

‘Noi siamo uni’: Paradox in Tommaso Landolfi’s Fantastic Literature

Abstract

This article examines paradox as a narrative device of fantastic literature in a selection of Tommaso Landolfi’s stories. It begins with some introductory comments on Landolfi, followed by an exploration of paradox and its relation to fantastic literature and models by critics like Todorov and Chanady. The main body of the essay analyses paradox in *La moglie di Gogol* (1954), *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* (1966), *Un concetto astruso* (1966), *Parole in agitazione* (1968), and *Il bacio* (1968). Some of these stories rarely receive close attention in criticism, and the goal is to bring to light new readings of Landolfi’s fantastic narrative.

Keywords: fantastic, Italy, twentieth century, Landolfi, paradox, Todorov, Jackson, Chanady.

Introduction

Although beginning his literary career in the late 1930s, Tommaso Landolfi (1908, Pico Farnese – 1979, Rome) has been described as an ‘ottocentista eccentrico in ritardo’ by Gianfranco Contini.ⁱ His fantastic literature certainly resonates with the nineteenth century, and in its more violent and sadistic moments echoes as far back as the eighteenth century and the Marquis de Sade. Curiously, Landolfi himself refuted the label of fantastic author,ⁱⁱ yet his fiction is undeniably fantastic, and he is moreover recognised as one of the most important figures in Italian fantastic literature. This article will focus on the most inexplicable, puzzling and paradoxical instances of the fantastic in Landolfi, in order to distinguish a small selection of texts – *La moglie di Gogol* (1954), *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* (1966), *Un concetto astruso* (1966), *Parole in agitazione* (1968), *Il bacio* (1968) – from a wider pool of his more straightforwardly fantastic texts.

Tommaso Landolfi

Tommaso Landolfi is by no means a minor voice in the fantastic in Italy:ⁱⁱⁱ he was included in Contini’s 1946 anthology *Italie Magique*,^{iv} Lazzarin claims that he is ‘uno dei massimi narratori fantastici della Penisola’,^v and in even more laudatory terms, Macrì declares that ‘Landolfi ha singolarmente arricchito il mondo fantastico degli italiani’.^{vi} On the other hand, the critical

literature^{vii} on Landolfi's work (in both English and Italian) focuses predominantly on his language^{viii} – see for example Ceni,^{ix} Macrì,^x and Terrile.^{xi} Even Brown,^{xii} one of the few studies in English (another is Capek-Habekovic^{xiii}), focuses primarily on biography. That being said, Carlino^{xiv} and Cecchini^{xv} are two studies devoted entirely to the fantastic. However, both dedicate large preliminary sections to Todorov's theory of hesitation, which is not the best approach to unveil the complexities of Landolfi's fantastic fiction. What this article will instead explore is a more difficult territory of his stories, that of inexplicable and irresolvable contradiction in the form of paradox, through five literary examples, *La moglie di Gogol* (1954), *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* (1966), *Un concetto astruso* (1966), *Parole in agitazione* (1968), and *Il bacio* (1968). Two of them (*La moglie di Gogol* and *Il bacio*) fit within a darker, more macabre, nineteenth-century tradition, whereas *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia*, *Un concetto astruso*, and *Parole in agitazione* have a distinctly twentieth-century ludic feel to them. The aims of this article are to consider some of Landolfi's stories which have been understudied in the critical literature, such as *Il bacio*; to cast a new light on more famous stories such as *La moglie di Gogol*; and to engage with Landolfi's fantastic narratives in new theoretical terms – that of paradox – in order to reveal a structural dimension to his work which extends beyond simple irruption and macabre violence.

Paradox and the Fantastic

From Zeno to Russell, the paradox has been a continual source of fascination which has produced, as Clark and Cave point out, a vast critical literature, replete with whole books on famous individual paradoxes.^{xvi} The word itself comes from the Greek 'para' (meaning 'beyond') and 'doxa' (meaning 'belief'), yet for the purposes of the following discussion, a narrower definition is needed, not only to focus the analysis, but also in order to define paradox in the context of fantastic literature, where much is already 'beyond belief'. More precisely, a paradox denotes a 'set [...] such that all of its members are individually plausible while nevertheless logically inconsistent overall'.^{xvii} As Rescher then summarises, 'a paradox arises when a set of individually plausible propositions is collectively inconsistent'.^{xviii} Another way of understanding paradox in the same way is as the simultaneous coexistence of two (or more) elements (such as A and not-A); that is to say, contradicting concepts or aspects of a narrative that are true at the same time. Together with Rescher's formulation, this is how paradox will be understood for the following discussion of Landolfi's fantastic literature.

