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College: Pembroke

Thesis Title:

A Different Mimesis: the Fantastic in Italy from the Scapigliati to the Postmodern

Degree: Dphil, Modern and Medieval Languages

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge and thank the various funding bodies without which this thesis would not have been possible: the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the University of Oxford for a Santander Scholarship, and the *Circolo* association in London. Likewise, I would also like to thank the Isaiah Berlin and Christina Drake funds which made my research trips to Italy over the long vacations possible. My college, Pembroke, has not only provided a very welcoming and supportive environment over the years, but also a great deal of financial help to allow me to attend numerous conferences which have greatly benefitted my research. I would also like to thank the faculty of modern and medieval language firstly for a travel grant that allowed me to cross the Atlantic, and secondly for the highly rewarding opportunity of teaching a range of topics and classes alongside my thesis.

My foremost and heartfelt thanks go to my supervisor Guido Bonsaver, who guided this thesis with great patience and meticulous care through the avalanche of my essays and hare-brained ideas. His constant encouragement and insights always kept my project on the right track and helped it grow in ways I never thought feasible.

Inspiration for the project itself and for my initial exposure to Italian literature is due to Florian Mussgnug who first taught me to 'hesitate'. Over my student years, from when I started out at University College London through to the doctorate at Oxford, Florian and Guido have been instrumental in guiding my thinking and challenging my work. I want to express my deep and sincere gratitude to both. A further thanks goes to Giuseppe Stellardi, my internal examiner, whose comments and questions have put me in good stead for the future, and to whom I owe most of my teaching opportunities at Oxford.

I would like to thank all my friends who have been there for me over the years, in the UK, Italy and beyond, a full list of whom would spill on to many pages and for so many different reasons. Finally, my greatest debt of all is to my parents and siblings, without whose love and support, both growing up and during my time at Oxford, I would not have been able to write these words.

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Short Abstract

This thesis investigates the literary fantastic in Italy from the late nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century. The purpose is to analyse the way in which the fantastic functions in a story—its ‘mechanics’—and to see how the fantastic evolved structurally over the first century of its existence in Italy. This investigation is carried out by the development of a new theoretical methodology together with the close reading of a selection of texts from four key Italian authors of fantastic literature.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is a historical overview of the emergence of the fantastic in Italy in the late nineteenth century up to the second half of the twentieth century; it examines the obstacles the fantastic has faced and some of the thematic and structural characteristics of texts which emerge. The second chapter is a literature review of the theoretical models used to analyse and understand the fantastic, followed by an outline of a new model, entitled Different Mimetics, which looks at the internal logic of the fantastic.

In the following four chapters Different Mimetics is applied to the study of a selection of fantastic texts by four authors. Chapter three focuses on Ugo Tarchetti, and shows that his stories are defined by coexistence and coincidence in both historical and thematic terms. Chapter four demonstrates how Giovanni Papini reverses the mechanics one might expect, and how his stories are structured as internal narratives. Chapter five looks at how Dino Buzzati’s stories are characterised by instability and stretched narrative paradigms; and finally, chapter six looks at how Italo Calvino’s narratives focus on world creation and paradox and how they question the stability of narrative paradigms.

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Summary

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General Review

This thesis begins with the premise that the fantastic does not set out to realistically represent the real world and should not therefore be measured against literature which does. Rather, mimesis applies to all representation and the fantastic is therefore simply a different type of mimesis, and should be considered for its own merit of creating coherent narratives which function by their own internal logic. In order to analyse how different components interact—the mechanics—within the confines of a story, a methodology to help dissect the text is necessary. Existing models are useful for analysing specific characteristics of the fantastic but often do not take into account the plurality and interconnectedness of different components. For example, a ghost story is not just about a ghost, but includes changed laws of the physical world, rules governing its movement, behaviour and degree of compatibility with the environment around it. What the methodology entitled *Different Mimetics* investigates is how all the components of a fantastic narrative interact, and it uses the work of four authors—Ugo

Tarchetti, Giovanni Papini, Dino Buzzati and Italo Calvino—as test cases. The secondary literature on the fantastic in Italy often attempts to trace literary prototypes or it considers the historical and cultural context of narratives. The purpose of this thesis is rather to say something new about the fantastic in Italy in mechanical terms using four important figures in the Italian tradition and an approach which focuses on how the fantastic operates.

In chapter one, I begin with a broad preliminary definition of the fantastic as a literature which articulates new realities and undermines familiar ones by means of impossible objects, paradoxes, and any number of signposts from a glossary of topoi including the double, madness, and vampires. Instead of defining the fantastic as either a genre or a mode, I give a definition using both concepts, structured in terms of a saussurean langue/parole opposition. This is followed by a historical overview of the fantastic in Italy which also looks at the trends of the stories that were published during the first century of the fantastic in Italy, from 1869 to the 1980s. There are two main reasons why the fantastic is late in coming to Italy. Firstly, there is no supernatural Romantic tradition in Italy, and secondly, the cultural focus is one of ethics, politics and nation which dominates Italian letters at the time of the Risorgimento and the Unification. During the late 1860s, a Milanese bohemian named Ugo Tarchetti publishes *Racconti fantastici* (1869), the first collection of fantastic stories in Italy. Reception was initially negative, but towards the end of the century, the rise of the paranormal and its place as a common cultural practice gives the fantastic a unique central position which was not to be repeated during its history. From the turn of the century onwards, the fantastic survives and develops in the shadow of the avant-gardes such as Futurism and Surrealism, and is often used as an experimental testing ground. Two events midway through the twentieth century are key to giving the

fantastic a sense of identity and cultural merit. Firstly, the prominent critic Gianfranco Contini edits and publishes *Italie magique* (1946), an anthology of fantastic stories written by Italian authors, and secondly, Italo Calvino publishes a trilogy of fantastic stories during the 1950s.

Chapter two is divided into two parts. Firstly, a literature review of current theories of the fantastic, and secondly an outline of a new approach, Different Mimetics. In the literature review I look at a number of key theories and the characteristics they identify as fantastic, including Todorov (1970) who looks at hesitation, Hume (1984: 21) who conceives of a 'departure from consensus reality' and Ceserani (1996) who acknowledges a wide range of possible characteristics and themes such as the double or madness. These three studies embody three of the main theoretical approaches to the fantastic: character and reader response (Todorov), models of scale (Hume), and identifiable signposts (Ceserani). I then discuss where these theories overlap and how they relate to each other. A small postscript to this first section discusses the feminine fantastic and the postmodern fantastic.

In the second section, I outline Different Mimetics whose initial claim is that by articulating the possible and impossible *the fantastic is constructed by adding and/or removing elements which question and problematize reality in narrative*. This is analysed by looking at what rules, objects, and boundaries are found in the text and how they fit together—the 'mechanics'. The type of environment or world is also considered. This model does not see any characteristic or element as inherently more fantastic than another; it rather depends on how the narrative is constructed. Together with the focus on how the fantastic operates internally, this approach attempts to overcome two fallacies in the critical literature: a tendency to set up a particular text as

paradigmatic example, and the notion that the fantastic falls short of a requirement of literature to represent the external, real world.

The authors in chapters three to six have been chosen because they are among the most important figures of the first century of the fantastic in Italy. There is not enough space in this thesis to cover all the fantastic texts by each author, so each chapter contains a selection of the most problematic texts, and they are organised thematically rather than chronologically, in terms of the degree to which their narratives worlds depart from reality.

Chapter three looks at Ugo Tarchetti, among the first to pen fantastic stories at the beginning of the period of interest in the paranormal around the time of the Unification. He is usually given the title of founder of the fantastic in Italy, but without any domestic models to follow, and drawing heavily from established nineteenth century figures, particularly Hoffmann and Poe, Tarchetti's stories are more characterised by imitation than by innovation. His output is also much smaller than that of his successors and this chapter therefore covers the totality of his fantastic stories, rather than a selection. I argue that the mechanics of Tarchetti's narrative operate by coincidence, in that various components coincide within the same space or time simultaneously, such as two minds in one body, or being both dead and alive at the same time. A second characteristic is coexistence. More than in the case of the other three authors, Tarchetti's narratives are bound up with realistic modes of representation, and he deploys a number of devices in order to balance between the real and the fantastic such as introductory considerations on the efficacy of the paranormal and pseudoscience, frequent date and time coordinates, such as 'Milan 1866', and particularly in the case of the *Racconti fantastici*, disclaimers which defer the source of the impossible. Stories are either received second-hand, or passed down

by a discovered manuscript. Responsibility for the fantastic is therefore deferred away from the narrator.

Giovanni Papini (chapter four) is a figurehead for the emergence of the fantastic in Italy in the early twentieth century. Recognised principally as a cultural figure responsible for the creation of, and contribution to, a number of journals including *Leonardo* (1903), and also known for his association with Marinetti and the Italian futurists, Papini is among the first writers to adopt the fantastic in a more systematic way, which he demonstrates through three collections: *Il tragico quotidiano* (1906), *Il pilota cieco* (1907) and *Parole e sangue* (1912). Papini is aware of the fantastic traditions of the nineteenth century from which he departs and explicitly states his differences to Poe by writing stories set in the mind not in an external narrative world, and by using play rather than terror. Mechanically, his stories are structured by the reversal of expected rules or topoi: for example, during a séance, spirits explore the human world not the other way around; and characters are dreamt, they are not the dreamers. A second mechanical characteristic is a delimited form of transcendence, rather than an unlimited and infinite impulse of transcendence characteristic of European Romanticism. Papini's stories are more games and puzzles than traditional nineteenth century narratives of ghosts, vampires, or terror. What I argue Papini contributes to the discourse of the fantastic is an exploration of how the fantastic which operates within a mind does not require external confirmation. Rather, the mechanics can be analysed regardless of the level on which the fantastic plays out.

