, in which he implemented some of the corrections. Pavolini's corrections are mostly of a philological nature. By closely reading Gamberale's translation and the original, Pavolini, also thanks

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[530] The letter is part of Gamberale collection in the Agnone library, and it is also reproduced in Iannucci, *Luigi Gamberale e la cultura italiana ed europea*, 275-276. My translation.

[531] The letter is also available in the Agnone library, and it is partially reproduced in Iannucci, 208.

[532] This is the case, for example, of the idiomatic expression used by Whitman in section 47 of "Song of Myself": "to hit the bull's eye," which Gamberale translated literally, instead of understanding it figuratively. Pavolini had listed this as one of the major mistakes by Gamberale in his February 6, 1922 letter, but the expression remained unchanged in the 1923 edition. The same is true for the expression "O span of youth!" that Gamberale had translated as "O espandersi di giovinezza" ("O expansion of youth"), and that Pavolini had also noticed in his letter. The expression remained unchanged.

to his philological education and experience, was able to correct Gamberale's frequently erratic choices: he integrated omissions (including the lines previously omitted by Gamberale from section 13 of "Song of Myself" about the encounter of the lyrical I with the black person who drives a cart with four horses) and restored the syntax, spacing and formal order of the original, often freely disrupted by Gamberale. Pavolini also made a few lexical suggestions that tended to simplify convoluted passages or modernize Gamberale's diction, but, overall, the main contributions were philological. From a strictly textual point of view, the quality of the 1923 edition would be much weaker if it weren't for Pavolini's intervention.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings, the mistakes, and the odd choices, Gamberale's work remains admirable and highly readable today. And while it sounds more dignified and often less fluid than the original, Gamberale's translation is still able to strongly convey the power and novelty of Whitman's work.

The 1923 edition can be seen as the closing act not only of Gamberale's translating work of almost forty years, but also of the phase of the first half century of the Italian reception, in which Whitman's fame had fully consolidated and stabilized. In this very moment, a young intellectual, writer, and translator was starting his studies in American literature: Cesare Pavese. Pavese was part of a group of emerging intellectuals and critics who started to look at American literature, and at Whitman, as inspiring examples to modernize Italian literature. Pavese's role was also fundamental in initiating the process that led to the appearance of the new unabridged translation by Enzo Giachino, in 1950.

Pavese was born in 1908 in Santo Stefano Belbo, a small village on the Langhe hills, close to Turin. The family moved to the city of Turin when Pavese was still young, and the move proved to be traumatic for him. The nostalgia for a rural life and for a contact with nature is a significant and constant theme in Pavese's writings. Thanks to the growth of the FIAT car industry, Turin was at that time feverishly evolving into an industrialized and urbanized city. In the meantime, Mussolini was ascending to power. Pavese's intellectual growth took place within an atmosphere characterized by both rapid changes and a certain cultural and political stiffening.

In the 1920s, Pavese made friends with figures who would become important intellectuals and political opponents to fascism, such as Leone Ginzburg, Giulio Carlo Argan, Giulio Einaudi. But it is important to note that Pavese's political commitment was never a militant one, even if he did get arrested in 1936 because of his affiliation with these figures. The predilection toward American literature of Pavese and of other Italian literati of this time has been studied and described as a strongly ideological, anti-fascist phenomenon, but recent studies by John Champagne and Jane Dunnett have suggested a more nuanced reading. Contesting the mythical idea of fascism's total autarky, Dunnett has shown how both fascists and antifascists invested in what she called "the American myth,"[533] while Champagne has argued that "American barbarism [was] a leitmotif in Italian literary discourse"[534] that both Pavese and Papini admired.

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[533] See Jane Dunnet, *The 'Mito Americano' and Italian Literary Culture Under Fascism* (Ariccia: Aracne, 2015), 486. Dunnet has particularly reflected on the influence of the American economic model and new modes of consumption on Fascist Italy and shown how translations of American fiction were found to be lucrative for Fascist economy.

[534] See John Champagne, "'Il Mito Americano' and Masculinities of the Fascist Era," *Modern Language Review* 111, part 4 (October 2016), 990. Champagne's article is also useful for its

These arguments reach the heart of a question often discussed in this study: the phenomenon of a primitivist reading of Whitman's work, shared by different, if not opposite, figures and movements (let us think of Marinetti and Khlebnikov, or Campana and Papini). Pavese's case epitomizes this problem, and at the same time shows the path to its final solution. I am convinced that there is a common base for these primitivist understandings: a common, utopian belief in the possibilities offered by a world, and a culture, of otherness and "novelty." This belief was particularly strong in Pavese. According to one of the first Italian Americanists, Agostino Lombardo, Italian writers of the 1930s and 1940s like Pavese and Elio Vittorini looked at America to find more than an ideal political system, but a larger ideal of newness: they were recuperating the classical European myth of America as the land of new opportunities.[535]

In various letters he wrote to his American friend Antony Chiuminatto, and to Professor Giuseppe Prezzolini (who at that time taught Italian language and literature at Columbia University), Pavese expressed his desire to move to the United States in order to start a new life there. He tried to apply to Columbia University and would even consider "to marry the most horrible heiress" if only he could get there, as he put it in a letter to Chiuminatto on April 2nd, 1932.[536] Unfortunately, Pavese would never move to nor visit the United States.