Before turning to Landolfi, however, a further contextual qualification should first be made. In fantastic literature, where the impossible either exists as part of, or an intrusion into, the narrative world,^{xix} it is important to state that to speak of a 'plausible' thesis does not mean a discussion of whether something is impossible or not, but rather a discussion of such impossibility in terms of the extent to which its propositions are inconsistent. This point can be further clarified by exploring how paradox differs from theories of the fantastic such as Todorov's, and theories of magical realism, as articulated by Chanady.

For Todorov, three conditions constitute the fantastic: firstly, the reader must hesitate when deciding whether the explanation to a narrative event is natural or supernatural – did the protagonist just see a ghost or not? –; secondly, the character must also hesitate between explanations; thirdly, the reader cannot resort to figurative interpretation: no allegory or metaphor. The longer this hesitation is prolonged – ideally indefinitely –, the more fantastic the text. While the first and third conditions are obligatory, the second condition of character hesitation is optional.^{xx} Todorov's theory of hesitation relies on the separation of possible and impossible explanations where only one can be correct – a character cannot have paradoxically both seen a ghost and not seen a ghost at the same time –, and hesitation takes place while making a decision between the 'plausible' alternatives of a natural or supernatural explanation. Hesitation is not itself a paradox, as Brooke-Rose claims.^{xxi}

The oxymoron 'magical realism' is an important corollary to consider theoretically because it 'combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinctions between them':^{xxii} where Todorov separates the natural and supernatural, magical realism merges them. In his own theory of magical realism Chanady modifies hesitation, outlining a theory of 'antinomy', 'the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text'.^{xxiii} Discussing paradox takes this argument one step further, because whereas for the fantastic in Todorov's terms the conflicting codes are kept separate, and where magical realism allows for conflicting codes to coexist, paradox discusses codes (or propositions) that are not simply contrasting but contradictory, and incompatibly so.

Living Automaton

One of Landolfi's most iconic and violent stories, *La moglie di Gogol* (1954)^{xxiv} draws from two well-known classics of nineteenth century fantastic literature, Hoffmann's *Sandman* (1817)

and Gogol's *Nose* (1835). Landolfi's story is certainly based on parody, as Capek-Habekovic^{xxv} and Granger-Mathieu^{xxvi} maintain, but I would argue that Landolfi goes beyond simple parody due to the paradox by which this story functions, and does so with an altogether more disturbing tone. Nikolai Vasilevič Gogol's wife – Caracas – is not a woman, but a blow-up doll, inflated through a tube in her anus and deflated by a stopper at the back of her throat. One day Caracas exclaims 'voglio fare popò'^{xxvii} to which Gogol leaps up, sticks two fingers down her throat and deflates her. Years go by and Gogol claims that she is aging. Suddenly he decides Caracas must die, and sets about over-inflating her until she bursts, weeping as he pumps. After she explodes into hundreds of pieces, Gogol throws a baby doll – Caracas' son – on the fire accompanied with cries of 'anche lui, anche lui'.^{xxviii}

Caracas is not a real woman with doll-like characteristics; rather, the fantastic is based upon the inanimate doll becoming animate, not an animate woman acting like a doll. Cecchini argues that the reader can do nothing other than hesitate,^{xxix} but I would argue that Todorov is not entirely applicable. Rather than a Todorovian hesitation between a supernatural explanation of a talking doll and a realistic explanation of hallucination or delusion, both are confirmed explanations. When Caracas suddenly speaks, the narrator Paskalovič doubts he heard correctly, 'credendo aver traudito',^{xxx} but then Gogol immediately 'arrossì violentemente e le saltò addosso ficcandole due dita in gola'.^{xxxi} In other words, both characters hear her speak: it is not an illusion. Caracas is both a doll and animate, she is both inflatable and yet inexplicably has an internal skeletal structure made of whalebone, she can be remade with each inflation but yet ages, she does not have inner organs (even of rubber) and yet has a baby rubber doll. In Gogol's *Nose*, Kovalev's severed nose is both a nose and a person – proof is given for both – in the same way that in *La moglie di Gogol*, proof is given for both an animate and inanimate paradigm. Instead of choosing between two narratives possibilities, or recognizing separate layers of interpretation, here both sets of details must be taken together: this is not an either/or structure, but a both/and structure.