In the later decades of the first half of the twentieth century, Dino Buzzati (chapter five) is one of only a few authors to whom the label 'fantastic author' can legitimately be applied due the quantity of stories he writes, and thus he demonstrates dedication to this type of literature rather than treating the fantastic as an occasional

divertissement or as a literary testing ground. As such, the texts in this chapter articulate a wide thematic range, including the fairytale, the absurd, and the uncanny, and Buzzati also produces some of the most problematic texts investigated by this thesis. Indeed the selection of texts occupies an extreme end of Buzzati's fantastic fiction. His wider opus is predominantly normalized, that is to say, there is little or no irruption of the impossible into his narrative worlds, which is important to mention because normalization is a general characteristic of the twentieth century whereas irruption is a characteristic of the nineteenth century. I firstly argue that Buzzati's stories are defined by a stretching of narrative paradigms both physical and cultural. For example, extended distance, roads, and buildings; and extensions of coincidence and cultural rules of hospitality. Secondly, Buzzati's stories are defined by instability caused by the degree to which details both factual and mechanical are removed from the texts. Through stretched paradigms and instability, Buzzati furthers the discussion of boundaries in fantastic literature.

Arguably the most important Italian writer of the fantastic since the late nineteenth century, Italo Calvino is responsible for bringing the fantastic to the fore at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. His thematic focus is the narrowest of all four of the principal authors being investigated in this thesis, essentially focusing on the fairytale and science-fiction, which can also be neatly separated by decade—the 1950s and 1960s respectively. Unlike the above authors, there is continuity between Calvino's science-fiction stories, where the ever-present protagonist Qfwfq witnesses the creation of planets, star systems and even the universe. In chapter six I argue that Calvino's fantastic is characterised by extremes of scale, paradox, erasure (what has been removed from the narrative), and an absence of irruption due the degree to which all the stories are normalized. Whereas in Buzzati,

normalization occurs because characters accept the impossible, in Calvino, the dimensions of each narrative paradigm often include the impossible thereby making the impossible possible. I also look at Calvino's criticism on the fantastic more generally and use it to locate Calvino's own works in a wider context. Although the least problematic author of the four, what Calvino contributes to fantastic literature is an exploration of the changing rather than the static nature of narrative paradigms.

I conclude that the fantastic has evolved mechanically from coincidence to reversal, to instability and to extremes of paradigms over the course of its first century of existence in Italy. The narrative worlds in which stories are set also progressively distance themselves from the familiar, and decreasingly depend on realistic modes of representation. Irruption wanes from Tarchetti onwards until it entirely disappears in Calvino. I also consider modal continuity and genre development in these four authors and I end by suggesting new directions for the thesis to expand.

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Introduction

The concept of and critical debate around the literary fantastic has existed since the late eighteenth century but only arrived in Italy, for particular cultural and political reasons, a century later. Since then, the fantastic has struggled to claim and own a specific status in Italian literature and to legitimate itself as a worthwhile endeavour. Over its short history, there have been a number of key moments and authors who have aided in this struggle but, on the whole, the fantastic has existed on the margins of Italian culture, as an occasional *divertissement* or as a literary testing ground.

Especially in its infancy, the discourse of the fantastic is limited, and, lacking a domestic source, it relied heavily on guidance from elsewhere. As a result of the influence of other national traditions, particularly of the nineteenth century, such as those of Britain, Germany, France and North America, the relationship between innovation and imitation is an important and recurrent issue in the Italian tradition. Tracing the literary prototypes and analysing the use of established traditional topoi are at the forefront of much of the criticism which tries to establish an authentic fantastic tradition in Italy.

As well as the question of originality, the hegemony of realism in the Italian tradition has created a historical reluctance to accept the fantastic. This still plays a hand in its marginalisation in the academic world. Although there has been recent critical reappraisal by Ceserani (1996), Amigoni (2004), Lazzarin (2004), Billiani and Sulis (2007), Hipkins (2007), Caltagirone and Maxia (2008), and Alpini (2009), further afield in more general encyclopaedias and readers of Italian literature the fantastic is restricted to a few passing references and is rarely a topic unto itself. This is because of how the fantastic was considered deficient according to the measure that realisms of

the nineteenth century applied to representations of the real world, a judgement which was also greatly responsible for the late arrival of the fantastic in Italy.

Elsewhere, the fantastic takes a more prominent position in literary studies through canonical authors such as Hoffmann, Poe, and Carroll to name but a few, none of whom are Italian, but many of whom are influential to Italian writers, particularly in the case of these three. The first to pen fantastic stories, Ugo Tarchetti, is an imitator, overshadowed by the foreign literary voices from whom he heavily draws. In his anthology of nineteenth century fantastic literature, even Calvino does not consider any compatriot worthy of inclusion, and it is not until the twentieth century that the fantastic begins to create an acknowledged literary space for itself.

The theory of the fantastic has received substantial critical focus, not least of all by Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* in 1970. Rather than a broad overview of the occurrence of the supernatural in literature, this landmark study focuses on the nature of the *relationship* between the supernatural and the real, by means of a sceptical reader who will hesitate between explanations. Despite its narrow application (strictly speaking, few texts fulfil its criteria), it has become a truism that all criticism on the fantastic begins with Todorov. Other prominent critics who look at the fantastic include Vax (1960) and Caillouis (1965) who look at character fear and irruption, Ceserani (1996), who investigates the fantastic historically, and Jackson (1981) who focuses on its function etymologically as literature which reveals something hidden.¹

In Italy, few critics looking at the fantastic maintain a theoretical axiom underpinning their analysis. Instead, their investigations adopt a historical approach, tracing the wider cultural context out of which a text emerges, often with an eye to

¹ For a detailed analysis of the etymology of fantastic and related terms such as fantasy, phantasy and imagination, see Lepschy (1989).

discovering the literary prototypes and genesis of that text in order to establish its place and importance. The approach can also be thematic, or author-based, and broad overviews are common.² Close readings occur less frequently, evidence of which can be demonstrated by the relative scarcity of secondary source references for individual stories in the later author chapters of this thesis. Establishing originality and acknowledging thematic breadth are certainly important undertakings for criticism, but they lack in being able to more effectively respond to the questions of why some fantastic narratives are more convincing than others, and particularly how the fantastic operates within each text.

The objective of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, to develop a methodology which deals specifically with the internal logic of fantastic texts, rather than their external correlation with reality. This is because of the premise this thesis begins with, that the fantastic does not set out to realistically represent the real world and therefore should not be measured by a yardstick of literature which does. Rather, fantastic narratives should be judged on their own merit, coherence, and logic, and to do so requires a new approach to analyse the mechanics of the fantastic. The second objective of this thesis

² A complete literature review is not possible here, but suffice it to mention a few important titles of studies which are not just single-author monographs. One of the earliest on the fantastic in Italy is Bonifazi (1982) which first considers the theories of Todorov, Freud, and Sartre, then gives a broad overview of the fantastic in Tarchetti, Buzzati and Pirandello. Farnetti (1988) concentrates on the early years of the fantastic in Italy. Studies more focused on literary prototypes include articles in Caltagirone and Maxia (2008) and Roda (2009), whose monograph is a collection of essays both author-specific and thematic (particularly focused on the double and the split body) from Tarchetti up to Papini. There is also Amigoni (2004) who looks at twentieth century authors like Savinio, Landolfi, Ortese and Tabucchi. Three recent studies worth mentioning which combine author-specific studies with thematic approaches are Bellotto (2003), Lazzarin (2004), and Alpini (2009). Bellotto focuses on authors who fall within the remit of 'surreal' such as Giorgio de Chirico, Bontempelli and Delfini; Lazzarin considers a wide range of aspects for each of his six authors such as psychoanalysis in Savinio, imitation in Buzzati, and ethical considerations of Primo Levi's work; and Alpini works on themes pertaining to a female fantastic in a number of authors from Serao to Capriolo. Hipkins (2007), together with Alpini, are two rare examples of studies dedicated to women writers of the fantastic. Zangrandi (2011) also considers women writers, but alongside more general historical and thematic considerations of the fantastic in Italy.

is to then apply that framework to the works of a number of Italian authors. By building on the secondary literature which already exists and by maintaining a theoretical axiom throughout, this thesis will contribute to a new understanding of the fantastic tradition in Italy. By analysing how the fantastic operates, it will 'reveal' something new about how the fantastic in Italy evolved in formal and not simply thematic or cultural terms over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. In the first, I give a preliminary definition of the fantastic before outlining a historical overview of the fantastic in Italy from the early nineteenth to the second half of the twentieth century. The second chapter is divided into two sections; in the first, I provide a literature review of the current theories of the fantastic; in the second, I outline my own theory of the fantastic. In the second part of the thesis, in chapters three to six, I apply that methodology to the texts of four Italian authors, each of whom plays an important role in the history of the fantastic: Ugo Tarchetti, Giovanni Papini, Dino Buzzati, and Italo Calvino.

Part I

1. The History of the Fantastic in Italy

Defining the Fantastic

The fantastic, however construed, is a difficult term to define, one whose meaning changes according to epoch, geographical location, artistic and philosophical current, and individual authorial interpretation. Herein lies part of the problem: depending on the definition used—the debate is replete with varying models—the fantastic in its different guises can be seen to stretch from the Classical era through to the present day. Just considering the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, what links Hoffmann, Poe, Gautier, Maupassant, Kafka, Tolkien, and Borges may not be immediately apparent, yet they all come under the label of ‘the fantastic’. Before discussing the presence of the fantastic in Italy, a preliminary definition is therefore necessary.

In his study of the Italian tradition, Ferdinando Amigoni rightly notes a critical cliché in fantastic criticism that ‘[s]ono molte le monografie che si aprono con l’affermazione: «non esiste una definizione precisa del fantastico»’ (2004: 9). In less absolute terms, a single definition is an oversimplification in any literary discourse, but it is certainly the case with the fantastic as much of what is intended by ‘fantastic’ changes because it is not concerned with stating what is already known, but more with articulating the limits of the possible and the impossible. As a result, two fallacies abound in the critical literature. Firstly, there is a tendency to construct simple definitions. This is by no means a bad approach; a simple premise which gradually becomes more complicated is a more useful analytical tool than beginning with a complex model. The problem instead lies with the impulse of exclusion fostered by simplicity: a collection of simple definitions which all focus on different aspects of the

fantastic makes it difficult to gain a sense of coherence, as the overlap between models can be non-existent. Thus defining the fantastic as 'hesitation' (Todorov 1975: 33), an irruption into the everyday (Caillois 1965: 161), 'a diametric reversal of the ground rules' (Rabkin 1976: 42) or a literature of subversion (Jackson 1981) are all valid observations but cannot be used as totalising principles.³ This means that different approaches can remain isolated, both excluding and excluded from the scope of neighbouring models.

