

A New Century of the Impossible: Giovanni Papini's "Fantastico Interno"

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This article firstly investigates Papini's claim to a new type of fantastic narrative, that of a "fantastico interno" of the mind, as distinct from and reversing a "fantastico esterno" that is characteristic of Edgar Allan Poe and the nineteenth century. Secondly, this article analyzes a small corpus of Papini's texts in order to see how an "interno" fantastic works in practice. I argue that Papini's "fantastico interno" does not have as strict a remit as first proposed, and that his model is an attempt to add a new theoretical dimension to understanding fantastic literature at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Introduction

Giovanni Papini¹ was a nonconformist and controversial Italian cultural figure. As well as being a prolific writer and essayist, he is also remembered for his associations with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Italian Futurists. Less well known are his forays into fantastic literature that principally comprise three collections from the early twentieth century: *Il tragico quotidiano* (1906), *Il Pilota cieco* (1907), and *Parole e sangue* (1912). While these stories are discussed in studies dedicated to Papini's cultural and literary contributions, they are rarely discussed in the wider context of Italian fantastic literature.² However, Papini's understated contribution to fantastic literature is worthy of more focused attention, not only because these three collections mark the most substantial addition to the corpus of Italian fantastic literature since it began in the late 1860s with Ugo Tarchetti, but also because of their singular style and the ideas expressed within them. Beyond the peninsula Jorge Luis Borges saw fit to include a

story of Papini's in his international *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940), and even personally edited a collection of Papini's stories entitled *Lo specchio che fugge* (1975). More importantly for what concerns the Italian tradition, Italo Calvino advocates that Papini marks a watershed moment between centuries. During the nineteenth century "il fantastico resta nella letteratura italiana dell'Ottocento un campo veramente «minore»" (*Saggi II* 1665), but then, "il racconto fantastico italiano si stacca dai modelli ottocenteschi e diventa un'altra cosa (o cento altre cose)," for which, as a date, "potremmo indicare il 1907, data del *Pilota cieco* di Giovanni Papini" (1693). Papini himself does not shy away from self-laudatory comments where, with Futurist-like rhetoric, he claims "io, come artista, come scrittore, ho creato un genere, nuovo in Italia, di storie assurde, inverosimili, e irreali" (*Filosofia* 876), but while Calvino points to *Il Pilota cieco* as a turning-point, this article will explore another aspect of Papini's fantastic literature, the preface to the earlier collection, *Il tragico quotidiano* (1906), where Papini outlines his thoughts toward a "fantastico interno" which sets him apart from his predecessors. Subsequently, this article will look at how Papini's theory resonates with four of his fantastic narratives: "L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato" (1906), "Storia completamente assurda" (1907), "Il Ritratto Profetico" (1912), and "L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso" (1912) (the inconsistent capitalization of titles throughout this article is Papini's own). Not only does a close analysis of these narratives articulate Papini's musings on the fantastic in different and more nuanced ways beyond the declamatory rhetoric of *Il tragico quotidiano*, but they are also part of an important contribution that Papini makes to Italian fantastic literature in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Per un fantastico interno

The literary fantastic, as Jackson notes, “comes into its own in the nineteenth century” (24), with a particular geographical distribution: “Il modo [of the fantastic],” Ceserani continues, “ha avuto le sue radici in un preciso periodo storico e in precise aree geografiche e culturali: il trapasso fra i secoli diciottesimo e diciannovesimo, e certe regioni della Scozia, dell’Inghilterra, della Germania e della Francia, con qualche appendice in Polonia, nei paesi dell’Est e nel New England” (15); Italy is notably absent.³ Beyond the peninsula, the fantastic literature of the nineteenth century is replete with figures such as ghosts, vampires or other forms of the impossible, topoi which are typically confirmed by external character reactions and other narratives signposts that underpin many theoretical models of the fantastic. Caillois, for example, articulates the fantastic in terms of a collective awareness of impossible occurrences:

le fantastique est rupture de l’ordre reconnu, irruption de l’inadmissible au sein de l’inaltérable légalité quotidienne, et non substitution totale à l’univers réel d’un univers exclusivement miraculeux. (161)

the fantastic is a rupture in the understood order, an irruption of the inadmissible into the unalterable legality of the everyday, and not a complete substitution of the real universe with an entirely miraculous one.