It is difficult to discuss *La moglie di Gogol* without acknowledging the behavioural extremes which it presents. Gogol's behaviour towards Caracas, as Cecchini rightly argues, is sadistic, misogynistic, violent, obscene, and fetishistic,^{xxxii} and exercised with complete control: he chooses to deflate and inflate her whenever he wants, quite literally moulding her as he pleases (in spite of a whalebone skeleton), he ignores her as he and Paskalovič are drinking vodka, leaves her deflated and crumpled on the floor after she speaks, and considers uxoricide – not to mention infanticide – a justified course of action to work out his own frustration. The

way in which Caracas is simultaneously doll and woman makes for a more revelatory political analysis, because whilst Caracas the doll can be deflated and re-inflated, the same or analogous action to Caracas the wife demonstrates a brutal level of domestic violence inflicted upon her for speaking out. The first murder is grotesque in the way that the distorted balloon creates an exaggerated female body but also denotes a prolonged and agonizing death, not the mention the phallic allusions of Gogol 'sudando e piangendo [...] seguitava a pompare'^{xxxiii} air through her anus. The second murder has no such gloss; Gogol's son burns to death. Secchi argues that *La moglie di Gogol* is 'una sorta di scherzo surreale',^{xxxiv} and whilst there are structurally surreal combinations – the animate/inanimate opposition of doll and wife – the humorous element is only present in terms of the grotesque through its combination with horror.^{xxxv}

Cosmic Confusion

Un concetto astruso (1966)^{xxxvi} is an often-overlooked story, but one which Macrì maintains, '[è] un racconto fantastico-speculativo tra i più vertiginosi e geniali del Novecento'.^{xxxvii} Hyperbole aside, this is certainly an innovative text within Landolfi's opus and one which differs greatly in form and content from his other fantastic stories, in that the dialogue itself is merely a transcription of an impossible conversation, and where the characters are inconceivably nonhuman. As well as appearing immediately before *Un concetto astruso* in the collection *Racconti impossibili*, *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* is the story which *Un concetto astruso* follows on from; and both stories combine metaphysics with aspects of science-fiction in two of Landolfi's more abstract stories.

In *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* a child asks his father about the Earth which he found in a book, but his father cannot define or explain such concepts as sound, atmosphere, and speaking. *Un concetto astruso* is set within a university lecture hall, where a professor is giving a lesson where he is trying to explain the concept of death found on a faraway planet – without mentioning it by name, it is clearly Earth – to the students who have great difficulty in understanding the term. In order to better frame the discussion, they cover topics like life, space, time, negative concepts, limitations, mouths, bodies, and causality, all of which the students and professor are unable to grasp conceptually, like the father and son. As the unsuccessful lesson ends, there is a huge explosion.

The difficulty that both the students and the professor have in their discussions derives from the fact that they are near infinite beings (in the sense of non-finite), and therefore the professor also does not fully understand what he is talking about. When he is unable to explain the term ‘bocca’ he quickly adds ‘[è] una cosa di laggiù. Lasciate stare’,^{xxxviii} and when describing cause and effect where ‘quasi ogni evento procedesse spazialmente da un altro’ he adds to himself, ‘[n]on si sa che diavolo sto inventando!’.^{xxxix} These are creatures which create the laws of nature ‘non vi è alcuna legge che ci governi, siamo noi in caso che governiamo le leggi dopo essercele inventate’^{xl} and so exist outside of the system they have created. Their state is ‘costante ed eterno’,^{xli} without physical form, and underpinning their existence is an absent sense of difference. The students ask ‘concetti negativi: che cosa sono?’,^{xlii} and when asked ‘voi qui siete parecchi o siete un solo?’, the students reply ‘[n]é parecchi né un solo [...]’. Semplice: noi siamo uni, la singolarità al plurale, meglio ancora la pluralità singolarizzata’,^{xliii} a qualification that includes the professor, ‘ciascuno di noi è tutto l’essere’.^{xliv}

By being students and professor they are separate, but also part of a larger being that includes both, and this paradox of two contradictory and simultaneous subject positions moreover extends to their language. The beings (henceforth ‘beings’ in the plural to denote the students and professor, or ‘Being’ to denote the whole) do not have mouths,^{xlv} nor do they understand the concept of a succession of events.^{xlvi} Firstly, therefore, these are not anthropomorphic beings, and secondly, their language is neither verbal nor temporally spaced, that is to say, it is unlike human language where each word follows or precedes another – humans do not say two words at the same time. The logical conclusion of telepathic language in both stories, a conclusion at which Granger-Mathieu arrives for *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia*, ‘on suppose que leur mode de communication, bien rapporté par écrit sous forme de dialogue, doit être plus ou moins télépathique’,^{xlvii} is only partly true – at least in *Un concetto astruso* – because the beings are part of a whole, and telepathy implies a sender and receiver. However, if there is paradoxically only one Being, then this distinction of self and other collapses: these are simultaneously the inner thoughts of the Being that are also communicated to its separate elements (the students and the professor, and the father and son). Somewhat unsurprisingly, this leads to some narrative contradictions. The students do not understand birth^{xlviii} and life^{xlix} given that they have no conception of its according ‘concetto negativo’ – death – with which to compare it. ‘Students’ and ‘professor’ are moreover terms which denote a process of growth and maturation, a contradiction because