Corollary to this restriction emerges the second fallacy: a tendency to reduce the fantastic to a single and central characteristic. The justification for this is understandable: using one yardstick when dealing with impossible objects, contradictions and paradoxes makes criticism easier. However, it is also more superficial because it overlooks complexity in the work. Models which look for one characteristic invariably propose a single text or a select few as exemplars against which to measure all others, which results in a hierarchy whereby texts are deemed inferior to that ideal. Todorov and Rabkin are both guilty of this, citing James' *The Turn of the Screw* and Carroll's *Alice* books respectively as models if not yardsticks of fantastic literature. The fact that these two critics use a different single characteristic (hesitation and an inverted world respectively) demonstrates the flaw in this approach because it begs the question of why one characteristic should be more important than another when defining the fantastic.

It is therefore more productive to see the fantastic not in terms of isolated models or measured according to a single text, but as part of a larger discussion where different themes, purposes, and characteristics interact. Therefore, throughout this thesis the word 'fantastic' will be used as an umbrella term to firstly encompass the

³ Some change the term itself: in her recent comparative study of Chinese and Western fantastic literature, Fanfan Chen coins the term 'fantasticism' (2007: 39).

fairytale, Surrealism,⁴ the gothic, the absurd, magical realism and even in some cases (such as Italo Calvino) science fiction, not to mention fantasy.⁵ Secondly, it will encompass the different theories of the fantastic, including the model proposed in the next chapter. Broadly speaking, the fantastic is a literature which challenges representations of both the real world and the fictional world, proposing new realities and undermining familiar ones by means of impossible objects, paradoxes, contradictions, and a whole glossary of different signposts such as the double, magic, nothingness, ghosts, madness, vampires, and mythical creatures. The above lists are by no means exhaustive as no single characteristic defines the fantastic, and the presence of such signposts do not automatically denote the fantastic: they merely signal its possibility, and therefore are meant as a guide to help better map this kind of literature.

Whether to label the fantastic a mode—an abstract underlying and far-reaching concept—or a genre—a more concrete and historically located literary type—is a subsequent and common problem when defining the fantastic.⁶ However, it is reductive to think in terms of one or the other because both add different dimensions; instead, the relationship between the two is the salient consideration. To this end, Saussure's model of *langue* and *parole* (1983: 25-32) is a useful analogy, where mode correlates with *langue*—an underlying structure—and genre with *parole*—the representation or utterance. In other words, some elements of the fantastic are structural; others are formal. For example, paradox—the coexistence of two contradictory elements A and

⁴ Not strictly according to the narrow Bretonian meaning, but in a wider more commonplace adjectival '[...] uso quotidiano come sinonimo di irreal, magico, strano, assurdo' (Binni 2003: 15).

⁵ Not all critics would accept this approach of conflating the two terms. See for example Attebery (1992: 20).

⁶ For an example of where critics stand, Ceserani (1996: 8; 2007: 41) and Jackson (1981: 13-60) argue that the fantastic is a mode; for Todorov (1975: 3) and Whitehead (2006: 1) it is a genre. Attebery's liminal approach proposes a fantasy genre and a fantastic mode (1992: 1-17).

not-A—is a structural fantastic component typically present in forms such as the ghost—there and not-there—and the vampire—dead and un-dead. Likewise, abstract concepts like impossibility, the inexpressible, and the inexplicable, constitute the mode of the fantastic (or modal fantastic), whereas the above glossary of signposts constitutes its genre forms. Some are open to debate: nothingness and magic, for example, could exist in either category. This relational approach acknowledges the underlying and recurrent issue of the possible and impossible which pervades the history of the fantastic whilst concurrently showing that such elements change over time. In the case of Italy, this can mean a latent mythological and ludic fantastic in Ariosto, a post-Enlightenment fantastic from the Unification onwards, or a twentieth century intellectual and ludic fantastic.

The reason why such a relationship—rather than a separation—between mode and genre is important is due to differences in what each stands for. On the one hand, for example, analysing and resolving inexpressible modal elements can undermine their very nature, for once they have been expressed in clear terms, they cease to be inexpressible, a point Corso makes regarding how ambiguity is undermined when its meaning is clarified (1993: 7). On the other, however, genre criticism is concerned with more concrete manifestations of types and devices, locating the fantastic in time, place, author and text, an impulse antithetical to that of the mode, which resists such an attempt at definition and clarification.

In other words, there is a central contradiction: attempting to apply a rigid framework in order to delimit the fantastic risks negating modal parts of its essence. Representing concepts which go beyond the limits of thought and language demonstrates how the theory will be incomplete and imperfect, but if so, how then can a more concrete and historically located genre be identified? To what extent can a

partial model be applied to analyse a ghost or a vampire? This is not a problem applicable only to Italy, but to all writers of the fantastic of all national literatures. Theorising the fantastic and identifying its real-world form—the representations in the text and also extra-textually in the world around the author—are opposing impulses. Resolving the conflict between these two impulses is a necessary and central obstacle to overcome, and it is interesting to note that in trying to identify the fantastic, the most widely used theory (Todorov's) is precisely a model of not knowing, of deferral, suspended identification and uncertainty.

In practice, a solution requires a dialogue between model and text along with its historical and cultural coordinates rather than a direct transposition of one over the other, meaning that neither can be said to assert authority; such an approach moreover avoids setting up a single text as a paradigm example. In the case of Italy, there is no single thread, author or text which underpins the fantastic in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but instead a multitude of factors, some of which link together, others which arise independently. In order to provide a broader historical context to the author studies, the following discussion will map some of the different moments and forms of the fantastic, tracing its evolution from the late nineteenth century to a turning point in Italian fantastic literature, the publication of Calvino's trilogy *I nostri antenati* (1960).

From Dishevelled Roots to 'Realist Fairytale'

The arrival of the fantastic in Italy during the second half of the nineteenth century marks the beginning of a complex and convoluted evolution from the Scapigliati to the present day because of differences both cultural and chronological to the traditions of France, Germany, Britain and North America. Chronologically, the fantastic in Italy begins late. Mücke argues that the modern European fantastic begins in France in 1772 with the publication of Cazotte's *Le diable amoureux* (Mücke 2003: 18; 2008: 412)—Cazotte is 'le précurseur français' (Castex 1951: 25-41). The fantastic is therefore a post-Enlightenment phenomenon because of the historical emergence of a concept of the impossible with which to contrast the possible, and there is a lag of nearly a century before its arrival—it is an *arrival* and not an independent creation—in Italy in the 1860s. This is not to say, however, that the fantastic maintains this lag throughout its history.

In cultural terms, the main reason for the late arrival of the fantastic in Italy is a Romantic tradition unlike those of Great Britain, France and Germany. In Italy, after Madame de Stael's 1816 article *Sulla maniera e l'utilità delle traduzioni*, Romanticism was an attempt to innovate Italian literature (Carsaniga 1996: 402) which aspired towards freedom from artistic and social codes such as those of classical art. There was also a focus on the concept of Nation, which in the case of Italy meant emancipation and the Risorgimento (Getto et al. 1972: 446). What were, however, absent compared to other Romantic traditions were the supernatural, gothic, absolute or infinite components—which Lattarulo concisely terms 'vita cosmica' (1995: 124)—that laid the cultural bedrock for the fantastic elsewhere.

Tutta la tematica "nera", i temi satanici, macabri, perversi, rimangono pressoché esclusi dall'orizzonte del nostro Romanticismo, che si trova condizionato dalla

realtà politica e dal fervore risorgimentale per un verso, e dalla stessa secolare tradizione classica, che rendeva troppo estranei questi nuovi spunti d'indagine, per altro verso (Getto et al. 1972: 450).

This sentiment is echoed by Finné, who argues that in Italy a Romantic thread which, although '[s]uperficiel' and '[p]artiel', was an 'amie des émeutes et des révolutions' and was more present than another, transcendental and apolitical Romanticism, 'plus artiste et mystérieuse [...] indifférente au monde extérieur, donc à la politique et motivée surtout par la rupture de l'équilibre entre le moi et l'univers' (1975: 11).⁷ Gina Martegiani goes so far as to claim that Italian Romanticism did not exist 'perchè i caratteri di quel movimento letterario a cui fu dato tal nome [il romanticismo italiano] sono addirittura *anti-romantic*' (1908: vii; original emphasis), a view countered by Ceserani who argues that it 'certainly existed, but nonetheless lacked the depth and breadth of themes present in other European romantic literature' (2007: 42). Romanticism is thus not a single homogenous body of concepts; and in Italy, the impulse to modernise Italian letters culminates with Manzoni. 'Prova suprema della letteratura romantica italiana è il romanzo, ma non il romanzo *poetico* di F. Schlegel e di Novalis, bensì il romanzo *storico* del Manzoni' (Puppo 1985: 19; original emphasis). It is, as Hipkins rightly points out, difficult to highlight just how much of an effect Manzoni has on Italian literature and by extension the possibility of a fantastic tradition: '[t]he impact of Italy's first 'great novel', *I promessi sposi*, which appealed so forcefully to a nation in bud, was one of the reasons why Italy's identity was tied up with a predominantly realist project' (2007: 24).