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discussion of Pavese's almost complete critical obliteration of Whitman's homoeroticism, and for the case of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1936 setting of ten *Calamus* poems into music.

[535] See Lombardo, *La ricerca del vero*, 50.

[536] The letter to Chiuminatto is included in Mark Pietralunga, ed. *Cesare Pavese and Anthony Chiuminatto: Their Correspondence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 158.

Pavese's utopian idea of American life and American literature[537] is well expressed in another letter to Chiuminatto, written in 1930:

> You Americans are the peach of the world! Not only in wealth and material life but really in liveliness and strength of art, which means thought and politics and religion and everything. You've got to predominate in this century all over the civilized world as before did Greece and Italy and France. Each of your worthy writers finds out a new field of existence and writes about it with such a downrightness and immediateness of spirit it's useless for us to match. A good modern European book is, generally speaking, only interesting and vital for the nation which produced it, whereas a good American one speaks to a larger crowd, springing as it does from deeper wants and really saying new things, not only queer ones, as we at our best are today doing.[538]

Pavese had started to satisfy his thirst for American literature when he was barely a teen-ager, by reading Whitman's poetry both in Gamberale's translation and in the original (he knew English well: he learned it at school and practiced it with his Italian-American friend Chiuminatto, by keeping up a steady correspondence with him). In a little slip of paper he stealthily passed to his peer Tullio Pinelli, during a high school class, he wrote that Whitman's poetry exalted the big forces of the modern world and expressed "love of freedom, love of humanity, justice, energy, enthusiasm."[539] What Pavese immediately liked in Whitman at such a young age was the strength of tone and absence of any moralism, which constituted a good opposition to Pavese's own weaknesses, interiorized prejudices and insecurities as he described them in his journals and letters from this time.

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[537] Critic Claudio Antonelli defined it: "an inspiration for his ghosts." See his *Pavese, Vittorini e gli americanisti*: *il mito dell'America* (Firenze: Edarc, 2008), 128. My translation.

[538] In *Selected Letters,* 84.

[539] See Cesare Pavese, *Lettere 1924-1950* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), vol. 1, 17. My translation.

During his university years, Pavese decided to work critically on Whitman's poetry, and even to devote his dissertation to it, which was defended in 1930.[540] With regards to this study, in another letter to Chiuminatto, Pavese wrote: "I succeeded barely in finding somebody I wanted for my degree's thesis about Walt Whitman. (You don't know, I'll be the first Italian to speak at some extent and critically of him. Look me over, I'll almost reveal him to Italy)."[541] Pavese was certainly aware that he was not the first Italian to comment on Whitman, but he seemed to enjoy the idea of being one of the first Italian American literature scholars.[542] Antonio Catalfamo has recently shown how the dissertation was opposed by the majority of Turinese academics present at the defense, as they saw it as belonging to the critical school of thought of Benedetto Croce.[543] Pavese was also encouraged to "italianize" the text, which did contain a few original passages from Whitman and a large employment of English words, especially in the part

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[540] See Cesare Pavese, *Interpretazione della poesia di Walt Whitman: tesi di laurea, 1930* ("Interpretation of Walt Whitman's Poetry"), University of Turin. The dissertation was published by Einaudi in 2006.

[541] Letter from Pavese to Chiuminatto, November 29, 1929. In *Lettere,* vol. 1, 156-157.

[542] Pavese's academic career never took off, but, in addition to being a writer, Pavese remained an active critic and translator. In addition to his dissertation and critical essays on Whitman, Pavese wrote various critical essays (most of them published in the Florentine journal *La Cultura*, which was one of the few venues for international literature, at that time) on other American writers such as Herman Melville, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Gertrude Stein, Edgar Lee Masters, William Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser. He also translated Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, John Dos Passos' *The 42nd Parallel*, William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*, Sinclair Lewis'*Our Mr Wrenn*, Gertude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Three Lives*, and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

[543] See Antonio Catalfamo, "La tesi di laurea di Cesare Pavese su Walt Whitman e i suoi studi successivi sulla letteratura americana," *Forum Italicum* 47 (May 2013): 80-95. Catalfamo argues that, in reality, Pavese's interpretation was not wholly Crocian, as the young scholar did pay attention to the historical and social context for his analysis of Whitman's poetry, and did not solely concentrate on the aesthetic elements.