Speaking across national traditions, Calvino distinguishes between two forms of a nineteenth-century moment: a “fantastico «visionario»” (*Saggi II* 1660), where the impossible is seen—here understood as the supernatural intruding or irrupting into the world of unwary characters in a manner similar to how Caillois argues above—and a “fantastico «quotidiano»” (*Saggi II* 1660)

of nightmares and madness that is indicative, as Calvino argues, of the “interiorizzazione del soprannaturale” (*Saggi II* 1661). In other words, over the course of the nineteenth century, the literary space of the fantastic moves progressively inwards from without the character to within. To this end, writing as he does at the beginning of the twentieth century, in his preface to *Il tragico quotidiano* Papini outlines a claim to a new fantastic that comes out of a rejection and reversal of a nineteenth-century tradition, although one which, by Calvino’s reasoning, is already under way. Nevertheless, for Papini it is a tradition for which the work of Edgar Allan Poe is an exemplum, where the fantastic is “straordinario ma *esteriore*” (*Poesia* 481, original emphasis) in which “uomini normali” find themselves in “situazioni anormali” (482), where ordinary characters encounter the extraordinary and impossible *that is external to them*. Papini by contrast sets out to make his characters “pensare e sentire in modo eccezionale dinanzi a fatti ordinari” (482), to “suscitare la meraviglia e lo spavento” (481) but within an ordinary everyday environment. In Lattarulo’s terms, “Il fantastico di Papini non vuol essere più, dunque, dualistico (mondo ordinario - evento inesplicabile)” (xxix). Rather, Papini shifts the focus away from characters who encounter terrifying and disturbing external phenomena to characters who reveal their own “ombre, gli abissi, gli enigmi, le tragedie” (*Poesia* 482).

As Vannicelli also points out (69), this already coincides with what Calvino identifies as a more focused interest during the late nineteenth century in the psychological and not visionary (read: external) fantastic. Soldateschi, who likewise notes the departure from a visionary fantastic, argues that the paradigm example of this internal fantastic whereby extraordinary thoughts emerge from ordinary events is “Il Mendicante di Anime” (1906) from the same collection *Il tragico quotidiano*. It is the story of an aspiring author who, in searching for material for his work, meets such a boring person that he is shocked into never writing again: an

extreme thought to an extremely ordinary person. “Il fantastico nasce dunque da un atteggiamento intellettuale (anche in questo caso con una chiara funzione educativo-provocatoria), rinunciando agli effetti speciali della tradizione visionaria ottocentesca” (Soldateschi 135). What this departure from traditional topoi highlights is a difficulty in ascribing a label of “fantastic narrative” by using other, more familiar definitions; confirming the impossible becomes difficult and risks categorizing Papini’s work as literature of madness. In theoretical terms, by removing the impossible from his understanding of the fantastic (and looking at a “vita ordinaria, quotidiana”), Papini’s fantastico interno strays from models and definitions of nineteenth-century fantastic literature such as those by Caillois and Todorov,⁴ and indeed moves towards a territory of Calvino’s “fantastico quotidiano” and also of the Uncanny, not in Freudian terms *sensu stricto*,⁵ but in the way that Papini’s characters discover and explore the shadows of their own terrible natures that echoes the process of bringing to light what was hidden.

Such an interior dimension has wider import over the course of the new century. Zangrandi argues that with regard to the Italian tradition, “Il fantastico del Novecento presenta un aldilà interiore, psicopatologico e inconscio” (41).

Nel Novecento, e in particolare nella seconda metà del secolo, la letteratura fantastica intraprende una strada di segno opposto rispetto alla tradizione fantastica ottocentesca: i testi fantastici novecenteschi non puntano a terrorizzare il lettore, intendono invece lasciarlo attonito perché l’assurdità della situazione descritta è in realtà credibile e possibile Sarà invece con Bontempelli, Savinio, Landolfi, Vigolo, Buzzati che il fantastico del Novecento italiano, in

sintonia con le letterature d'oltralpe, darà una svolta decisiva: non sarà un'esperienza di trasgressione, ma un modo di prestare alla realtà oggettiva un carattere onirico, che sfocia frequentemente nell'incubo. (29, 35)

Italian fantastic literature moves from an “esperienza di trasgressione” in the nineteenth century to having “un carattere onirico” in the twentieth. From this perspective, and writing before all the above-mentioned authors, Papini stands out as one of the first—and certainly the most vocal—proponents of this shift away from a traditional to an introspective fantastic (as Calvino puts it, “si stacca dai modelli ottocenteschi”), a forerunner of the changes that were to take place in Italian fantastic literature over the course of the new century.

Moreover, Papini claims that his internal fantastic is superior because he considers terror from within to be stronger to terror from without: “Io credo fermamente alla superiorità di questo *fantastico interno* sul *fantastico esterno* degli altri novellieri” (*Poesia* 483, original emphasis). I would, however, argue that this is rhetoric employed more in order to legitimate a stance against Poe’s more canonical standing and what Papini considers an external fantastic. It is a means of lending his argument more weight by throwing the gauntlet down before Poe, a recognized grandee of fantastic fiction. In point of fact, Papini is clearly indebted to Poe who, as Borges also notes, “senza dubbio fu uno dei suoi maestri” (Papini 1975, 8), and there are recognizable echoes of Poe in the examples that follow, meaning that the distinction that Papini draws is not as clear-cut as he would have hoped. In other words, it is precisely because Papini is indebted to Poe that he feels the need to distance himself so forcefully in order to demonstrate his own originality.