Not only did the fantastic have to counter the literary success of Manzoni's work, but was also subject to his direct criticism. In a letter to Cesare D'Azeglio, Manzoni condemns the supernatural components of European Romanticism as 'un non

⁷ Leopardi's poem *L'infinito* (1819) certainly demonstrates a presence of the transcendental and absolute in Italian letters, but it is a single poem, not an entire tradition.

so qual guazzabuglio di streghe, di spettri, un disordine sistematico, una ricerca dello stravagante' (1991: 254), with no moral or literary value (Ghidetti 1985 vii; Reim 1992: 5) because the literature of the period was burdened with socio-political concerns of discovering a national identity (Cavalli 2002: 16), a requirement that was to continue to marginalise the fantastic over the course of its history. Reim also highlights the role that the Enlightenment played in preventing the fantastic from taking root, 'l'ipoteca della ragione illuminista sul romanticismo italiano è ancora talmente forte da cancellarne il lato «notturno», la parte «gotica» e «nera»' (1992: 6), a paradigm of rationalism that Raimondi argues goes back as far as the eighteenth century: '[s]oprattutto in Italia, dove il Romanticismo si mantiene entro i termini lucidi della moderazione, esiste un chiaro rapporto di continuità con il pensiero del razionalismo settecentesco' (1997: 42). The dominance of reason not only prevented the creation of a fantastic tradition, but also further demonstrates how the fantastic was considered antithetical to reason, or irrational, as Manzoni makes clear.

Another prominent literary voice in the denouncement of the fantastic is Leopardi, whose importance is undeniable—Lattarulo argues—in marginalising a more macabre and darker fantastic which prevented any sort of transcendence, and instead subjected the fantastic to parody and irony (1996: 189). Manzoni calls the Romantic supernatural 'un disordine', lacking order, in the same way it lacked reason in a country, as Leopardi maintained, more dominated by rationality than other European countries: 'troppo è noto che nessuna delle tre grandi nazioni che, come dicono i giornali, marchent à la tête de la civilisation, *crede agli spiriti meno dell'italiana*' (Leopardi 1977: 1122-1123; my emphasis). This comment made in 1819 demonstrates Leopardi's awareness of the pervasive nature of superstition in popular culture, as well as the frequent tendency by gothic authors such as Walpole and Radcliffe to set their

stories in a mysterious and shrouded Italy. However, within Italy, the consensus was that the fantastic was deficient, unworthy, and it thus lacked the endorsement of the literary establishment. The preoccupation with ideas of the Unification, as well as the realist and historical literature headed by Manzoni, all underpinned by an Enlightenment paradigm—which in turn met no resistance due to an absent opposing supernatural Romantic paradigm—effectively barred the fantastic from Italy for the first half of the nineteenth century.

It is within a rapidly modernising and unified Italy that the fantastic first emerges in the works of the Scapigliati, and it is because of this new national identity that the fantastic is indeed able to emerge. 'The difficult origins of the fantastic in Italy are inevitably bound up with the difficult origins of a national space and literature: as such, it is only regarded as establishing any roots in Italy around unification' (Hipkins 2007: 23). The Scapigliati are a 'loosely knit group of self-styled bohemians' (Dombroski 1999: 460) who, when confronted with the technological innovations and scientific progress of a modernising Milan, react by transgressing and deforming the natural (Finzi 1980: 9). Indeed, the gothic tone of many Scapigliati texts is unsurprising, as the gothic has widely been read as a reaction to the spread of industrialisation (Caesar 2007: 115 n.21). The Scapigliati are at heart Romantics born too late and in the wrong country, but they are also critical of the world they inhabited: they are not apolitical and the fantastic stories produced at this time rebel against the contemporary world. Thus the Romantic tradition that the Scapigliati are trying to instil is not identical with its original form, it is a hybrid. Finzi notes that:

il "racconto nero" degli Scapigliati in fondo, poi, tanto nero non è. E non per calcolata prudenza o per mancanza d'invenzione, ma semplicemente (ancora una volta) per quel guardare alla realtà "altra" con l'occhio rivolto a "questa" realtà: insomma indagando, sì, il sogno, l'ombra, quanto di oscuro e inspiegabile è nell'esistere, l'extravisuale (non si vede ma c'è...), l'oltremondo e

certi fenomeni occulti [...] *ma sempre con l'aria di chi non perde mai di vista quella forma del sensibile che ci troviamo a toccare/vedere/vivere* (Finzi 1980: 9-10; my emphasis).

This duality of the phenomenal world and an extra-sensorial 'other' world demonstrates a coexistence characteristic of many representations of the fantastic. However, such a generalisation like Finzi's does not account for the individual tastes and the directions the various Scapigliati took, for they are not a unified movement: 'their initial cohesion was shattered by the centrifugal force of their acute individualism' (Carsaniga 1978: 337), paralleling the model of the alienated Romantic poet. The late arrival of the fantastic does not translate as a direct transposition of foreign traditions and figures but rather manifests as a hybrid of external influences and the contemporary Italian literary scene, and this theme of hybridity permeates every aspect of the fantastic throughout its history in Italy.

Being the first to pen fantastic stories, the Scapigliati are without domestic models to follow, adapt and improve upon (Lazzarin 2004: 32-34), which means that they have to look further afield to the literary offerings produced elsewhere, to authors who had dominated fantastic literature since the beginning of the nineteenth century: European and North American voices such as Hoffmann—who Calvino argues is synonymous with the first half of the nineteenth century fantastic tradition (1995b: 1657)—Poe, Maupassant, and Gautier. This 'fascino delle brume nordiche' (Desideri 1989: 969) on the part of Italian authors is reflected, ironically, by the similar impulse of mystery and intrigue which drew Walpole and Radcliffe to Italy. Critics differ over which author or tradition is most influential to late nineteenth century Italian writers—Ceserani argues for the important impact of Gautier (1996: 122) whilst Melani highlights the importance of Poe (2009: 6)—but such an argument can only really be useful at the level of individual authors and texts. Acknowledging the underlying fact that Italian

fantastic texts do not have domestic models is the salient point. Thus when Roda argues that Ugo Tarchetti is the 'vero padre del genere fantastico in Italia' (2009: 11), this is true, but up to a point: merely from a diachronic perspective and not in terms of any literary authority. Indeed, Tarchetti unscrupulously draws from abroad (Bonifazi 1982: 79), and the influence of outside sources continues to play a role even as far as Calvino, who acknowledges the debt he owes Poe (Ghidetti 1987: 51). This is not to say that Tarchetti does not expand the fantastic, his collection entitled *Racconti fantastici* (1869) is the first of its kind in Italy, but his efforts are overshadowed by fantastic texts further afield.

The need for foreign influences in order to expand the literary discourse, and taking into account the youth of the fantastic, leads Lazzarin to argue that Italy does not have a nineteenth century tradition (2008a: 24), a sentiment echoed by Papini and Calvino. However, it is tempting to argue that Papini's is merely a knee-jerk reaction in line with avant-garde futurist rhetoric which claims to deny the influence of the past. In *L'esperienza futurista* Papini claims that 'io, come artista, come scrittore, ho creato un genere, *nuovo in Italia*, di storie assurde, inverosimili, e irreali' (1961: 876; my emphasis). Calvino on the other hand refuses to include any Italian fantastic authors in his anthology *Racconti fantastici dell'Ottocento* (1983) 'solo per obbligo di presenza' (1995b: 1665). The size and impact of the fantastic in Italy is certainly smaller and less developed in the nineteenth than in the twentieth century, but whether there is a complete absence of a tradition is debatable.

Before the turn of the century there are other moments to note, but the evolution of the fantastic should not be seen in purely linear and consequential terms. Fantastic texts of the era of Decadentismo such as *Malombra* (1881) by Antonio Fogazzaro are not a direct response to those of Scapigliatura. Rather, the fantastic in the late

nineteenth century arises out of a literary scene replete with decadent and Scapigliati influences (and others), not to mention those of foreign fantastic texts, and the focus should be on the individual output, not necessarily the literary currents of the time. Hipkins concurs: '[t]he fact is that there is a vein of the Italian fantastic to be uncovered which lies with individuals rather than movements' (2007: 23). A corollary argument against seeing the fantastic according to a movement-based approach is that it implies a goal, a set of conventions within which a movement's exponents attempt to remain, or an absolute—as is often the case with the avant-garde—to which writers aspire, both of which denote structures of varying rigidity which in theoretical terms undermine the modal fantastic. In historical terms, the fantastic is not a movement in Italy because its presence is instead ephemeral, its identity unclear, and its output small, but this is not to deny that literary and cultural movements affected the environment surrounding the production of fantastic texts.

Amidst the gothic and macabre currents of the late nineteenth century emerges a noteworthy text which becomes one of Italy's most famous fantastic exports (Calvino 1995b: 1681-1682). Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1880-1883), by combining fairytale with a strong didactic element, is quickly taken up as a staple of childhood education, an Italian *Bildungsroman* (Dombroski 1999: 471).⁸ The fact that it is originally published as a newspaper serial demonstrates both the level of industrialisation capable of distributing the paper and also the level of literacy in its readership, but this only partly responds to the question of the status of fairy and folk tales more generally in Italy. Lattarulo proposes that in the nineteenth century there is also a magical tradition of folktales, local beliefs, and old stories which is part of the everyday:

⁸ For a further discussion of the evolution of fantasy literature for children in Italy, see Myers (2012).

il fantastico e il meraviglioso non sono posti in opposizione con l'abituale e il quotidiano e non sono vissuti come una rischiosa avventura individuale di ricerca dell'illimitato. Il fantastico [...] è piuttosto quello del magismo, delle fiabe popolari, delle credenze locali, delle antiche storie paurose (1996: 192).

However, this fantastic exists as an undercurrent of popular culture, and as such is marginalised by being part of an oral rather than a written practice from which Italian bourgeois authors could draw, revealing a sociological divide which prevents the transmission of culture from the peasant illiterate masses to the ruling and literate classes. The direction is only top-down (Colin 1990: 84), meaning that superstitions and local beliefs remain in the backwaters of Italian culture. These oral tales are later collected, firstly by Capuana in *C'era una volta* (1882), and then by Calvino in *Fiabe italiane* (1956) but Italian folktales are not a source for fantastic texts in Italy. In the case of Collodi, it is no coincidence that he translates Perrault into Italian (published as *Racconti delle Fate* in 1875), who together with the Grimm brothers, are the canonical voices of the fairytale in the nineteenth century. In the same way that the Scapigliati draw from Hoffmann and Poe, so too does Collodi draw from Perrault. As with the gothic and macabre, the fairytale in its written form is also imported into Italy.