growth requires a point of origin or birth, which is precisely absent, as the state of ‘costante ed eterno’ demonstrates.

The degree to which boundaries and physical objects have been removed from both stories is implemented to a degree unlike that found elsewhere in Landolfi’s work. Corporeality is absent, the beings exist in ethereal form; the concepts of life and birth have also been removed; likewise limits on power both constructive and destructive do not apply (as they are omnipotent). Most importantly, difference – and the capacity to understand concepts implied by this – also does not feature, for example where the beings show difficulty grasping ideas such as self and other – ‘noi siamo uni’. Indeed, the very reason why they cannot define these Earthly concepts is because they have no notion of difference by which to construct definitions: it is a structuralist conundrum. Moreover, *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* and particularly *Un concetto astruso* achieve what Jackson sets out in psychoanalytic terms as a central aspect of fantastic literature:

Various motifs, then, are variations upon these basic semantic elements of the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’, and of their interrelations. One of the central thrusts of the fantastic is an attempt to erase this distinction itself, to resist separation and difference, to re-discover a unity of self and other. Its attempts to establish a state of undifferentiation, of unity of self and not-self, reveals itself differently in different periods.ⁱ

In Jackson’s terms, therefore, these are two successful fantastic texts. At the end of the discussion in *Un concetto astruso* one concept remains, that which the students and professor were originally grappling with in the lecture theatre: death. The lesson is spent fruitlessly debating the term, at the end of which the ‘intero universo visibile’ⁱⁱ explodes. Granger-Mathieu notes that this is the only way – ‘l’unique possibilité’ – for the beings to understand death.ⁱⁱⁱ As the beings control the laws of nature, it follows that this ‘catastrofe cosmica’ⁱⁱⁱⁱ is ironically desired and realised by them. This is not to suggest that the beings have a death wish in the Freudian sense of the term, but instead ironic in that they do not realise that the desire to understand death by experiencing it rather than defining it will also negate any further use of the term because they destroy themselves in the process.

A second, more subtle, but noteworthy irony is at play with the way in which the Being/beings understand the infinite and its relation to a limited terrestrial perspective. Their state of existence transcends space and time, the Being/beings are free from corporeal and mental limitation, yet are unable to conceive of the universe as composed of discrete and

limited elements. Their cosmic perspective is ironically restricted by having no understanding of the very boundaries and concepts they transcend.^{liv}

Angry Words

Critics who approach *Parole in agitazione* (1968)^{lv} predominantly focus on the central premise of a split between signifiers and their signifieds,^{lvi} thus highlighting the arbitrary nature of language.^{lvii} Within the narrative itself, however, this fragment engenders some complex fantastic devices and asks subtler questions of the language debate beyond simply the question of the signifier/signified split. Furthermore, given that Landolfi's language is often the privileged aspect critics analyse, this story bridges between Landolfi's language games and the fantastic.

One morning while brushing his teeth, the narrator rinses his mouth, but instead of soapy water, Words^{lviii} fall into the basin. They introduce themselves by their signifiers – the leader calls itself Locupletale – and demand that the narrator reassign them meanings. Other Words interject with their demands until the by now fed-up narrator writes down a list of all their meanings, scoops the Words up, and tips them into a bottle. He decides that whichever Word comes out first will be assigned to the first meaning on the list, the second to the second meaning, and so on. As each emerges and collects a meaning, it runs off, but as the narrator never makes a list of these reassigned signifieds, only the individual Word knows what it means.

Little information is given as to how the Words move, talk or signal the narrator, or even how they are constructed. They may look like their respective signifiers written on the page, but Landolfi is careful not to give away details, such as for example whether the Words have extraneous limbs, hands, or other anthropomorphic characteristics. He instead represents his Words in minimal terms. For Jackson, the fantastic articulates “the unnameable”, the ‘nameless things’ of horror fiction, by attempting to visualise the unseen, or by establishing a disjunction of word and meaning through a play upon ‘thingless names’,^{lix} and these Words are, to use her term, ‘thingless names’, where the object to which a signifier refers is missing or in this case left, ironically, unsaid.