discussing Whitman's use of slang (a topic that particularly interested Pavese). Thus, the dissertation, which Pavese had not necessarily composed with an anti-fascist ideology in mind, still was received by most of the Turinese committee as an attempt to undermine the cultural and political *status quo.*

In addition to Catalfamo, a series of other scholars have recently discussed the dissertation, spurred by its publication for the first time in 2006. The Italianist and comparatist Gabriella Remigi has, for example, argued that the study, completed when Pavese was only 22 years old, already contained Pavese's fundamental ideas about Whitman's poetry.[544] Remigi is also convinced that these ideas are actually at the roots of Pavese's own poetics and that they also shape his poetry and prose. She notes how Pavese was convinced that every writer is characterized by a certain "monotony" (in terms of style, but also of a repertoire of themes and images) and how Whitman's "monotony" corresponded, in Pavese's opinion, to a use of primitivist images and to a certain sense of a healthy virility and pioneering vitality. In addition to this, Pavese deeply appreciated Whitman's anti-literariness and originality, as well as the general mythopoetic nature of his writing. This mythical dimension of the poetic persona's absorption of the external world, his adoration of daily, ephemeral things, is for Remigi what Pavese really saw as the nucleus of Whitman's writing, but also what would have become the nucleus of his own writing. Remigi and other critics such as Catalfamo,

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[544] See both Remigi's essay, "Walt Whitman: At the Roots of Pavese's Poetics," contained in *Leucò va in America. Cesare Pavese nel centenario della sua nascita*, ed. Mario Mignone (Salerno: Edisud, 2010) and her monograph, *Cesare Pavese e la letteratura americana. Una "splendida monotonia"* (Firenze: Olschki, 2012).

Lawrence G. Smith and Valerio Ferme,[545] who also wrote about Pavese's dissertation, may be assigning too much weight to a study written by an extremely young Pavese, at a time in which he was still inexperienced both as writer and as critic.

It is true that the dissertation already contains, if in rough form, a few of Pavese's central ideas about Whitman: that he wrote a "poetry of poetry making" characterized by "the myth of discovery" and by a poetic persona mostly equivalent to the traditional American figure of "the pioneer." These ideas would appear, in a much more refined form, in the essay called "Walt Whitman, poesia del far poesia" ("Walt Whitman, poetry of poetry making") written by Pavese in 1933.[546] In this article, in addition to what he had done in the dissertation, Pavese importantly explains the textual history of the different editions of the *Leaves*, and argues once again, and more effectively, that Whitman, despite what had been said, especially by other European critics who tended to depict the American poet as a pretty naïve 'idler,' had a clear critical awareness that guided his composition and revision processes. For Pavese, the American poet "knew what he was doing," and for this reason "he was his own best critic." Pavese also underlines the Biblical and oratorical components of Whitman's verse and he praises Whitman's catalogues. Pavese's critical discourse on Whitman was primarily aimed at polemically

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[545] In addition to Remigi and Catalfamo, quoted above, see Lawrence G. Smith, *Cesare Pavese and America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Valerio Cristiano Ferme, "Cesare Pavese's and Elio Vittorini's Translations from American Literature: The Americanization of Aesthetics and the Subversion of Culture under the Fascist Regime" (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 1998).

[546] The essay, first published in *La Cultura* in 1933, is included in *La letteratura americana e altri saggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1951), 141-165. An English translation, entitled "Interpretation of Walt Whitman, Poet" is available in *American Literature. Essays and Opinions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), ed. Edwin Fussell. My translation.

differentiating itself from the ones previously produced by other European and Italian critics.

This fresh understanding of the programmatic and self-aware component of Whitman's poetics and formal innovations is undoubtedly Pavese's greatest merit as a critic of Whitman's poetry. This passage from the article can be seen as the culmination of the long process in Italy of coming to terms with Whitman and ultimately recognizing his creative mastery and meta-textual modernity:

> [Whitman] did not succeed in the absurdity of creating a poetry appropriate to the democratic and republican world and to the principles of the newly discovered land—because poetry is, after all, one and only one thing—but spending his life repeating in various ways his intention, he made poetry out of the intention to make poetry, the poetry of the discovery of a new world in history and of the singing of it. In brief, to spell out the apparent paradox, he made poetry out of poetry-making.[547]

But when we come to the actual influence of these ideas on Pavese's own poetics, we should avoid any simplistic formulation. By reading "Il mestiere di poeta" ("The poet's craft,") an essay (which Remigi does not take into consideration) written by Pavese as an introduction to the 1943, second edition of his collection of poems *Lavorare stanca*[548] it is clear how his writing is here first of all oriented toward a narrative quality which is not a primary element of Whitman's poetry. In the 1933 article on Whitman I discussed above, Pavese argued that "Whitman thinks in lines, that is to say, that with him every thought, every flash of inspiration, creates for itself a definitive form in which it consists, and does not lapse into a rhythm preexistent or subject to other laws." (130) On the contrary, when introducing his own poetry in "The Poet's Craft," (written in

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[547] This passage is on page 122. My translation.