Between the Unification and the turn of the century, positivism, the dominant mode of philosophical thought in Italy, is transformed and 'fantastic literature underwent a radical modernization' (Traill 1996: 138). From being a philosophy of empiricism—whereby the phenomenal world is understood in terms of sensorial data—the materialist scope of positivism widens to include the impossible realm of the netherworld, what Traill terms the 'paranormal mode' (1996: 17). The natural and supernatural are not considered mutually exclusive—clairvoyance, telepathy and precognition are taken as physically possible—because the laws of the possible are extended to include the scientifically unapproved (Traill 1996: 17-18). For this reason,

in Italy, science, and particularly scientific psychology, had great difficulty separating itself from the supernatural (Guerriero 2001: 70).

Instead of rejecting the supernatural resolutely, positivism is used to attribute it a materialist explanation (Colin 1990: 89): an extreme positivism denoting a coexistence between the fantastic and the real. The dialogue between the fantastic and positivism not only denotes an acceptance of the marginalised fantastic by the central positivist paradigm but also, by attributing an explanation to impossible elements which irrupt into the narrative world, normalizes the fantastic, making it part of an everyday experience. This pseudoscientific refashioning of positivism is, as Biondi succinctly argues in the introduction to Ruchin's study, 'un cavallo di troia nella fortezza dei saperi positivi' (2011: 10). Nevertheless it is also '[u]n fantastico riportato se non alla ragione, almeno a una spiegazione' (2011: 10), an explanatory not an ambiguous fantastic.

The normalizing tendency present in both the fairytale and the paranormal, which counters a central tenant of gothic fiction—terror when confronted with an inexplicable and sudden irruption, as opposed to fright at the *known* results of a séance—is argument to account for a weaker Italian gothic compared to other European traditions, one reinforced by considerations such as historical lateness and a dominant Enlightenment paradigm. As Ihring and Wolfzettel note, this new positivism undermines the fundamentals of the traditional fantastic (2003: 12), and to this end the vampire, which along with the ghost is the other major irruptive theme of the nineteenth century, is hard to find. Tardiola (1991) outlines a modest tradition in Italy—very discreet, as Lacroix puts it (1993: 111)—which, apart from a few exceptions, for example Franco Mistrali's *Il vampiro* (1869), all appear in the twentieth, not nineteenth century, such as Giuseppe Tonsi's *Il vampiro* (1904), Capuana's *Un vampiro* (1907) and Enrico Boni's *Vampiro* (1908). Ihring (2003) highlights a few nineteenth century

titles with vampiric tones, such as Tarchetti's *I fatali* and *Fosca* (both 1869), but it is difficult to label them 'vampire stories'.

The popularity of spiritualism in all circles of Italian society during this period makes it a part of social reality: séances are attended by the likes of Mazzini, Garibaldi and positivist scientists such as Cesare Lombroso (Foni 2007: 38; see also Colin 1990: 89)—figures whose real-world and scientific preoccupations otherwise symbolise a resistance to the fantastic. One author who documents this social reality is the verista Capuana who, although a sceptic, is fascinated by mystery (Farnetti 1988: 18) and many of his stories chronicle the paranormal within society, collected in a volume called *Novelle inverosimili* (1999). The title infers Capuana's scepticism but also demonstrates how acceptance of the supernatural in terms of this extreme positivism is not universal. The binary opposition of scepticism and acceptance is a motif in Capuana's fantastic fiction sometimes represented by his characters, for example Mongori and Giorgio in *Un vampiro* (1907) or the recurrent figure of the sceptic Dr Maggioli who cannot deny witnessing the supernatural through empirical sensorial input, such as in *Il busto* (1900), *La conquista dell'aria* (1900), *La redenzione dei capolavori* (1900), *L'invisibile* (1900), and *La evocatrice* (1902). Although Maggioli does express both fright and wonder at some of the events presented before him, they are always recounted through a framing device (a salon) where he casually speaks of his adventures to those around. Capuana demonstrates how during the era of extreme positivism, rather than reacting against a paradigm of bourgeois reality, the fantastic is *part of* that dominant paradigm of reality. Instead of being the 'underside [...] of realism' (Jackson 1981: 25), the fantastic is at the forefront of what is considered real, a culturally dominant position which will not be repeated: this late nineteenth and early twentieth century period marks the golden age of the fantastic in Italy.

Such a correspondence between real external events and their representation in fantastic texts is rare, a correspondence Ceserani rightly argues should not be looked for (1996: 104-105) because the fantastic does not set out to accurately document concrete historical reality. However, in the case of stories which represent the paranormal, this correspondence is exceptional. Naturally, Capuana is not the only author to write about spiritualism, but his status as a *verista* makes the correlation all the more important.

Futurism, launched in 1909 by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti proclaims a love of danger, technology, violence, and destruction—particularly towards icons of culture (Marinetti 1983: 10-11). The avant-garde, however, is not synonymous with the fantastic although it is certainly conducive to the growth of fantastic literary production. Avant-garde movements propose manifestos, and outline their aims and ideologies. Again, clear intentions denote the kind of stability which undermines aspects of the fantastic, but a second and more important corollary factor has to do with the tendency of avant-garde movements to aspire towards absolutes or goals (the best example being ‘*surréalisme absolu*’ (Breton 1962: 40)), meaning that the reach of the movement is limited by that goal which exponents claim to have reached. The fantastic, by contrast, functions as ‘any *departure* from consensus reality’ (Hume 1984: 21; my emphasis): it is rather open-ended and unlimited.

The correlation between fantastic and futurist texts is instead due to a shared tendency towards innovation. The relationship between Futurism and the fantastic is not one of dependence but instead of *facility*. While the advance guard of Futurism with ‘*il salto mortale, lo schiaffo ed il pugno*’ (Marinetti 1983: 10) creates its own literary space, the fantastic follows behind in its shadow. Some of the Futurists wrote fantastic stories, but it is important to note that it is problematic to label them ‘futurist fantastic

stories', as there is no necessary link between the fantastic and Futurism; rather these are fantastic stories written by Futurists. Marinetti's own *Mafarka il futurista* (1909) combines both Futurism and the fantastic as does Aldo Palazzeschi's *Il codice di Perelà* (1911). The most prolific writer of fantastic stories among the Futurists is Giovanni Papini, and the three collections *Il tragico quotidiano* (1906), *Il pilota cieco* (1907), and *Parole e sangue* (1912) predate his associations with the Futurists. He is first a fantastic writer, then a Futurist, and the fact that such texts are by an Italian author and an extension of an innovative Italian avant-garde movement gives more weight to the notion of an Italian fantastic tradition rather than one based on the imitation of foreign examples that characterised the nineteenth century.

The next step in the history of the fantastic occurs with the rise of another avant-garde movement, Surrealism. Launched in France in 1924 by its creator André Breton, there is, however, no surrealist movement in Italy (Fontanella 1983: 9) for two main reasons.

- 1) una ragione politica: l'Italia era la patria di una delle più forti dittature di destra, e l'autarchia proclamata da Mussolini, la sua perenne ricerca di tutto quanto fosse «nazionale», «italiano», lasciava poco spazio alle voci d'oltralpe;
- 2) una ragione più propriamente culturale: l'avversione profonda, ed il rigetto che la psicoanalisi aveva trovato in Italia,⁹ anche da parte dei critici più accorti e sensibili: valga Benedetto Croce come esempio (Urgnani 1991: 96).

Political and cultural disapproval notwithstanding, it is in 1940 with the publication of a special edition of the journal *Prospettive* edited by Curzio Malaparte that Surrealism comes to a wider public attention, well after the heyday of Surrealism in France.¹⁰ Giorgio and Andrea de Chirico (the latter better known by his pseudonym Alberto Savinio) are the only Italians directly involved in the French Surrealist movement and

⁹ Indeed psychoanalysis does not make a real cultural impact until the post-war years (Gordon 2005: 144).

¹⁰ For a further discussion of the influence of Surrealism in Italian letters see Raffi (1986) and Cirillo (2000).

indeed Savinio is included in Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1940). Due to the resistance to importing non-Italian culture, one reason why Surrealism entered Italy before the fall of Fascism is because Malaparte made Surrealism out to be *Italian* (and Greek) in terms of part of a Classical legacy, a tactic Fontanella calls a 'goffo tentativo di accaparramento nazionalistico' (1983: 19), where Savinio and his brother are the discoverers of Italian Surrealism:

è innegabile che il surrealismo (non il nome ma la cosa) è prima greco e italiano che francese. [...] Ma in Grecia e in Italia è natura, (ottimamente Alberto Savinio, il cui nome è legato agli inizi del surrealismo, con quello di altri italiani, quali Giorgio de Chirico e Carrà, identifica il surrealismo degli antichi Greci e Latini [...])(Malaparte 1940: 3).

One author who has a subtler and less well defined relationship with Futurism and Surrealism is Massimo Bontempelli whose prose exhibits the kind of fragmentation common to the Futurist movement with texts such as *La Vita intensa* (1920) and *La Vita operosa* (1921), but also characteristics which align more to what would become known as surreal, such as in *La scacchiera davanti allo specchio* (1921)(Urgnani 1991: 7, 58). His own theory of magical realism in 1925, in merging the terms realism and magical parallels the very same transgression of the boundaries of reality that the surrealists made using psychoanalysis. However, Baldacci convincingly argues that, '[i]n quanto cosa precisa, il surrealismo di Breton ha ben poco a che fare col novecentismo bontempelliano'. Most notably, 'Bontempelli non rinunciò mai allo stile; il surrealismo lo superò nella scrittura automatica' (1967: 136).

Surrealism in Italy further expands the literary space of the fantastic moulded and delimited by the Scapigliati, extreme positivism and more indirectly by the Futurists. Consequently, *Italie Magique*, an anthology of fantastic stories first published in French

in 1946,¹¹ is Gianfranco Contini's response to bretonian Surrealism (Sica 2008: 613) and an attempt to demonstrate an Italian offshoot in the panorama of Surrealism and the fantastic in the twentieth century (Bellotto 2003: 25). This anthology is a turning point, not only because it is the first of its type, but also because of the critical attention afforded to the fantastic by a prominent Italian critic. The volume contains stories by Massimo Bontempelli, Aldo Palazzeschi, Antonio Baldini, Nicola Lisi, Cesare Zavattini, Enrico Morovich, Alberto Moravia, and Tommaso Landolfi, but Savinio is conspicuously absent and for one reason: his links to the French surrealists mark him out as 'sostanzialmente estraneo alla tradizione italiana del surreale' (Bellotto 2003: 26). On the one hand, therefore, he is heralded in *Prospettive* for being the discoverer of Italian Surrealism; on the other, Savinio is considered too French by Contini, making him a liminal case. In his preface to the Italian edition, Contini outlines the conditions for an Italian surreal tradition.