Labeling Poe as a writer of an external fantastic is appropriate when considering stories such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1834), “Ligeia” (1838), and “The Oval Portrait”

(1845) but overlooks the “psychodramas of diseased imaginings and deluded visions” (Botting 110) that populate Poe’s work. This psychological dimension differs in Papini’s work in that Poe’s characters are often subjected to intense stimuli that evoke delirium and agony, whereas Papini’s model is interested in the mundanity of the everyday. The more important issue is that Papini is aware of a nineteenth-century tradition of fantastic literature against which he stakes the claim of literary innovation in Italy, and he shows that he recognizes the corresponding deficiency of such a tradition on the peninsula.

With perhaps a glimmer of insincerity towards literature that otherwise shocks, scares, and evokes marvel, Papini speaks of an “ordinary” fantastic in arguing that “La sorgente del fantastico ordinario è materiale, esterna, obiettiva. Io ho voluto trovare un’altra sorgente” (*Poesia* 482). It is, however, the difference in point of origin that is the salient consideration. The *sorgente esterna* from which a fantastic object emerges is redirected where the source becomes “[l]’anima stessa degli uomini (482),” a *sorgente interna*, so to speak. While Papini’s initial remarks propose extraordinary thoughts, I will argue that there are instances in his fantastic prose in *Il tragico quotidiano* and beyond where, departing from a thought, suspicion, or personal memory of a character, the fantastic manifests itself more concretely in an external manner. Instead of suggesting that Papini simply internalizes the fantastic in keeping with a trend that Calvino identifies (and not to mention as Papini’s own model outlines), my argument is that Papini does not restrict himself to his own parameters of uncovering the dark recesses within the enclosed minds of his characters. Rather, Papini uses an internal point of departure for the fantastic, which, while in some cases leads to a more pedestrian and perhaps tongue-in-cheek fantastic such as “Il Mendicante di Anime” (if fantastic is indeed a suitable label for this story), in others creates a fantastic that does not remain strictly internal. In the examples that I will

present later, only the individual characters can confirm impossible events because of evidence exclusive to them: Papini's is also a delimited and personal fantastic, one that negotiates between external and internal events, and the corresponding testimony needed to confirm them. In the same way that Poe is not simply a writer of the external fantastic, neither is Papini's limited to the mind; instead, it begins there as a thought experiment. In short, my argument is that "fantastico interno" is a point of departure rather than a fixed space for the fantastic, and as such can be considered to have greater reach in Papini's corpus.

Writing in *Nuova antologia*, Luigi Pirandello had mixed feelings about Papini's preface. On the one hand, he is dismissive: "non mi sembra affatto nuovo il proposito di far pensare e sentire gli uomini in modo eccezionale dinanzi a fatti ordinari . . . I veri scrittori mi pare che abbiano fatto sempre questo, senza dichiararlo espressamente" (667). He continues that "noto con dispiacere in lui una smania, che diventa sempre più violenta, di mostrarsi originale a ogni costo," but also recognizes an innovative streak: "Io credo che il Papini abbia originalità, cioè un suo proprio modo di vedere, di pensare, di sentire" (667). Amid his exasperation with Papini's over-zealous attempts to turn heads, Pirandello's comments chime with a particular characteristic of Papini's narratives: that of a reversal, either of narrative assumptions, rules, or of an original fantastic story, which Papini himself writes about in *L'altra metà* (1911), a work that Ridolfi describes as "una congerie bizzarra di sofismi e di capovolgimenti" (141). Papini engages with concepts such as nothingness, the impossible, madness and rules of reversal, the goal of which was "lo studio dei concetti negativi, la ricerca e l'analisi di ciò che si contrappone ai concetti riconosciuti, desiderati, normali, utili e benedetti" (*Filosofia* 203). The work articulates an innovative tendency that Papini exhibits throughout the period of his early career as a contrarian: a tendency to counter norms. In addition to demonstrating different uses of the "fantastico

interno,” the examples which follow also show how Papini draws from and in turn reverses canonical literary examples of the nineteenth century, countering what might be expected in more typical examples of the genre.

Violent Dreamworlds

Echoing Lattarulo’s point above about moving away from a dualistic approach, “L’ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato” (1906) challenges assumptions of a binary division of real world and fantastic “other”—such as an object, creature, or marvelous world. Livi is particularly enthusiastic, saying of this short story that the fantastic “è forse un brillante esercizio di scrittura” (46). Even after his lukewarm remarks, Pirandello considers this “la miglior cosa del volume” [of *Il tragico quotidiano*] (668).