After the Words struggle to climb out of the basin – quite literally ‘slipping signifiers’ – and begin to interact with each other, in so doing they display a social dimension which demonstrates relationships between words in language. Here, the Words need each other in

order to swap meanings. Some Words want reassigned meanings which befit their signifiers – Lima will only swap with words which mean ‘qualcosa di molto soffice’ such as ‘Guanciale’ or ‘Cuscino’^{lx} –, and these preferences reveal politics between Words: Martello will give its meaning to Totano, but does not want Totano’s meaning in exchange, but rather Betulla’s, who in turn is wanted by Trave. The exchange of signifieds is not a simple direct swap because there is always a ‘better’ meaning on offer: meanings are constantly deferred. Ultimately, however, their meanings are assigned arbitrarily, not by convention, and after they run off, they become meaningless on two counts. Firstly, only the individual Word knows what meaning it has been assigned, making it redundant as it cannot consequently be used as a word by anyone or anything else. Secondly, since meanings are differential and relational, the Words need other meanings against which to define themselves, which they lack because they run off in different directions; instead, they are self-referential, lost and meaningless Words. Hence the paradox of the story: they are Words but not words; they have new meaning but are also meaningless, and are physically manifest but without clear form – physical forms of an abstract concept.

Il vampiro inesistente

Described as ‘una rivisitazione-reinterpretazione di una delle figure perturbanti e fantastiche più note: il vampiro’,^{lxi} Landolfi’s *Il bacio* (1968)^{lxii} develops the figure of the vampire. Moreover, for a literary fragment and not a full-length story, Landolfi does so in surprising detail. When the bachelor and lawyer D goes to sleep he feels something like a breath of air on his lips – a kiss – which occurs with increasing frequency and intensity as the nights go by. Eventually, after a series of agonizing nights, a chasm opens up before him, and as his life ends he glimpses the creature that has been kissing him.

As Cecchini points out, the creature is never named, it is always ‘qualcosa’, ‘quel qualunque’, ‘il che’ or ‘la creatura’,^{lxiii} a nameless thing unlike the thingless names of the Words in *Parole in agitazione*. Moreover, as well as lacking a signifier, D also cannot see or describe the creature: it is without signifier or signified, thingless and nameless, like the beings of *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* and *Un concetto astruso*. D does not perceive the vampire directly, but instead by the abstract signposts which delimit the space it fills: ‘something’ is there in the room at night with D. There is no hesitation in a Todorovian sense, as D does not doubt the presence of his visitor; instead the creature is both present and absent:

[d]apprima fu come un'immensa massa, che sembrava occupare l'intera stanza ed era nondimeno stranamente vacua, distinta dal fitto buio circostante secondo può distinguersi un vuoto in un vuoto, simile a certe falle nel nero etere cosmico.^{lxiv}

D is somehow able to perceive one type of darkness from another, as well as air from void. Paradoxically, the void has exterior dimensions – it fills the room – and describing the void gives form to something which is by definition form/less: even mentioning the space this void takes up delimits and thus undermines it. However, in so doing, this contaminating trace of form allows D to become aware of it because the formless void now has form.

In the climax to these visitations there appears a vortex, and the distinction is an important one: void denotes an absence of form; vortex denotes form and a point of contact and a point of origin, although here the latter is missing, 's'aprì un'immane voragine rovesciata, un vortice grigiastro somigliante a una matrice o ad un nicchio; incombeva, e lo chiamava dal sommo della sua spirale',^{lxv} and through the vortex, '[v]ide se stesso quale un pesce del profondo, fiocamente luminoso nel nero abisso'.^{lxvi} D resorts to metaphor to describe the unfathomable vortex as Landolfi's unreality edges towards Jackson's 'non-thetic' pole.

Whereas the thetic signifies propositions (theses) which are taken to be real, rational, and substantial, the non-thetic suggests their opposite, an unreality. The non-thetic, by definition, can have no adequate linguistic form, for it exists before, or outside, human language. [...] [Fantastic narrative] is situated *between* the thetic and the non-thetic (original emphasis).^{lxvii}

D has inadequate language to express his impending demise – the Jackson 'unreality' is an impending *absence* of reality for him – because of the difficulty of trying to give form to the formless and of describing what he cannot fully perceive. Then he finally sees the vampire itself, which even at this point remains without description:

gli fu dato guardarla in viso, colei che lo aveva succhiato dalla vita, che ora gli strappava il supremo bacio. Fu, la fine. E la creatura sconosciuta si risollevò dalla spoglia vuota e corse per il mondo.^{lxviii}

Having now realised his desire to 'menarla a corporeità',^{lxix} D dies at the moment the vampire emerges. The void – the vampire's hunger – ends as D's desire to see his kisser and the vampire's hunger (structures which denote absence) are satisfied. Both structures in *Il bacio*,

the ‘vuoto in un vuoto’ and the ‘nero abisso’ are without end and dimensions yet paradoxically represented.