Si suole assegnare alle brume del Settentrionale e alle fate morgane dell'Oriente il monopolio della sensibilità magica in letteratura. *Nel paese dell'intelligenza il surrealismo fu un tentativo di scaricare l'intelletto con procedure essenzialmente intellettuali [...].* Nel cuore dell'Occidente, dove la *lucidità del controllo è ineliminabile*, è possibile un'altra soluzione, se si passa dalla disposizione lirica alla narrativa: *isolare l'eccezione attraverso i filtri dell'ironia.* [...] Questi autori sembrano riannodarsi in qualche modo *alla vena magica che percorre tutta l'Italia rinascimentale [...]. Ecco del magico senza magia, del surreale senza surrealismo [...].* E i testi che ne risultano sono non meno piacevolmente leggibili che *espressivamente validi* (1988: Prefazione; my emphasis).

The French surrealist practitioner's ability to bypass reason and embrace irrationality is an unfeasible task to Italian writers for whom rationality is inalienable due to a perennial paradigm of rationality on the peninsula—an argument advanced for the nineteenth century (see above p. 13)—, and the sombre surrealist gravitas of the unknown is

¹¹ The translated edition is for all intents and purposes identical with the original French, and that Italian edition is included in the bibliography.

replaced by ironic pretence—a sceptical awareness—by Italian writers. Guerricchio even suggests an alternative title of ‘*Italie comique*’ (1993: 31) to Contini’s original *Italie magique* to better reflect the comic elements in the anthology. The dominant presence of reason a century before, which was responsible for preventing the fantastic from developing, is acknowledged here influencing the form the Italian conceptualisation of the surreal took. Lucidity and irony are foregrounded, paralleling an approach to the fantastic that Calvino proposes, one that requires rationality: ‘il fantastico [...] richiede mente lucida, controllo della ragione sull’ispirazione istintiva o inconscia [...]; richiede di saper nello stesso tempo distinguere e mescolare finzione e verità, gioco e spavento, fascinazione e distacco’ (1995b: 1676-1677). Calvino outlines a post-Enlightenment, rational approach to the fantastic, and Contini identifies rationality coupled with irony as features which underpin the Italian texts in his anthology. The complementary assertions of Contini and Calvino point to a prominent and widespread characteristic of the twentieth century, an intellectual fantastic ‘un uso intellettuale’ (Calvino 1995a: 267) which functions ‘come gioco, ironia, ammicco’ (267). Where the fantastic in Italy was forever trailing behind a gothic tradition further afield during the nineteenth century, Contini identifies a trend which is more in synch with the intellectual and ludic fantastic currents of the twentieth century.

The relationship between Fascism and the fantastic is not a straightforward one of censorship, as Barberi Squarotti also argues, ‘il fantastico della narrativa degli anni fra il 1930 e la seconda guerra mondiale non ha legami diretti con la situazione politica del fascismo’ (1984: 209). While Squarotti is here arguing the case for literary allegory as a means to bypass censorship (209), there are also restrictions directly imposed on the wider culture of the fantastic by the regime. Fascist cultural policies quell the fascination with northern gothic countries (see Desideri, above, p. 15), because,

Cigliana argues, it is considered to undermine the health of the Latin race. She adds that

Mussolini aveva infatti imposto la chiusura dei circoli, delle associazioni, delle riviste di metapsichica e aveva determinato la messa al bando delle ricerche sul paranormale. Le tentazioni demiurgiche e il velleitarismo magico che avevano percorso in profondità la cultura italiana dell'Ottocento [...] si erano rivolt[i] verso altri orizzonti di gloria, tutta guerriera e nazionalistica. Il mondo dei maghi studiosi e degli esoteristi utopisti aveva concluso il suo tempo (Cigliana 2002: 20).

In this way the extended positivism of the paranormal is suppressed for more earthly political ends; once again, the fantastic is marginalised by a cultural hegemony of the real. However, in terms of literary output, as opposed to paranormal practices, it is difficult to speak of a decrease in publications because the fantastic is still an ephemeral literary type, and so there is little consistent output by which to measure an effect of censorship. In fact, the later years of Fascism represent a particularly productive period for Italian fantastic literature because it coincides with the early writing careers of two writers to whom the label 'fantastic writer' can legitimately apply because of their consistent and significant output: Dino Buzzati and Tommaso Landolfi. During this period Buzzati publishes the collection *I sette messaggeri* in 1942, and Landolfi, an inveterate recluse, publishes the collections *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* (1937), *Il mar delle blatte e altre storie* (1939), *La spada* (1942) and the fantastic novel *La pietra lunare* (1939).

A decade later, with the partial defection of a prominent neorealist figure, Italo Calvino, the fantastic comes to the fore with *Il visconte dimezzato* (1952), followed by *Il barone rampante* (1957), and *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959), collected together as *I nostri antenati* (1960). This is arguably the most significant moment of the fantastic in Italy in the twentieth century, when a major literary figure writes fantastic stories for reasons other than a passing fancy or minor literary experiment. What these three texts

do is combine the fairytale, ludic components, the intellectual fantastic, realism and paradox to create a hybrid fantastic. Vittorini labels *Il visconte dimezzato* as having 'un senso di realismo a carica fiabesca, sia [...] un senso di fiaba a carica realistica' (in Sapegno 1988: 18), hence the *partial* defection. Moreover this qualification also highlights the combination of fantastic and realistic elements present in the work, mirroring the structure of Scapigliati texts from a century before.

The endorsements of Contini and Calvino in quick succession (1946 and 1952) highlighted that nearly a century after it had first arrived in Italy, the fantastic was finally a literary form that had cultural merit even though it did not engage with the social and historical demands of literature at the time. Whilst there is little continuity between the different historical moments of the fantastic and between authors, there *is* continuity in the obstacles the fantastic faced. As Ghidetti and Lattarulo argue, '[n]on si può infatti dimenticare che continuano a pesare sulla letteratura italiana, dall'età del decadentismo al secondo dopoguerra, urgenze etiche e politiche attivate sulla scia del Risorgimento' (1984: vii). The way in which the fantastic represented the unreal was bound up with the way in which Italian culture attempted to view the world in *realistic* terms, and throughout its history, the fantastic has failed to live up to such a measure. In the case of the late nineteenth century, the fantastic partly bucked this trend by representing the social reality of the paranormal. But from the turn of the century onwards, the fantastic has required other means of legitimating its existence: the innovative tendencies of the Italian avant-garde, the so-called 'Italian' Surrealism proclaimed by Malaparte, the Italian surreal thread espoused by Contini and the important Italian writer, Calvino. The appearance of being Italian rather than having been imported or copied—although a fallacious and simplified perspective—was a factor in legitimating the fantastic in the creation of both a literary space and an identity.

Currents and Characteristics

The history outlined above is only a partial representation of the panorama of the fantastic in Italy; the correlation between cultural and philosophical currents with the publication of fantastic texts certainly illustrates some of the changes in the way reality is perceived—and how the fantastic reacts to it—but there are other details to account for, the first of which is a double aspect of marginality.

Within the Italian canon as a whole, the fantastic is firstly overshadowed by modes of realism and the historical novel, and secondly, within this marginal space are found marginal writers at another remove. This is Ghidetti and Lattarulo's argument: particularly in the twentieth century, the fantastic is used as a testing ground for writers who are better known in other literary fields: Lampedusa, Svevo, and Moravia to name a few, but there are many writers to list, which means the margin is active, driven by writers dominant elsewhere, but here marginal to more central voices like Tarchetti's. '[Q]uasi tutti gli scrittori italiani del '900 hanno almeno uno scheletro nell'armadio, un racconto fantastico (e sia pure di quella specie ibrida che i tempi impongono)' (Ghidetti and Lattarulo 1984: xii; my emphasis). Hyperbole aside, this notion of concealment is taken up by Hipkins who argues that the marginalisation from the rest of Italian letters is due to 'a self-perpetuating myth that the Italian fantastic did not exist' (2007: 23). This is a compelling point, particularly if such 'skeletons' are hidden or can be dismissed as unimportant, but that qualification mainly applies to authors whose fantastic output is no more than an ephemeral literary experiment. Moreover, the

number of anthologies of Italian fantastic literature demonstrates a not inconsiderable production, although it is certainly smaller during the nineteenth century.¹²

However, although the fantastic greatly expands over the course of its existence, it is problematic to label its exponents Italian 'fantastic writers', not because of the quality of their work, but instead because few writers commit themselves to writing predominantly in this literary discourse; certainly this is the case in the late nineteenth century (Farnetti 1988: 12). Even the 'nomi celebrati' (Ghidetti and Lattarulo 1984: vii) of the twentieth century, like Pirandello, Bontempelli and Calvino are famous for literary pursuits other than the fantastic. Buzzati and Landolfi, I would argue, are the main exceptions.

Marginalised still further are women writers of the fantastic. 'If the Italian fantastic as a whole presents an anomalous history when compared to that of many Western counterparts, women's role in that is correspondingly all the more marginalised' (Hipkins 2007: 27).¹³ During the late nineteenth century, a period of low output for the fantastic in Italy as a whole, few woman writers are included in anthologies or mentioned in criticism, one exception being Matilde Serao. During the early twentieth century, production is limited. A few short stories by Grazia Deledda, and Ada Negri pepper the first few decades; and stories by Elsa Morante, *Il gioco segreto* (1941), and Paola Masino's *Nascita e morte della massaia* (1945) appear later. After Calvino's trilogy, Anna-Maria Ortese's *L'iguana* (1965) in particular has garnered critical acclaim and interest.¹⁴

¹² See Finné (1975), Finzi (1980), Ghidetti and Lattarulo (1984), Ghidetti (1985), Reim (1992), D'Arcangelo (1993), Gazich (1994), Lattarulo (2000), D'Elia (2007), Melani (2009), and Carnero (2011).