[548] The collection was first published in 1936.

1934) Pavese repeats more than once that he intends "each poem as a story."[549] And even if in *Lavorare stanca* (1936) there is an experimentation with a long, free verse which could be tentatively interpreted as, at least partially, Whitmanian, and which was highly innovative compared to other Italian poetry of the time, it is also clear how these poems aim, most of all, to be examples of a "calm and clear narrative." (155) This critical piece is also relevant because here Pavese acknowledges how coming into contact with American slang (more directly through the correspondence with Chiuminatto, in which the Italian-American friend taught current American slang to Pavese, than through reading Whitman or other American authors) helped convince him of the power of the spoken word (and often even dialect) in his works.

Going back to the innovative versification of this collection, Pavese dedicates a specific passage to it:

> I had also created a personal kind of verse, which I swear I did not do deliberately. At that time I knew only that free verse did not suit me very well, because of its capricious and undisciplined exaggerations that usually pass for imagination. I have written elsewhere of the free verse of Whitman, which on the contrary I greatly admired and feared, describing my confused presentiment that so much rhetoric demanded inspiration to bring it to life. I lacked both the inspiration and temperament to use it. I had no faith in traditional metres because of the amount of triteness and unjustified fiddling about which I thought they implied: and, moreover, I had used them too much in parody for me to take them seriously and achieve a rhyming effect which would not strike me as comic.
> I knew naturally that there are no traditional metres in the absolute sense, but every poet re-creates in himself the interior rhythms of his imagination. (157-158)

Passages like this confirm the idea that Pavese's elaboration of poetics does contain habitual references to Whitman's poetry: it acknowledges its 'lesson' and it keeps it in mind as an example of poetic greatness. And yet, Pavese is also consciously looking

[549] See Cesare Pavese, "Il mestiere di poeta" in *Lavorare stanca* [1936] (Torino: Einaudi, 1960), 154. All passages from this article cited here are translated into English by me.

for the rhythm and tones of his own imagination. Objectivity of narration, precision of symbolic images, economy of diction are the principles which animate his style. And if it is true that Pavese, as a critic, found in Whitman a sense of the myth of discovering and 'naming' the world, of making reality, and the present, and America, through writing, or at least to firmly believe that this could be done, the poems of *Lavorare stanca* mostly deal with a nostalgic look into a pretty hopeless and depressing present, if not into what appears to be a mythical but absolutely lost, past.

If we examine the first two stanzas of "Incontro" ("Encounter") we can observe how the lines unfold by following a precise narration. The rhythm found here is peculiarly Pavesian, as we'll verify by finding it again later on. It is a moderate rhythm, and yet it is quite cadenced by a repetitive and fragmented scheme. But we never find the accumulation and iteration typical of Whitman.[550] Secondly, we can see how nostalgic, resigned, and somehow desolate, the general tone is.

> Those hard hills that made my body
> and rack it with so many memories, gave me the wonder
> of that girl who doesn't know I create but do not understand her.
>
> I met her one evening: a lighter figure
> beneath the ambiguous stars, in the mist of the summer.
> Round about was the murmur of these hills,
> deeper than the shade, and all at once was a sound
> that seemed to come from the hills, a voice both clear
> and harsh, a voice from times that are lost.
> […]
> I made her from the depth of all the things
> that are dearest to me, she's something I don't understand.[551]

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[550] The only instance in which Pavese experiments with the use of iteration is in a later collection entitled *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi*, published in 1951, shortly after his death. It's interesting to note how the long, free verse of *Lavorare stanca*, has here completely disappeared.

[551] Original: "Queste dure colline che hanno fatto il mio corpo / e lo scuotono a tanti ricordi, mi han schiuso il prodigio / di costei, che non sa che la vivo e non riesco a comprenderla. // L'ho

The Langhe hills are certainly the main recurrent element of all Pavese's work, both in poetry and prose. The desire to go back to them, to find them intact, not modified by modernity, is a theme that obsesses Pavese, while the fleeting image of a mysterious woman often embodies the poet's search for creative genius, his longing to recover an ancestral voice: "I made her from the depth of all the things / that are dearest to me […]."

Having said this, there certainly are a few echoes of Whitman's tones in Pavese's works. This is the case in the novel *The Devil in the Hills* and some short stories like "The Hermit," or "Struggles of Young Men," which contain scenes, motifs and images that are strikingly reminiscent of Whitman's.