The *Gentiluomo malato*⁶ claims to be the manifestation of a dream: someone or something is dreaming *him*, and he wants to discover its identity. At first the *Gentiluomo malato* makes every effort not to awaken his dreamer. Finally, humiliated and tired, he then desires for his dreamer to wake up, and so fills his life with as many sadistic things as possible. Even after acts of arson and torture, he is unsuccessful, and his last attempt is to let his dreamer know it is dreaming in an effort to force it to awaken. Notably, the *Gentiluomo malato* is *being* dreamed instead of actively dreaming, and the dreamer itself, as the *Gentiluomo malato* argues, is an absent non-human entity that has dreamt him into existence:

Il sogno di quest’*uno* è talmente duraturo ed intenso ch’io son divenuto visibile anche agli uomini che vegliano. Ma il mondo della veglia, il mondo della realtà concreta non è il mio Certo dev’essere grande e potente; un essere per il

quale i nostri anni sono minuti, e che può vivere tutta la vita di un uomo in una delle sue ore e la storia dell'umanità in una delle sue notti. (*Poesia* 539-40, original emphasis)

The presence of the *Gentiluomo malato* is unlike the irruption of an object such as a vampire or a ghost into a real world setting, in a manner with overtones of Poe and a tradition of the nineteenth century, where the impossible bursts into a familiar world. Instead, the *Gentiluomo malato* argues that “Forse il mondo intero non è che il prodotto perpetuamente variabile di un incrociarsi di sogni di esseri simili a lui” (540). He considers himself a dreamed character intruding into a dream world of another sleeping being similar to that which is dreaming him, a theory corroborated by his actions: “quando la sua mano toccava qualche oggetto sembrava *che questo entrasse a far parte del mondo dei sogni*” (537, my emphasis). The “real world” of the characters responds in a way that suggests that their world too is a dream world of another, unnamed character. Such a narrative strategy of Papini’s highlights a characteristic of realistic fiction that is challenged in fantastic prose: the illusion of referentiality and the claim that a text refers in some way to the real external world. For a fantastic narrative, as Michael McLoughlin notes for Massimo Bontempelli’s work (but which applies more broadly to fantastic literature as a whole), “Il mondo del testo è poetico nel senso che non ha un referente preciso (in questa o qualsiasi altra realtà), è autoreferenziale e segue una logica indipendente da qualunque altra (naturale o soprannaturale)” (21). Armitage marks a difference in terms of narrative boundary: “the realist world gives the illusion of being boundless, but only because we never get the chance to test its limits” (173). An irruption of the impossible is not only a means of disassociating a fantastic text from a real-world referent but also a means of demonstrating the boundaries of the

narrative world, boundaries that are revealed in Papini when neither the world of the *Gentiluomo malato* nor the source—wherever his dreamer is while it is dreaming—refers to the outside/real world. Instead, the narrative depicts enclosed and bounded dream worlds of undetermined scope. As an exploration of the extraordinary thoughts of two sleeping beings, “L’ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato” is explicitly self-referential: Papini entirely does away with the “fantastico esterno” and replaces it with two internal fantastic environments with no real-world referents, where the dreamers themselves are displaced, and their dreams foregrounded.

The similarities of the *Gentiluomo malato*’s actions to those of worshipping a deity do not go unnoticed: “Immaginai per qualche tempo ch’egli fosse una specie di paterna divinità evangelica e perciò m’industriai di menare la piú [sic] virtuosa e santa vita del mondo” (*Poesia* 541). There is moreover some contextual irony to note: during the period in which *Il tragico quotidiano* was published, Papini was still an atheist, yet after the indictment of religious credulity in this story, he converts to Christianity a little over a decade later. A duplicate of a very similar religious practice features clearly in a later short story by Papini entitled “Armuria” (1954), about a faraway island colony where the religious dogma revolves around actions taken to prevent the dreamer of the world from waking up:

tutto l’universo nel quale viviamo non è altro che la visione, la fantasia e quasi il sogno di un Demiurgo Non soltanto noi siam fatti, come disse il poeta, della stoffa dei sogni ma tutto il visibil creato non è che un sogno divino Quando il Demiurgo si desterà, pensano, tutto quel che diciamo creazione s’inabisserà coi suoi abitatori, nel nulla. (1177-78)

On deciding to awaken his dreamer, the *Gentiluomo malato* treats his world with indifference and disrespect by acting in whatever socially unacceptable way he chooses. When he resolves to create a nightmare for his dreamer to force him awake, he claims:

Uccisi con raffinate torture i vecchi innocenti; avvelenai le acque d'interè città; incendiai nello stesso istante le capigliature di una moltitudine di donne; sbranai coi miei denti, resi selvaggi dalla volontà di annientamento, tutti i fanciulli che trovai sul mio cammino. (541-42)

Whether or not the *Gentiluomo malato* is acting under his own volition, or whether he is simply the expression of the desires of his dreamer (it remains ambiguous), they constitute different levels of a “fantastico interno;” both are “pensieri anormali” (to rephrase Papini) of extreme violence, which underpin the vicious acts committed, and are in part legitimated precisely because the *Gentiluomo malato* does not act in what he feels is a “real” world but instead an internal world of some absent fantastic being.