¹³ For a more detailed analysis of the literary space of the fantastic by women writers see Hipkins (2007: 23-50). Pelletier (1990: 12) looks more broadly at the minor presence of women writers in anthologies of fantastic literature from all over the world.

¹⁴ See Wood (2007) and LaPenna (2007) for further discussions of the fantastic in *L'iguana*.

Structurally, there is no rigid progression from an irruptive to a normalized fantastic in Italy, that is to say, from the irruption of the impossible into the everyday to a fantastic where the impossible is accepted or integrated into the norms of the story. Even so, there are clusters of irruptive texts in the late nineteenth century and clusters of normalized fantastic texts in the twentieth century. In this regard, Surrealism—which collapses paradigms such as real/unreal, human/machine, and animate/inanimate together—normalizes fantastic structures because they are anticipated and expected on this continuing discovery of ‘surréalité’ (Breton 1962: 27), and expectation of the impossible undermines irruption. In other words, the effect of labelling a text ‘surreal’ implies an expectation of impossible or unfamiliar syntheses, an indicative characteristic of the texts in Contini’s anthology. However, this is not to say that either an irruptive or normalized fantastic remains restricted to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries respectively. The effect of an extreme positivist paradigm of reality—coupled with the impact of *Pinocchio*—demonstrates a tradition of a normalized fantastic in the late nineteenth century, disrupting a neat diachronic division. Likewise, the gothic is present in the twentieth century, particularly in the case of Landolfi. The two masterpieces of the Italian fantastic for Ghidetti and Lattarulo (1984: xi) are Vigolo’s *La Virgilia* (1922) and Landolfi’s *Racconto d’autunno* (1945), texts with heavy Romantic and macabre tones respectively: their late appearance demonstrates the inconsistent nature of the fantastic in Italy.

In turn, the lack of coherent thematic progression is partly due to the hybrid nature of the fantastic in Italy, an element that for Ghidetti and Lattarulo characterises the twentieth century. As Billiani argues, fantastic texts do not arise in Italy in any sort of pure form, but

[r]ather, they intertwine with other narrative formats, such as realist, epistolary, *verista*, modernist, humoristic, or fairy-tale forms. As a result, their appearance is often orchestrated through a complex system of intertextual references, which range from indirect allusions to whole translations and rewritings (2007: 16; original emphasis).

This tendency continues through into the twentieth century, visible both in the texts and in cultural influences. In reference to Ghidetti and Lattarulo's anthology, Guidotti maintains that during the first three decades of the twentieth century, the fantastic even outside Futurism and Surrealism nevertheless only exists under the shadow of the avant-garde.

Probabilmente molti di questi scrittori vivono con maggiore intensità suggestioni scritturali provenienti dalle avanguardie: dal futurismo [...] al surrealismo naturalmente, *al fantastico il passo è breve*, ed è ben nota d'altronde la disputa fra critici sui modi classificatori dei primi trent'anni del novecento, in cui il fantastico sembra manifestarsi appunto attraverso questi movimenti in maniera *quasi esclusiva* (Guidotti 1999: 24-25; my emphasis).

Although the step from the avant-garde to the fantastic is certainly short—or at least shorter than from realist modes of representation—, I would however argue that the effect of the avant-garde is less totalising than Guidotti claims because contributions by the likes of Tozzi, *Parole di un morto* (1916), Albertazzi, *Il diavolo nell'ampolla* (1918), and Falchi, *Tre croci* (1921),¹⁵ not to mention *La Virgilia* by Vigolo all exhibit gothic and macabre elements as well.

This hybridity of format and influence is by no means a deficiency in the fantastic in Italy precisely because deficiency implies a pure example to which to measure fantastic texts—a problematic approach (see above p. 7)—, but the difficulty in classifying the fantastic certainly increases. In this sense, a hybrid fantastic responds well to the problems and demands of the impulse of theorising the fantastic outlined

¹⁵ All reproduced in Ghidetti and Lattarulo (1984).

above, as it resists definitions, and in so doing provides many possibilities for identifying its form historically and culturally.

At the turn of the century, there emerges a ludic, humorous fantastic, one underpinned by a rationalist paradigm as Contini claims, and which implies a knowledge or awareness of what is being played with or subverted, which is particularly characteristic of Papini's fantastic work. Underpinned by the same paradigm, the intellectual fantastic, although different, is often found alongside the ludic, for example in Contini's anthology. Finné argues that this presence of humour in Italian fantastic texts should be noted because of its Europe-wide importance as a turning point in the fantastic in general, and credit is due to Italy for passing so smoothly into this second ludic phase of the fantastic after having almost completely ignored the first traditional phrase—with some exceptions: Tarchetti, Capuana, Papini and Landolfi. Italy for Finné is thus a precursor not a latecomer to this 'néo-fantastique' (1975: 16).

This is a problematic argument for two reasons. Firstly, Italy does not develop a ludic tradition quickly due to a weak gothic tradition because this implies that the latter evolves *out of* the former, which it does not, and gothic and ludic elements are also present in both centuries. Moreover, Finné's four examples cited above all exhibit ludic qualities, particularly Papini. Instead, it is more accurate to say that with ephemeral exceptions the gothic takes a marginal position whilst the ludic and intellectual currents become more dominant during the twentieth century. Secondly, as Contini notes, the fantastic in Italy goes back to a ludic Renaissance moment: humour is not radically innovative in the early twentieth century. Indeed, rather than an absent domestic figurehead during the 1860s—that is to say no equivalent nineteenth century authority such as Hoffmann, Poe or Gautier—there is instead the latent figure of Ariosto with his 'ironic fantasy' (Olken 1968: 1) whose influence is less immediate and direct. In

addition to this, Leopardi, an impediment to a fantastic underpinned by a Romantic paradigm, nonetheless ‘anticipa certi *topoi* della narrativa fantastica ottocentesca’ (Castori 2008: 760) in his *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie* (1824) such as:

il tema dello scienziato che sfida le leggi della natura finché una notte la sua audacia non viene messa a dura prova; il tema del mito antico che si rivela veritiero; il tema del mondo soprannaturale che s’apre per un fugace momento e subito si richiude (Calvino 1995b: 1674).

This story is precursory and influential: the same ironic tone and candid approach used by Ruysch in speaking of and with the dead—‘Diamine! Chi ha insegnato la musica a questi morti, che cantano di mezza notte come galli?’ (Leopardi 1977: 763)—is taken up by Tarchetti in *Un osso di morto* (1869), one of the first stories in the Italian tradition. The image of Ruysch, ‘guardando per gli spiragli dell’uscio’ (Leopardi 1977: 763), glimpsing the supernatural from the perspective of a rationalist paradigm (Ruysch was a scientist), is taken as a motif for the whole of the nineteenth century fantastic in Italy by Reim who entitles his anthology *Da uno spiraglio*.

A ludic, ironic and intellectual fantastic tradition during the twentieth century¹⁶ develops in part because these qualities of fantastic texts are not fundamentally innovative in, or imported into, Italian literature, but in turn this does mean Italian writers actively draw from Ariosto or Leopardi. The modern and Renaissance strands of the fantastic are distinct and separate but a few writers like Calvino (for example in *Il cavaliere inesistente*) and Tarchetti bridge the gap. In other words, aspects of the twentieth century Italian tradition can be traced to Italian precursors but, throughout its history, the fantastic primarily heavily relied upon external influence from the European and North American nineteenth century traditions.

¹⁶ Which is also present to a lesser extent in the nineteenth century, an example being *La lettera U* by Tarchetti (see chapter 3, pp. 70-73).

From the Scapigliati to Calvino's trilogy, the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century is not one of *replacement*—following the irruptive to normalized paradigm which Todorov proposes—, but of *compounding* from the dishevelled roots of the fantastic onwards. Normalized, ludic and intellectual components combine with the fairytale and irruptive gothic and macabre elements—and the different forms implied by these structures—, all of which move in and out of dominant positions throughout the course of its history, even against the grain. This gives the fantastic in Italy a certain unpredictable and fragmented quality, one emphasised by its function as a literary testing ground in the twentieth century and by the ephemeral production of texts. The second part of the thesis adds a gloss to this conclusion because the authors chosen are firstly important not marginal figures in the evolution of the fantastic in Italy and secondly because they demonstrate a continual and dominant tendency of normalization. This is not to deny the existence of irruptive elements in the tradition; they simply occupy a more marginal position.

2. Literature Review: Theories of the Fantastic

The literature on the fantastic can be divided into those studies which appear before and those which appear subsequently after Tzvetan Todorov's watershed monograph *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*.¹⁷ This is not to say, however, that all other attempts to define the fantastic fall short of this measure; indeed, Todorov has received substantial criticism on many aspects of his theory. At the same time, his work has become the first port of call when engaging with the fantastic. Whether rejected or accepted, Todorov has to a degree standardised the critical debate: when he is referenced, this provides an accepted and recognisable position. In the wider field, Hume rightly points out that whilst each model has its particular focus, there is little interaction between them, almost like, as she puts it, 'blind men describing an elephant' (1984: 19). Whilst I agree that it can be difficult to see where there is overlap between models, I do not think that they are entirely isolated, and I will therefore demonstrate how the models by the likes of Todorov, Rabkin, Hume, Jackson and others share common ground, rather than only treating each model individually, or relying solely on Todorov for orientation.

Broadly speaking, there are two main categories of theory, reader-response (including character response), and structural approaches. In turn, structural models either look for particular signposts and characteristics, or take the form of a scale. This will not be an exhaustive study of the different competing theories, but rather an outline of some of the more canonical and indeed useful models. Two compound forms of the fantastic will also be considered, the feminine and postmodern fantastic. Whilst these

¹⁷ The book was published in 1970 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil). Throughout this thesis, references to this study derive from the 1975 English translation.

are subsets of more general theories, they are worth mentioning in order to differentiate them from the above models, and to clarify their use in later chapters.