> In the dark, I recalled the project of hiking over the hills with Pieretto, our knapsacks on our shoulders. I did not envy the motor cars. I knew that in a car you cross over but do not come to know a land. 'On foot,' I imagined myself saying to Pieretto, 'that's the real way to get about in the country, you take the paths, you pass by the vineyards, you see everything. It's the same difference as looking at water or jumping in. Better to be a beggar, a vagabond.' […] That summer I spent an hour or two at the river every morning. […] Seated on the thwarts of that boat I developed a taste for the open air and came to understand that the pleasure we get from water and earth is something that continues from the far side of infancy, from the far side of a vegetable garden and an orchard. These mornings I used to think that all life is like a game beneath the sun. […] Whenever I spent the noon sweating in the boat, then the rest of the day my blood would stay fresh, invigorated by my plunge into the river. It was as if the sun and the living weight of the current had imbued in me a virtue of theirs, a blind force, joyous and stubborn, like that of a tree or a woodland beast.[552]

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incontrata, una sera: una macchia piú chiara / sotto le stelle ambigue, nella foschia d'estate. / Era intorno il sentore di queste colline / piú profondo dell'ombra, e d'un tratto suonò / come uscisse da queste colline, una voce piú netta / e aspra insieme, una voce di tempi perduti. / […] / L'ho creata dal fondo di tutte le cose / che mi sono piú care, e non riesco a comprenderla." Cesare Pavese, "Incontro" in *Lavorare stanca,* 33. The English translation is taken from A *Mania for Solitude: Selected Poems, 1930-1950*, ed. and transl. Margaret Crosland (London: Owen, 1969), 39.

[552] Original: "Mi tornò in mente nel buio quel progetto di traversare le colline, sacco in spalla, con Pieretto. Non invidiavo le automobili. Sapevo che in automobile si traversa, non si conosce una terra. 'A piedi, - avrei detto a Pieretto, - vai veramente, in campagna, prendi i sentieri, costeggi le vigne, vedi tutto. C'è la stessa differenza che guardare un'acqua o saltarci dentro. Meglio essere

Pavese's emphasis on the regenerating sanity of the relationship with nature, the sense of walking through it, under the sun, are strikingly reminding of Whitman.

In the posthumous collection of ten poems *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi* we find two short poems that are highly reminding of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"[553] and of the ancestral voice of the maternal sea that continually invokes death.

> Red earth, black earth,
> you come from the sea,
> from the green burnt soil,
> with ancient words
> and desperate striving
> and flowers among the rocks –
> you don't know the speech
> and striving of the sea you carry,
> […]
> you, like a hard and
> deep-sweet word, old in the blood
> […]
> old indeed like
> your mother's hands,
> the bowl of the brazier
> […] [554]

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pezzente, vagabondo.' […] In quell'estate andavo in Po, un'ora o due, al mattino. […] Fu sulle tavole di quella barca che presi gusto all'aria aperta e capii che il piacere dell'acqua e della terra continua di là dall'infanzia, di là da un orto e da un frutteto. Tutta la vita, pensavo in quei mattini, è come un gioco sotto il sole. […] Le volte che sudavo sull'acqua, mi restava poi per tutto il giorno il sangue fresco, rinvigorito dall'urto col fiume. Era come se il sole e il peso vivo della corrente mi avessero intriso di una loro virtù, una forza cieca, gioiosa e sorniona, come quella di un tronco o di una bestia dei boschi." Cesare Pavese, *Il diavolo sulle colline* [1949] in *La bella estate* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 109;113;114. The English translation is taken from *The Devil in the* Hills, trans. D. D. Paige (London: Owen, 2002), 42; 48-49.

[553] See Walt Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 196-201. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

[554] Original: "Terra rossa terra nera, /tu vieni dal mare, / dal verde riarso, / dove sono parole / antiche e fatica sanguigna / e gerani tra i sassi – / non sai quanto porti /di mare parole e fatica, / […] / tu dura e dolcissima / parola, antica per sangue / […] antichissimo, come / le mani di tua

> You always come from the sea,
> you have its hoarse voice,
> always the secret eyes
> of running water among brambles,
> […]
> Each time you live again
> like and ancient and
> wild thing that the heart
> already knew and wanted close.
> Each time it's a wrench,
> each time it's death.
> […]
> Until our hearts are shaken.
> They have spoken a name for you.
> Death begins again.
> Unknown wild thing,
> you are born again of the sea.[555]

Pavese wrote about the city, as well. He wrote about the life of factory workers, of prostitutes and employees, about cinemas and cafés and trams and cars, and about the overwhelming feeling of being part of an immense crowd. The influence of Whitman's work on Pavese in this direction has been often overlooked by critics, who have concentrated instead on his appreciation of Whitman's "Arcadian evasion into an

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madre, / la conca del braciere." Cesare Pavese, "Terra rossa, terra nera" in *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi* [1951] (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), 11-12. The English translation is taken from Crosland, ed. and trans., 122.