An Authorial Visitation

Although Calvino himself is not clear on which specific titles of *Il Pilota cieco* provide a new start to the century, “Storia completamente assurda” (1907) is among Papini’s most famous pieces. It continues the discussion of binary assumptions of fantastic literature by focusing on the relationship between an irruption of the impossible and the world into which it intrudes. In the story, a visitor calls and without revealing his identity, produces a book and begins to read. Hours go by and the narrator is shocked to hear the stranger provide a complete and exact

account of his (the narrator's) life.

Stunned at how an apparently imaginary story “pensata e immaginata per lunghi anni” (585) exactly corresponds to his own life—“*la narrazione precisa e completa di tutta la mia vita intima ed esteriore*” (583, original emphasis)⁷—the narrator is most perturbed by its accuracy: “La mia confusione e la mia paura provenivano da questa esattezza impeccabile e da questa inquietante scrupolosità” (584). The fantastic at first glance comes in the form of the impossibly precise and accurate testimony. Yet, the concept of a volume, albeit “grosso,” containing a complete record of the protagonist's life, is unconvincing. In the same way that Doležel notes that it “would take a text of infinite length to construct a complete fictional world” (169), so too would it take a timeframe far longer than a few hours to credibly represent a *complete* account of the protagonist's life because all literary representations are exercises in editing. Indeed, this is implicitly acknowledged as the protagonist is at his desk writing his own memoirs when the stranger enters.

That the protagonist is an ordinary everyday character to whom something extraordinary occurs is an expectation which coheres with Papini's thoughts on Poe in *Il tragico quotidiano*. Yet Doležel's argument provides an explanation to the book if the direction in which the fantastic is understood is reversed. It is not the book along with its author that irrupts into an everyday normal world: the book and its author are in fact unremarkable. Rather, the stranger is an author who enters his own narrative to present his character (the narrator) with the very work about him. In other words, this story needs to be read in a metaliterary not literal way,⁸ as a thought experiment which revolves around the imagined encounter between an author and their character.⁹ The book the stranger reads out is therefore *necessarily* complete because it contains all, *and the only*, information that has been written about the protagonist, and furthermore

explains how the stranger, as the narrator's literary creator, can have such detailed knowledge of his life and his thoughts. Indeed, the stranger says of his work that "ogni tanto ho fatto dei ritocchi e dei mutamenti nella vita del mio eroe. Tutto quanto, però, è di mia invenzione" (585). In the same way that an outer context that contains the dreamer is absent in "L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato," so too is the outer context absent here. "Storia completamente assurda," by having the author meet his character and in keeping with Papini's "fantastico interno" model, suggests a reading where the narrative is simply one extraordinary thought of the author (such as the dreamer in "Il Gentiluomo malato"), where he imagines meeting the protagonist of the story he has been writing. Moreover, on hearing his own life story, the protagonist expresses how his perspective has changed, "le cose piú semplici ch'erano intorno a me apparvero ad un tratto al mio sguardo cosí bizzarre ed ostili ch'io n'ebbi quasi ribrezzo" [sic](*Poesia* 583), echoing Papini's tenet of "Vedere il mondo comune in modo non comune." The story of his life and the way he reacts to being reminded of his forgotten and sometimes shameful past—with "brividi" and "paura" —moreover reflects the objective for characters to "scoprire a loro stessi, tutto quello che c'è in essa [della loro vita ordinaria, quotidiana, comune] di misterioso, di grottesco, di terribile" (482). In short, both protagonist and antagonist carry out and embody Papini's "fantastico interno," the presence of which is also reinforced by the fact that the "libro fantastico" recounts the protagonist's "pensieri interni." Verdenelli likewise confirms "la vocazione interiore e psicologica della scelta fantastica papiniana" (16). Papini calls into question the role of the protagonist in a fantastic story as the norm to which something abnormal happens by reversing what demarcates the ordinary, and creates a narrative world which is itself an extraordinary thought, a fantastic that operates within the mind of an unseen character.

Prophetic Portents

Vannicelli (187) notes that *Il Ritratto Profetico* (1912) bears a close resemblance to Poe's *The Oval Portrait* (1842), where moreover "la situazione, con gusto tutto papiniano, è rovesciata rispetto a quella del *Ritratto di Dorian Gray*" (189), and indeed Papini also draws from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Having accepted to model for a portrait painter named Hartling, the narrator is disgusted at the grotesque results, and buys the portrait in order to hide it away. Six years or so later, he chances upon it, and is astonished to find that the once grotesque portrait now bears a strikingly lifelike resemblance. Hartling appears uninterested when the narrator tells him about his portrait, and the narrator flees, terrified.