Il bacio represents the *process* of the manifestation of a vampire – the metamorphosis and development of the supernatural being – and portrays D’s internal desire as an external manifestation, where the vampire grows stronger as D grows weaker. The more D desires to hold the hidden kisser in his arms, the more voraciously he is himself devoured. Tardiola in *Il vampiro nella letteratura italiana*^{lxx} outlines a modest tradition including mostly twentieth century texts such as Giuseppe Tonsi’s *Il vampiro* (1904), Luigi Capuana’s *Un vampiro* (1907) and Enrico Boni’s *Vampiro* (1908); Lacroix likewise labels the vampire tradition in Italy as particularly discreet.^{lxxi} While Landolfi’s contribution may not be as significant when compared to other national vampire traditions, within its Italian context and compared to its peers, *Il bacio* is a both innovative and noteworthy contribution to Italian vampire literature, one that not only explores the *creation* of a vampire (something absent in Tonsi, Boni, and Capuana) but also does so with impossible abstract forms together with phantasmagorical and phantom imagery.

Conclusions

These five stories are by no means the only complex stories by Landolfi, and they demonstrate the different means through which Landolfi articulates paradox in his work. There is an explanatory paradox in *La moglie di Gogol*, while a paradox of definition arises in *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* and *Un concetto astruso* when the boundaries between self and other literally collapse, and when any notion of difference is absent. In part a corollary, *Parole in agitazione* features a linguistic paradox where words are both the signs and users, both unstable message and sender. Finally, Landolfi explores paradoxes of dimensions in *Il bacio* and adds an innovative vampire story to the tradition in Italy.

In Landolfi’s wider opus, there is more focus on the surreal, ghost stories, the macabre and deviant not to mention inexplicable behaviours, but where paradox is deployed it serves to focus attention more closely on how the fantastic operates within a story because the salient issue is not one of deciding *between* explanations, but rather of exploring their formulation. Reading becomes a more careful rather than ‘hesitant’ practice as paradox requires a consideration of all possibilities simultaneously, and of why an inconsistency exists. The corollary of such an argument means that it is best dealt with models unlike Todorov’s

which divides up a set of inconsistent elements; here, Jackson's has proved useful in exploring Landolfi's work. As part of, and in keeping with, the 'uso intellettuale (e non più emozionale)' of fantastic tradition of the twentieth century, which Calvino distinguishes from a visionary nineteenth century tradition,^{lxxii} paradox in Landolfi furthermore suggests alternative and impossible perspectives to imagine and to consider, such as a world without difference, or self-aware language.

Finally, there is a wider goal to consider in terms of Italian fantastic literature more generally. The historical categories whereby the impossible is accepted or rejected by the characters and reader broadly speaking distinguish the nineteenth century from the twentieth, that is, the irruption of the impossible into the everyday, and its later acceptance. Paradox and irresolvable contradiction are more problematic devices, ones not so easily classifiable and which do not feature prominently in the critical literature. What these five texts of Landolfi's establish, together with the most recognizable example in Italian literature, Calvino's *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959), – the knight without physical form – is a category of paradoxical Italian fantastic literature, one which situates itself in both categories that read the fantastic in two contrasting terms corresponding to two different historical periods. These literary examples open up the possibility of exploring further texts throughout the Italian tradition that resonate in the same way, and which likewise bring to the fore a need for different, less binary, analytical approaches to fantastic literature.

Notes

ⁱ G. Contini, *Letteratura dell'Italia unita, 1861-1968* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1994), p. 931.

ⁱⁱ T. Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milano: Rizzoli, 1991), p. 269.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a discussion of the critical debate surrounding the fantastic in Italy, together with a bibliography of works, see S. Lazzarin, 'Il punto sul fantastico italiano: 1980-2007,' *Moderna*, IX (2007), 215–70.

^{iv} Although an important anthology it only really comes to the fore after its 1988 republication. See B. Sica, *L'Italia magica di Gianfranco Contini: storia e interpretazione* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2013).