[555] Original: "Sempre vieni dal mare / e ne hai la voce roca, / sempre hai occhi segreti / d'acqua viva tra i rovi, / […] / Ogni volta rivivi / come una cosa antica / e selvaggia, che il cuore / già sapeva e si serra. / Ogni volta è uno strappo, / ogni volta è la morte. / […] / Fin che ci trema il cuore. / Hanno detto un tuo nome. / Ricomincia la morte. / Cosa ignota e selvaggia / sei rinata dal mare." Cesare Pavese, "Sempre vieni dal mare" in *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi*, 19. The English translation is taken from Crosland, ed. and trans., 128.

ancestral dimension."[556] But in a 1930 letter to his friend Tullio Pinelli, Pavese noted how he shared with Whitman a love for big cities:

> Now, I don't know if it's because of the influence of Walt Whitman, but I feel I would give out 27 country places for 1 city like Turin. The country is sure good for a momentary relax of the soul, good for the landscape. To see it and to run away on an electric train! Life, True modern life as I dream it and fear it, is a big city, full of noise and factories, with huge buildings, crowds and beautiful women (it's such a shame that I don't know how to approach them, anyway)"[557]

Like Whitman, Pavese embraced city life and its teeming possibilities without being blind to its grime, noise, and fearful dimensions.

Pavese liked Whitman also because of the latter's capacity to write both about urban and rural life, and to mediate between them, which is something Pavese had tried to do both in his real life and creative works. But Pavese never recurs to the use of Whitmanian catalogues nor to his peculiar use of the "I," either in the individual or collective Whitmanian sense. Pavese offers instead, sharp, essential, and once again, quite prosaic and anti-lyrical, descriptions, as in "Deola Thinking":

> Deola spends the morning in the café
> and nobody looks at her. All the city folk
> are rushing along in the still-cool sunshine of dawn. Deola looks
> for no one, but smokes in peace and breathes in the morning.[558]

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[556] See Remigi, *Cesare Pavese e la letteratura Americana*, 24. My translation.

[557] In *Lettere* vol. 1, 35. My translation.

[558] Original: "Deola passa il mattino seduta al caffè / e nessuno la guarda. A quest'ora in città corron tutti / sotto il sole ancor fresco dell'alba. Non cerca nessuno / neanche Deola, ma fuma pacata e respira il mattino." Cesare Pavese, "Pensieri di Deola" in *Lavorare* stanca, 14. The English translation is taken from Crosland, ed. and trans., 44.

In this type of passage, Pavese sounds almost like Langston Hughes, another admirer of Whitman who took inspiration from *Leaves of Grass* to focus on ordinary people in urban settings while describing them in relatively flat, prosaic, but undeniably powerful ways.

Pavese's interest in Whitman's poetry grew at a time when Italian literature was programmatically looking out of itself, in order to try to renew its tones and methods: Whitman's idea of a renovated literature that could be understood by "common" people and that could mythopoetically found modernity, was highly appealing to the Italian writer and critic. In Whitman, Pavese saw an invitation to find his own identity as a writer. But on a formal level, Pavese wrote mostly prose. His poetry, even if characterized, for the most part, by a free, long verse, remained anchored to a narrative pattern that is very rarely used by Whitman. And on a thematic level, some allusions to Whitman's poetry can be found, but they remain minimal.

Pavese's first criticism of Whitman was not overtly antifascist, but later he did embrace an antifascist reading of the American poet. Pavese's translation of Whitman's "The Wallabout Martyrs" appeared on December 12, 1945, in the Turinese Marxist periodical *Il Politecnico*, directed by Elio Vittorini.[559] Whitman's original reads:

> Greater than memory of Achilles or Ulysses,
> More, more by far to thee than tomb of Alexander,
> Those cart loads of old charnel ashes, scales and splints of
> mouldy bones,
> Once living men—once resolute courage, aspiration, strength,
> The stepping stones to thee to-day and here, America.[560]

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[559] See Cesare Pavese, "I martiri di Wallabout," *Il Politecnico* 12 (December 15 1945).

[560] See Walt Whitman, "The Wallabout Martyrs" in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-1892, 387. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/whole.html.

Pavese's translation, significantly inserted in an article about the remains of Nathaniel Bacon, and appearing in an important venue for the left-wing reconstruction of Italian culture and democracy after fascism, sounds like a celebration of the sacrifice of the Italian resistance movement, of those partisans who had died to defy fascism and Nazism and to liberate the country from them. Accompanied by articles about Hemingway, American music, philosophy in the USSR, and the United Nations Charter signed in San Francisco in June of the same year, Pavese's translation firmly places itself within this strongly anti-fascist ideological sphere.