On seeing the portrait for the first time, the protagonist's inability to recognize himself, together with his negative reaction, is echoed elsewhere: the narrator in "L'Uomo che ha perduto se stesso" (below) does not recognize himself at all in the mirror, and as with "Storia completamente assurda," the narrator is repulsed by the creative work (in this case the painting) and attempts to be rid of it, in a similar manner in which the recipient of the extraordinary story is shocked and wishes it destroyed. When the narrator looks at the portrait again years later, with Poe-like emphasis, he exclaims "*il ritratto ora somigliava!*" (*Poesia* 861, original emphasis).

The eyes have

quella stessa espressione di cattiveria e di disillusione che leggevo ora nei miei occhi riflessi nello specchio di sopra. E la mia bocca . . . sogghignava come sogghignavo io in quel momento, con la medesima e precisa smorfia dei labbri, smorfia un po' di ribrezzo e un po' di rabbia, ch'io vedevo innanzi a me, sopra al

quadro. (861-62)

The portrait is not a representation primarily of the change in physical features; it instead traces the more rapid changes in the narrator's psychology, a creative process that Hartling terms "dipingere un'anima" (855).

Reversal features heavily in this narrative. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait grows older and Gray does not age; in a reversed manner (as Carla Papini (60) notes), the portrait in "Il Ritratto Profetico" represents an older man and a younger character who ages. The portrait does not capture and preserve an image of outer beauty, but foretells the inner turmoil of the protagonist's "ombre" and "abissi" (*Poesia* 482), and reverses the function of the portrait in Wilde where "The perfect likeness of youthful purity in the portrait gradually grows hideous as Dorian's spiritual state degenerates" (MacAndrew 220). Further allusions to Wilde's original come in the form of the myriad of portraits the narrator has on his wall: "La mia casa è una specie di odiosa galleria dove almeno tre stanze son riempite di faccie [sic] mie di tutte le età . . . che . . . mi turbano, mi fanno quasi paura" (*Poesia* 854), alluding, even if in mirrored and negative terms, to how Lord Henry describes Basil Hallward's extraordinary portrait of Gray: "Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus" (170). In Poe's *The Oval Portrait* (1842), the narrator describes the portrait as having "an absolute *lifelikeness* [sic] of expression" (189, original emphasis), whereas in Papini the protagonist describes two men in another portrait with "faccie [sic]...vivissime e *inverosimili*" (*Poesia* 857, my emphasis).

When he sees the portrait again six years later, the narrator acknowledges Hartling's capacity to foretell his turbulent psychological development but the painting now functions simply as a normal portrait and its fantastic dimension can only be understood with hindsight. In

other words, the external fantastic (Hartling's skill as an unwitting seer) only exists exclusively from the narrator's historical perspective, as only he can testify as to his psychological condition years before. In the meantime, Hartling's approach to art has become mimetic rather than prophetic, although not without a few embellishments: "L'arte, caro amico, deve rivaleggiare con la natura. Bisogna riprodurre scrupolosamente il vero a forza di pazienza e tutt'al più [sic] abbellirlo con gusto" (863). Faced with the discovery of a prophetic portrait, the narrator's reaction is one of fear, but another reaction ("Il terrore di un tale ritrovamento era paragonabile soltanto a quello della riscoperta del ritratto profetico," 863) arises in response to how Hartling discredits his own previous work, now believing that art should accurately represent reality. In contrast to the preface of *Il tragico quotidiano*, where Papini advocates an approach of "Vedere il mondo comune in modo non comune", of challenging representations of reality, Hartling has abandoned this by accepting a comfortable life and copying reality "in un modo comune." The narrator's sarcasm equates the effects of fear of an impossible portrait with contempt for an artist who sells out, yet ironically the once prophetic portrait now functions as a realistic and lifelike representation of the narrator's current self. The reversed portrait of Dorian Gray, a nineteenth-century fantastic object, is updated to a twentieth-century context in "Il Ritratto Profetico" because the fantastic is normalized upon discovery—that is, the impossible is incorporated into the norms of the narrative in the form of the now ordinary portrait —, a characteristic Todorov argues is indicative of twentieth-century fantastic literature (173).

Missing Masks

In addition to a modernist ring that anticipates the questions of identity of Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921), as Di Biase (81) notes, "L'Uomo che ha perduto se stesso"

undeniably draws from the nineteenth century, not only in a direct reference to Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* (1814), but also in its allusions to Jean Lorrain's "Les Trous du masque" (1895). It is important to note that Lorrain's narrative features in Calvino's anthology of fantastic literature under the "fantastico quotidiano" stories of the nineteenth century, that is, the category which reflects Papini's own category of "fantastico interno." On the other hand, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* tells the story of selling one's shadow, the absence of which becomes a social impediment because characters confirm in shocked tones (that is, from an external "visionary" perspective) that Peter has no shadow.