^v S. Lazzarin, 'Vipistrello, colombe, animale giglio: vampiri linguistici del Novecento italiano,' *Italies*, 10 (2008), 271.

^{vi} O. Macrí, *Esemplari del sentimento poetico contemporaneo* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1941), p. 295.

^{vii} See for example the recent A. Cortellessa, ed., *Scuole segrete: il Novecento italiano e Tommaso Landolfi*, Biblioteca Aragno (Milano: N. Aragno, 2009); S. Cirillo, ed., *Cento anni di Landolfi: atti del*

convegno, Roma, 7-8 Maggio 2008 (Roma: Bulzoni, 2010); and E. Ercolani and M. Verdenelli, eds., *Tommaso Landolfi e il caleidoscopio delle forme: atti della giornata di studio, Macerata 23 Ottobre 2008* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2010). Despite this not insignificant output of conference proceedings and essay collections, Landolfi remains relatively unread outside of Italy, and even within Italy Walter Pedullà admits a niche appeal, 'uno scrittore "per critici"'. W. Pedullà, Carlo Serafini, and Marco Ricciardi, "'Editoriale,'" in *L'illuminista: rivista di cultura contemporanea*, ed. by Walter Pedullà, 2008, p. 11.

^{viii} His use of outdated and antiquated words, as well as his neologisms, combines with a syntax and style which can at times be impenetrable, the best example being *La passeggiata* (1966) (In Landolfi, *Opere II*, pp. 591-592. For further bibliographical information see Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, 1278).

^{ix} A. Ceni, *La 'sopra-realtà' di Tommaso Landolfi* (Firenze: Franco Cesati, 1986).

^x O. Macrí, *Tommaso Landolfi: narratore poeta critico artefice della lingua* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1990).

^{xi} C. Terrile, *L'arte del possibile: ethos e poetica nell'opera di Tommaso Landolfi* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007).

^{xii} J. Brown, *Tommaso Landolfi Between the Giubbe Rosse and Middle Europe, 1930-1945: A Dissertation* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Dissertation Services, 2007).

^{xiii} R. Capek-Habekovic, *Tommaso Landolfi's Grotesque Images* (New York: Lang, 1986).

^{xiv} M. Carlino, *Landolfi e il fantastico* (Roma: Lithos, 1998).

^{xv} L. Cecchini, *'Parlare per le notti': il fantastico nell'opera di Tommaso Landolfi* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2001).

^{xvi} M. Clark, *Paradoxes from A to Z* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), ix; P. Cave, *This Sentence Is False. An Introduction to Philosophical Paradoxes* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), viii. These two monographs are accessible introductions to many famous paradoxes.

^{xvii} N. Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), p. 6.

^{xviii} Ibid. p. 6.

^{xix} There are too many books on theory to list here, but among the most canonical are T. Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); I. Bessière, *Le récit fantastique: la poétique de l'incertain* (Paris: Larousse, 1974); E. S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); R. Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981); K. Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984); and R. Ceserani, *Il fantastico* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1996).

^{xx} Todorov, pp. 37-38.

^{xxi} C. Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 69.

^{xxii} W. B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 1.

^{xxiii} A. B. Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland, 1985), p. 12.

^{xxiv} First published on 14 December 1944 in *Città*. For further bibliographical information see Landolfi, *Opere (I)*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Milano: Rizzoli, 1991), pp. 1021-1022.

^{xxv} Capek-Habekovic, p. 35.

^{xxvi} G. Granger-Mathieu, *Masques et miroirs: modalités de la représentation dans l'oeuvre narrative de Tommaso Landolfi* (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2008), p. 191. Lazzarin points out that parody features more generally in Landolfi's oeuvre as Aymone and Romagnoli note ('Il punto sul fantastico italiano', p. 222).

^{xxvii} Landolfi, *Opere (I)*, p. 682.

^{xxviii} Ibid. p. 688.

^{xxix} Cecchini, p. 119.

^{xxx} Landolfi, *Opere (I)*, pp. 682-683.

^{xxxi} Ibid. p. 683.

^{xxxii} Cecchini, p. 116.

^{xxxiii} Landolfi, *Opere (I)*, p. 687.

^{xxxiv} B. G. Secchi, *Invito alla lettura di Tommaso Landolfi* (Milano: Mursia, 1978), p. 65.

^{xxxv} Thomson argues that the grotesque is commonly defined as occurring where the comic and the terrifying are held in disharmony. In his own, broader terms, the grotesque is defined as 'the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response'. P. Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp 20-21, 27. For a more detailed discussion of the word grotesque and its history, see W. Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. by Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963).