Three years later, in December 1948, Pavese published, this time in the periodical *Poesia*, a translation from *Specimen Days*, which he entitled "Naturismo ottocentesco" ("Nineteenth-century Naturism"). The accompanying note to the translation summarizes Pavese's understanding and appreciation of Whitman and also his peculiar way of conceiving of Whitman's "primitivism." It reads

> […] while the impressionist and cataloguing manner [of these pages] conveys also in prose the measure of the stylistic revolution achieved by Whitman […] the evident, incessant, obsessive references to the notes, the composing, the readings, the scenes, the "poems" shows how from literature one cannot escape – and even less so when one declares to be primitive, a prophet, and not a literatus. For Walt, through Naturism, even American democracy became an expressive problem. Which is beautiful and consoling, still today.[561]

Pavese held that Whitman's call for primitivism was first and foremost the result of "an expressive problem," and he regarded it as a quintessential literary, artistic concern: *how* should Whitman write America. Despite what some Italianists have claimed, Pavese did not see Whitman as a primitive, irrational, wild poet. Ultimately, the idea is suitable

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[561] See Cesare Pavese, "Naturismo ottocentesco," *Poesia* 9 (December 1948): 169-181. My translation.

neither for Whitman nor Pavese himself since Pavese's writing is anything but that of a primitivist. The Italian writer's call for a renovated contact with one's visceral instincts and individual convictions and passions comes from the nascent awareness of the need to write and to found a new Italy. This common "expressive problem" shared by Pavese and Whitman brings us back once again to our starting point: the post-risorgimental readings of Whitman's poetry.

Whitman's methods and results seemed so relevant and necessary to Pavese for post-World War II Italy, that he actively worked for the realization of a new unabridged translation. Shortly before committing suicide in 1949, he convinced Enzo Giachino to accept the challenge.[562] Pavese's contribution to the Italian reception of Whitman remains crucial. If he touched one of the highest critical peaks in his evaluation and description of Whitman's poetry, the Italian writer was also importantly able to maintain his creative identity and originality. He understood that Whitman's was an inspiring force for originality, not for imitation. Or, to use Ruben Darío's words, Pavese had looked at Whitman with this question in mind: "who do I need to imitate, in order to be original?"[563]

[562] See Walt Whitman, *Foglie d'erba*, trans. Enzo Giachino (Torino: Einaudi, 1950).

[563] Rubén Darío, "Los colores del estandarte," *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 1896. My translation.

Conclusions

In his "To the Poets," Emanuel Carnevali imagines dead poets sleeping in their graves who are awakened by the thunder of their own voices and by the winds of their own music. He writes,

> Essences of the people's beautiful selves,
> Violins whose strings quiver
> With long, soft, delicate harmonies—
> Even when touched by the world's rough fingers,
> Even when touched by Grief's cold fingers—
> Think of the day when you, sleeping in your graves,
> Shall be awakened by the thunder of your own voices
> And by the strong, cool winds of your own music:
> For in the fertile soil of the years
> Your voices will blossom and become thunder,
> Your music will become winds that purify and create.[564]

This image would have certainly pleased Whitman, a poet who insistently projected a collective ego capable of representing and embracing the present and future diversity of voices that he perceived as necessarily constitutive of a modernity in-the-making.

I borrow Carnevali's invocation of the thunder and the wind because it represents well the way in which Whitman's voice entered the complex Italian and transnational network I have explored in this work. Whitman's voice was often understood and *used* like thunder, an outburst or provocation. But it also operated like wind, a more gradual and continual form of movement and modification. This study has attempted to gauge the effects of both thunder and wind.

This study has shown how there was a strong post-risorgimental, political appropriation of Whitman that started with the diffusion of William Michael Rossetti's edition and Enrico Nencioni's critical essays. My argument is that this reading remained

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[564] Emanuel Carnevali, "To the Poets," *Poetry* 11 (October-March, 1917-8): 301.

active throughout the 1920s, manifesting itself in all its strength again in the political appropriations of Whitman's words by Gabriele D'Annunzio, Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti, and Sibilla Aleramo. I have tried to demonstrate how the socialist and humanitarian reading was often in clear opposition to the fascist reading but also how the two approaches intermingled and combined at times, as in the case of Ada Negri's critical assessment of Whitman, an assessment explored here for the first time. I also showed how there was a pervading myth of Whitman's poetry as being "primitivist" and "barbaric" and how this was a common trait of different, if not opposite, approaches. I argued that the common root for this myth resides in a utopian sense of the possibility of radical novelty that critics and writers thought was embodied by Whitman's poetry.

The absorption and reinvention of Whitman's work by significant figures in Italian literature, such as Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli and Gabriele D'Annunzio, but also by lesser known ones such as Piero Jahier, Emanuel Carnevali, and Dino Campana, and by a woman writer, Sibilla Aleramo, who used a pseudonym to write about Whitman, has proven to be extremely rich and diversified. Whitman's "otherness" was read and appropriated by these writers to help with their individual and collective agendas, from that of achieving a renovated epic literature to that of experimenting with sound, to that of employing free verse in an attempt to compose a completely new poetry. This is also testified by the progressive revolution that took place within the networked environment of the pre-modernist and modernist scene across the world. I showed how Ivan Turgenev, José Martí, Luigi Capuana, Jules Laforgue, Vjacheslav Ivanov, Velimir Khlebnikov, Gian Pietro Lucini, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and Mina Loy, among

others, let Whitman's voice enter their works as a thunder and a wind, in different, sometimes opposite, ways.