At a masked ball where all the guests are dressed the same way, the protagonist looks at himself in a giant mirror and cannot pick out his reflection from among a mass of identical reflections. After a frenzied search, the protagonist finally finds his cloak and mask in a lost-and-found boutique. Overjoyed, he reclaims his identity by putting his garments back on.

It is through a mask, an object which functions to *prevent* identification, that the narrator recognizes his masked, not unmasked self. In Lorrain's original, when the protagonist stands in front of the mirror, he recognizes his gestures but can see no reflection beneath: "I was that masked figure, because I could recognize my gesture in the hand that raised the cowl, . . . there was nothing under the mask . . . , only the hole of rounded cloth over the empty space" (459). In Papini, the narrator is unable to single out his reflection from a mass of identical ones. Unlike Lorrain's character, who is at least able to identify an absence, Papini's is prevented from any identification. He begins to panic and, in the attempt to find his reflection, externalizes himself through his language, "Dov'è il mio *me* fra tutti questi estranei silenziosi?", "io voglio me! Voglio cercarmi! Voglio sentire me stesso! Mi son perduto – ho perduto me stesso" (*Poesia* 802, original emphasis). Rather than a split body—a frequent feature of fantastic literature

(Jackson 82)—the narrator has a split identity, the missing part of which only he can recognize. This fantastic division is psychological, not physical, yet the protagonist becomes whole again through a physical object: the mask.

These circumstances are moreover highly personal as it is only the protagonist who is unable to delineate his own reflection in the mirror, and when the protagonist recounts that the doctors suggest “ch’ero fuori di me” (*Poesia* 803), meaning that he has lost his mind, the protagonist agrees in more literal rather than figurative terms: “Avevo perduto me stesso, non la ragione” (803). In a similar manner, the sympathetic host of the party makes him “girare tutta la casa per farmi certo ch’io non ero rimasto là” (804) but cannot confirm the loss of his guest’s self. When the protagonist puts up posters describing himself, he is picked up in the street and marched to his own house, but not even his rescuers can confirm the split: they cannot present the lost “me” to the “io” as the protagonist lives alone, and so no-one answers the door. It is only when the mask and gown re-appear that the protagonist becomes whole again: “Eccomi! Ero io! Son io! M’ero ritrovato. Ero proprio io, io in persona . . . Non c’erano altri uomini intorno a me . . . Mi riconobbi” (808).

The lost self never manifests before the characters in a manner that would allow the extraordinary claim to be confirmed; these are thoughts confined to the mind of the protagonist, who conceives of his lost self linguistically as a lost “me.” In Gogol’s *Nose* (1836), by contrast, Kovalev’s claim of having lost his nose is confirmed by external witnesses; in Papini, there are no witnesses other than the protagonist. Instead, the protagonist’s actions denote a missing self: in contrast to the above examples, this is a more authentic “fantastico interno,” where odd behaviour indicates fantastic thoughts. This tempers the fantastic, as insanity becomes the more credible explanation, but within the narrator’s mind, the impossible has taken place. Papini

internalizes the impossible and, despite its nineteenth-century visionary roots in von Chiamisso and Lorrain, the story does not fit in Calvino's category of "fantastico visionario" because it deals precisely with a *lack* of sight, both literal and metaphorical, as the protagonist cannot see both himself and the possibility that he might be delusional. In Papini's terms, the character is both the "sorgente" and the "situazione anormale" which his "io" encounters, collapsing the boundaries between a dualistic division of the character from the fantastic that Lattarulo outlines. The story therefore sits astride a nineteenth- and twentieth-century fantastic tradition—that is, between Poe's "fantastico esterno," with a "situazione anormale" and with its "diseased imaginings and deluded visions" (Botting 110), and Papini's "fantastico interno"—by making the *fantastico* part of both an external manifestation, albeit one particular and unique to the character, and an internal or psychological dimension.

Conclusions

These four short stories show how Papini's more prescriptive musings of what constitutes an internal fantastic in *Il tragico quotidiano* in fact feature further afield in his work and in a variety of different and more nuanced forms, which add complexity to the distinction between an external, broadly nineteenth-century tradition, and an interiorized modern fantastic tradition. These examples are moreover important within Papini's corpus because they challenge assumptions underpinning fantastic literature. In "L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato," Papini creates two interlinking dream-worlds which problematize the yardstick to which norms are measured and, in so doing, frees the narrative from a real-world point of departure; indeed the "sorgente interna" of the narrative is its dreamer. In "Storia completamente assurda," in order to make sense of a puzzle of a complete representation of reality, it is necessary to reverse

assumptions of narrative. Rather than dreaming and writing, these stories explore the passive and helpless conditions of being dreamed and being written, both concepts which articulate themselves in the imaginations of the dreamer and writer, and both internal *sorgenti* which are displaced, absent. The other two examples, “Il Ritratto Profetico” and “L’Uomo che ha perduto se stesso,” explore a more ludic treatment of the “fantastico interno.” In the former, the portrait only appears impossible at the moment when it ceases to be prophetic and becomes a normal painting, which only the narrator can confirm. Likewise, in the latter, in a bemusing manner, the narrator joyfully finds himself via the very object through which he originally lost himself.