^{xxxvi} Written a few years earlier in 1963, no mention is made as to the year when *Quattro chiacchiere in famiglia* was written, although it too was published in 1966 along with *Un concetto astruso* in the collection *Racconti impossibili*. For further bibliographical information see Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 1279.

^{xxxvii} Macrí, *Tommaso Landolfi*, p. 103.

^{xxxviii} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 629.

^{xxxix} Ibid. p. 638.

^{xl} Ibid. p. 643.

^{xli} Ibid. p. 626.

^{xlii} Ibid. p. 627.

^{xliii} Ibid. p. 635.

^{xliv} Ibid. p. 633.

^{xliv} Ibid. p. 629.

^{xlvi} Ibid. p. 638.

^{xlvii} Granger-Mathieu, p. 81.

^{xlviii} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 646.

^{xlix} Ibid. p. 625.

ⁱ Jackson, p. 52.

^{li} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 652.

^{lii} Granger-Mathieu, p. 82.

^{liii} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 652.

^{liv} Moreover, there is a parallel to be noted to the Romantic ideal of yearning for the infinite, an aspect of European Romanticism which was for the most part absent in Italy (Leopardi's *L'infinito* (1819) being a famous but rare exception). As Lattarulo notes, with reference in particular to the German Romantic tradition, 'assente nel Romanticismo italiano [è] la ragione essenziale di una radicale poetica del fantastico, cioè la tensione alla negazione dell'individuazione, del limite, dell'operazione cosciente dell'uomo, considerate come barriere che isolano e separano dalla vita cosmica.' L. Lattarulo, '«Antica storia narra così». Considerazioni sul fantastico italiano ottocentesco,' in *Geografia, storia e poetiche del fantastico*, ed. by Monica Farnetti (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1995), pp. 124. The Being/beings have what the romantic artists aspires towards, an absence of limits, but in so doing are also themselves limited, as the discussions in the classroom demonstrate. For further reading on Landolfi's Romanticism together with a discussion of the fantastic, see L. Lattarulo, 'Fantastico e "cattivo infinito" nell'Ottocento italiano. Dalla marginalità all'affermazione,' in *Le soglie del fantastico*, ed. by Marina Galletti (Roma: Lithos, 1996), pp. 181–202. See also M. Baccelli, 'Landolfi e il Romanticismo tedesco,' in *Le lunazioni del cuore: saggi Su Tommaso Landolfi*, ed. by Idolina Landolfi (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1996), pp. 205–232; Lattarulo's essay mentioned above (1995) explores Italian Romanticism further, as does M. Puppo, *Romanticismo italiano e romanticismo europeo* (Milano: Istituto propaganda libraria, 1985) and E. Raimondi, *Romanticismo italiano e romanticismo europeo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997).

^{lv} First published on 27 October 1963 in *Corriere della Sera*. For further bibliographical information, see Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 1287.

^{lvi} M. Verdenelli, *Prove di voce: Tommaso Landolfi* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1997), p. 26; R. Sacchettini, *L'oscuro rovescio: previsione e pre-visione della morte nella narrativa di Tommaso Landolfi* (Firenze: Società editrice fiorentina, 2006), p. 152; P. Trama, *Animali e fantasmi della scrittura: saggi sulla zoopoetica di Tommaso Landolfi* (Roma: Salerno, 2006), p. 14.

^{lvii} Granger-Mathieu, p. 89.

^{lviii} In order to avoid confusion with phrases like 'in other words' and since they are capitalised – Magiostra, Betulla, Martello, etc – I capitalise 'Word' to refer only to these animate objects.

^{lix} Jackson, p. 41.

^{lx} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 857.

^{lxi} Cecchini, p. 122.

^{lxxii} First published on 14 May 1964 in *Corriere della Sera*. For further bibliographical information, see Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 1289.

^{lxxiii} Cecchini, p. 122 n 1.

^{lxxiv} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 892.

^{lxxv} Ibid. p. 893.

^{lxxvi} Ibid.

^{lxxvii} Jackson, pp. 75-76.

^{lxxviii} Landolfi, *Opere (II)*, p. 893.

^{lxxix} Ibid. p. 891.

^{lxxx} G. Tardiola, *Il vampiro nella letteratura italiana* (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991).

^{lxxxi} J. Lacroix, 'Vampires à « l'italienne ».' *Revue des études italiennes*, 39 (1993), 111.

^{lxxxii} I. Calvino, *Saggi: 1945-1985 (I)*, ed. by Mario Barenghi (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), p. 267.