Thanks to my archival work, I was able to discover the existence of the previously overlooked 1912 edition of Luigi Gamberale's selected translation, to evaluate a series of translation drafts and revisions, and to attest to the certainty of Aleramo's authorship of one of the four articles on Whitman signed by NEMI in the *Nuova Antologia*. I also studied correspondence that revealed previously unnoticed connections and unearthed the often enthusiastic reactions to Whitman's work by "common" readers who wrote to Gamberale to thank him for his translation and express their admiration of Whitman's poetry. I examined the writing of non-American authors about "America," produced in their travels and stays on the American continents, specifically the cases of Dino Campana, Emanuel Carnevali, and Vladimir Mayakovsky. I argued that their writings are filtered through a distinctively Whitmanian perspective and that these writers' embrace a profoundly cosmopolitan modernist identity.

A large number of transnational connections have been unearthed within the international community of literati in which Whitman's reception came to assume a global significance. For example, Luigi Gamberale's translation was important for French, Spanish, and Russian translations in a strictly comparative, intertextual sense. I also investigated how South American *modernismo* was influenced by French symbolism in the reading of Whitman, and at the same time did not achieve the same results in terms of appropriating Whitman's formal innovations. In addition, I considered, at a larger scale, the turn of the century international scene and how national literary traditions were at this point often intent to re-make themselves (also to reflect political changes) and to

liberate themselves from the classical and romantic past, while often remaining significantly attached to tradition. In this sense, once again, I showed how Whitman's presence worked as both thunder and wind.

Many questions remain open. For example, the connection between Whitman and Italian and international women writers and critics needs further exploration. And, of course, there are many more transnational connections to excavate, and comparative perspectives to evaluate: the network that I was able to describe certainly can be enriched through expansion.

While this study has covered the 1870-1930 period, future studies will need to address the second and still ongoing phase of the Italian reception, which started in the 1940s and 1950s. No doubt these future studies will be able to show that the presence and *usage* of Whitman in Italian culture has continued to expand steadily with the 1950 publication of Giachino's new unabridged translation, with the emergence and institutionalization of American studies in Italy, with the re-reading of Whitmanian forms and themes also via the appreciation of the works of the Beat Generation (all-time favorites of Italian readers, to this day), and with the appearance of new translations of the different editions of Whitman's poetry.

It seems clear that a key topic this future critical work will need to address is sexuality, specifically, the increased understanding and interest in the homoerotic elements and other sexual themes in Whitman's poetry. The sexual dimension of

Whitman's work seemed to go unnoticed (or was ignored), with only a few exceptions,[565] in the first phase.

Key questions will include: how did the modernist readings and reinventions of Whitman's work influence the experiments of the Italian neo-avant-garde and postmodernism? How can this second phase of the Italian reception be compared to what was happening in other countries and cultures? How did the political significance of Whitman's work change, in Italy and elsewhere within the multinational network of the reception, in relation to historical phenomena such as the cold war, the post-World War II reconstruction, the advancement of civil rights, the advent of globalization, the post 9/11 period? What were the effects of the appearance of new translations, editions, and critical works? Did the more widespread knowledge of English help Italian readers confront Whitman more directly? And what were the interconnections with other scenes of the reception, and especially with American culture, with which Italian readers, critics and writers, at this point, were more directly familiar?

I am convinced that a third phase will begin soon, when Mario Corona's new unabridged translation of Whitman's deathbed edition will be published, more than sixty years after Giachino's, by the end of 2017 by the major publishing house Mondadori, in the prestigious scholarly series *I Meridiani*. As we have seen, the appearance of new editions and translations have been crucial moments in the reception. I believe that Corona's introduction and translation—the result of a lifetime of studies on Whitman—

[565] As we have seen, interesting exceptions in this sense were those of Ada Negri and Sibilla Aleramo, who both commented on the relevance given to sex by Whitman. The homoerotic aspect, though, went unrecognized by them, or at least they failed to comment on it.

which I recently had the honor to preview, while preparing the final bibliography for him, will certainly have a groundbreaking effect on Italian students, readers, and writers.

The transnational, multilingual and comparative approach used in this study has allowed us to see how the Italian reception of Whitman was deeply interconnected with other scenes and to identify an important web of cross-cultural exchange. As is fitting for a global poet, Whitman's reception needs to be studied in ways that go beyond any particular national tradition. A networked perspective should be maintained and further refined in future studies. The subject remains vast, and while this scope may be intimidating, its richness and diversity are stimulating and encouraging.

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