Recalling Calvino’s assessment of fantastic literature—“Nel Novecento è un uso intellettuale (e non più emozionale) del fantastico che s’impone: come gioco, ironia, ammicco, e anche come meditazione sugli incubi o i desideri nascosti dell’uomo contemporaneo” (*Saggi I* 267)—the above-mentioned narratives by Papini, published at the beginning of the twentieth century and with distinct echoes of the nineteenth century and of their predecessors, are both intellectual and emotional. On the one hand, they are intellectual because these are extraordinary thoughts pertaining to an internal fantastic, but also because the stories are puzzles—some indeed ludic—that question the assumptions and parameters of fantastic fiction; on the other, they are emotional because characters react with shock and even terror at the events that befall them. As a forerunner of writers of the fantastic to come from the peninsula in the twentieth century, and with a view precisely in Calvino’s terms towards unearthing the inner terrors of the characters, Papini contributes to Italian fantastic literature a model which proposes a departure from the nineteenth century in a bid to update the literary discourse, a new “uso intellettuale” of the modern fantastic, one that is literally “of the mind.” Papini’s internal fantastic model is however somewhat binary in its reactionary stance, in that it draws from, and departs in an

opposite direction to, Poe, even though the departure from this literary figure is not always as radical as claimed, and it overlooks a trend towards internalization already under way in European fantastic texts by the late nineteenth century. That being said, it is possible to employ the “fantastico interno” as a starting point to provide a different perspective through which to understand Papini’s own fantastic output and with which to consider modern Italian fantastic literature more broadly. The “fantastico interno” coheres well with Papini’s own contrarian approach to culture, demonstrates literary innovation not only in the broader theoretical considerations of the fantastic but also in his creative writings, and consequently and importantly, explicitly seeks to energize the discussion on fantastic literature in Italy after a slow and minor presence during the previous century.

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¹ For biographical detail see Ridolfi and Grana, and for a general introduction to Papini's life and works see Isnenghi. Papini criticism tends to focus on his Pragmatism, his own life as a cultural polemicist, and the years after his conversion to Catholicism. See for example Casini and Colella ("Reflex Action").

² Two recent monographs which do engage with Papini's fantastic are Vannicelli and Mangini (*Letteratura come anamorfosi*).

³ For further reading on the fantastic in Italy, see Amigoni, Lazzarin, Roda, and Zangrandi, and for a recent anthology which places Papini within the context of Italian fantastic literature, see Melani.

⁴ Todorov's model of hesitation is likewise based on deciding upon the possible occurrence of events external to the characters (33).

⁵ The thematic similarity of the oneiric dimension of Papini's writings to Freudian thinking is hard to overlook. However, it is difficult to be clear on any influence Freud had on Papini's fantastic writings in the early moment of 1906 and the preface to *Il tragico quotidiano*. On the one hand, Tordi (301) argues that "Papini non fa il nome di Freud ma la terminologia che usa è inequivocabile" in an article in *Leonardo* in February 1905 entitled "Avvertimenti agli psicologi" in which Papini mentions unconscious, subconscious and subliminal. (The original by Papini appears in Quaranta and Schram Pighi on pages 41-44 of the February 1905 publication.) On the other, while Freud appears more clearly in later works such as *Gog* (1931), in the preface to *Il tragico quotidiano*, although Papini's focus on an internal fantastic may sound distinctly Freudian, Freud is never explicitly referenced. Rather than using Freud as a point of departure for this new way of thinking about fantastic literature for which Papini claims primacy, Papini instead departs from Poe. The thinking behind a "fantastico interno" should therefore be understood as coinciding with, and not due to, the beginnings of Freudian thinking.

⁶ Ridolfi mentions that as well as the pseudonym Gian Falco, Papini was also called "Il Gentiluomo malato" (63-64).

⁷ The italicized moment of narrative climax echoes many of Poe's stories which highlight

such moment through italicization.

⁸ Mangini also mentions the metaliterary content of this story, but goes no further in elaborating (“Il maldestro demiurgo” 179).

⁹ Interestingly a year before, in 1906, Pirandello published the short story “Personaggi,” in which the narrator meets and greets his future characters, mere shadows at this point (*Novelle per un anno* 2656-62).