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. Whilst the first and third conditions are obligatory, the second condition of character hesitation is optional (Todorov 1975: 33), making this strictly speaking a bipartite not a tripartite model. Understandably, the most common criticism levelled at Todorov is the narrowness of the scope of this model (see Cornwell 1990: 12): Jan Potocki's *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (1804-1805) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) are two of a privileged few texts to which hesitation applies. However, focusing on the narrowness is reductive because no literary model is expected to perfectly account for all texts which might come under its remit, and for those texts for which hesitation is prolonged, the fantastic *is* accounted for. The issue is rather the way in which a select few texts form a measure to which other narratives falls short, suggesting that these as the best or most representative fantastic texts, an illusory position given the multitude of other models proposing different examples.

Whilst the aspect of hesitation in Todorov's model is less useful, it is nonetheless thought-provoking—proved by how other critics have clearly drawn from Todorov for their own models—, and, as Cornwell points out, the sub-categories of the marvellous such as the 'hyperbolic marvellous', 'exotic marvellous', 'instrumental marvellous', and 'scientific marvellous' (Todorov 1975: 54-56) 'render his system far

more widely useful than some are prepared to acknowledge' (Cornwell 1990: 12).¹⁸ The central tenant of Todorov's theory—hesitation—is not structuralist in nature, but instead a reader-response, which is a surprising move from such a prominent card-carrying structuralist as Todorov. Chanady modifies hesitation, outlining a theory of 'antinomy', 'the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text' (1985: 12). As with Todorov, the two codes or explanations (natural and supernatural) are mutually exclusive, and it might appear that regarding the fantastic Chanady is simply rephrasing Todorov, but in fact he highlights how hesitation is not the most reduced or structural form of Todorov's theory: hesitation instead merely signposts a further level underpinning the fantastic, that of two opposing codes in the text. Chanady's main argument is that in magical realism, these conflicting codes are resolved (1985: 24-26), unlike in fantastic literature, where the codes remain in conflict. The oxymoron magical realism is an important tangent to consider theoretically because it 'combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinctions between them' (Faris 2004: 1) meaning that supernatural phenomena are 'well assimilated into the realistic textual environment, rarely causing any comment by narrators or characters' (2004: 8). Two distinctions follow: firstly, that magical realism allows for both supernatural and rational explanations, and secondly, magical realism is set in the real world, which distinguishes such narratives from fairytales, which function by deferral to a faraway time or land. Consequently, degrees of supernatural integration and complexity through coexistence with the real, and the possibility of multiple explanations, are two important considerations for the fantastic, particularly regarding the later author chapters.

¹⁸ Two vociferous critics of Todorov's, Stanislaw Lem and Robert Abernathy, attack the model for being structuralist because such 'absolute equality in literature' allows any and all narratives, regardless of literary merit (1974: 236).

Brooke-Rose points out that hesitation is not a characteristic exclusive to the fantastic (1981: 65), and therefore the issue is not why the reader hesitates, but firstly the makeup of the conflicting codes, and secondly, as a corollary, why these two codes or explanations should be mutually exclusive. The either/or explanatory structure is a weak aspect of Todorov's theory not only because it otherwise assumes that the available choices of explanations are themselves clear—which is a fallacious claim—,¹⁹ but also because this assumes stable and universal knowledge of how the 'world which is indeed our world' (1975: 25) works. The multiplicity of conflating explanations should be accepted, not denied.

Ceserani is one such critic for whom multiplicity underpins the fantastic, but in terms of identifiable characteristics, not in terms of explanation. 'Quello che caratterizza il fantastico non può essere né un elenco di procedimenti retorici né una lista di temi esclusivi', but instead a 'particolare combinazione' of signposts (1996: 75). Rather than reducing the fantastic to one key element, Ceserani proposes different avenues of identification by outlining categories like 'la vita dei morti', 'la follia', 'il doppio' or 'il nulla' (1996: 85-95). This approach leaves open the question of explanation(s), and since his list is not exclusive, it is compatible with, and can add to, other theories which focus on other signposts like terror (Millet & Labbé 2005: 11), altered ground rules (Rabkin 1976: 12), not to mention character hesitation. The corollary of a combination of signposts is a hierarchical classification system: the more signposts, the more fantastic the text, depending on which signposts and their particular combination.

Sartre advocates something similar to Ceserani, but argues for more than simply ephemeral indications of the fantastic. If a text proposes a talking horse, unless other elements in its environment talk back to it, like the trees, the best explanation is a

¹⁹ The problem of identifying explanations is a characteristic of Buzzati's fantastic work (see Chapter 5).

man in a horse suit (1947: 124). Although this pushes the fantastic close to the fairytale to the extent to which the fantastic according to Sartre essentially requires an entire secondary world, it does highlight the need for confirming the impossible, and this is exactly what Todorov rejects by arguing that once the impossible or supernatural is confirmed (or rejected), the text is no longer fantastic. Sartre's is the more useful approach, simply because if the fantastic can be positively identified without being negated, then how the fantastic works, as well as its construction, can be analysed. The fantastic for Sartre is an upside-down world, 'à l'envers' (1947: 128), where doors open onto solid walls and where waiters bring an ink bottle rather than a cup of coffee (1947: 128). Sartre does make the point that if everything is 'à l'envers', then everything is the same and thus the difference cannot be perceived (1947: 135-136), showing the need for a relativistic perspective where only some aspects are reversed. Rabkin, no doubt drawing on Sartre, takes up this reversal rule and claims that the fantastic is defined 'when the ground rules of a narrative are forced to make a 180° reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted' (Rabkin 1976: 12). This framework has been criticised for being too rigid: Rabkin is trying to appear scientific in his approach, but in so doing neglects the unscientific nature of literary representation. Whilst Rabkin's model fits best with Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, Fredericks notes of Rabkin's theory that the ideal that Carroll's works represent marks the extreme end of the fantastic because Carroll is not more generally representative (1978: 36).

In his later work, Rabkin corrects his framework—removing the precision of 180°—and simply defines the fantastic as 'the affect generated when we read by the direct reversal of the ground rules of the narrative world. Fantasy denotes that class of work where the fantastic is used exhaustively' (1979: 22), where reversals can occur

on four levels: plot, thematic development, character development and style (1979: 22). Brooke-Rose points out that in Rabkin's earlier work, almost anything could be classed as fantastic 'even character error' (1981: 392 n.1). Here, however, Rabkin introduces a scale model. The least fantastic texts are realistic texts from the likes of Zola (at point 1 on the scale), with Poe's *Black Cat* at point 8, and *Alice in Wonderland* at point 10. Sherlock Holmes and by extension detective fiction is found at point 5 (1979: 165). This second attempt by Rabkin is more useful than his first, but *Alice in Wonderland* is still the measure to which all other fantastic texts fall short, and any theory which proposes a paradigm example is reductive, as it gives the impression that the theory has been tailored for a particular text. However, Rabkin's scale of classification is certainly an improvement, as it importantly highlights degrees of the fantastic, not to mention making clear his own distinction between what constitutes fantasy and the fantastic.

The most useful scale approach is by Kathryn Hume. Hers is a binary model, comprising two opposing impulses, mimesis ('the desire to imitate') and fantasy ('the desire to change givens and alter reality')(1984: 20), and is represented by 'any departure from consensus reality' (1984: 21). Entire literary traditions can be plotted on this scale, and Hume includes pre-Enlightenment Christian divine realism (such as Dante's *Commedia*) as well Classical mythology. Hume herself highlights the issue of who sets the consensus, to which she replies the world of the author and audience (1984: 23). Despite the suggestions of stability implied by consensus, this point of departure varies according to historical and cultural epoch. Thus both point of departure and point of arrival (however far fantasy departs) are unfixed. What is therefore missing from Hume's model to better define fantasy literature are signposts which locate different narratives not only in relation to their points of departure, but also to each other, and a combination of Ceserani's forms and Rabkin's scale of reversed

ground rules would account for this lacuna. Although Todorov may appear to be a one-signpost model, even his is a scale theory. In order to arrive at a point where hesitation is even an issue, the text has to depart accepted norms of narrative reality, pass through uncanny literature and arrive at a boundary between the uncanny and the marvellous. Like Hume, therefore, Todorov has in mind not only fantastic literature, but all literature, and hesitation is the linchpin around which two categories—the strange but possible, and the impossible—pivot.

Hume also highlights the appeal of fantasy literature. Humankind historically sought to imitate the ‘sacred pattern’ in the world around, and the highest goal was to depart from consensus reality in order to be more like the deities above. A consequence of such a departure was a continual failure to live up to such ideals (1984: 31). Two points are worth noting here. Firstly, this aspiration to transcend humanity is also noted by Sartre (1947: 125) and Jackson (1981: 2), but it also mirrors a later Romantic impulse of yearning for the infinite which underpins much post-Enlightenment fantastic literature in Europe and North America, an impulse that is importantly absent in Italy (as discussed in the previous chapter). Secondly, failing to live up the ideal set up by a deity contrasts with how fantastic literature is seen today. Armitt argues that whilst ‘fantastic’ has positive connotations in the real world, when transferred to literature, the meaning becomes more negative (1996: 1), one reason being, along with Armitt’s own suggestion that it is considered escapist, that it falls short of an ideal of accurately representing the world. Hume and Armitt demonstrate a wider change of direction: from aspiring and falling short of a transcendental ideal to falling short of the ideal of representation; that is, from focusing on the point of arrival (fantasy) to focusing on the point of departure (realistically representing consensus reality). This is an important observation because the fantastic should not be measured

according to its capacity to represent the real precisely because it is not trying to represent the real world; literary representation has more than one purpose.

Brooke-Rose views the fantastic as two interrelating binary models: 'the unreal as real', describing the fantastic in realistic terms, and the 'real as unreal' (1981: 51); this latter category Cornwell regards as 'essentially an updated elaboration of the Russian Formalist term *ostranenie*' (1990: 15). These pairings are not particularly relevant to this discussion: the unreal as real simply means using realistic language to represent the fantastic, an important point Brooke-Rose makes elsewhere, and the unreal as real includes non-fantastic categories like the *nouveau roman* and metafiction.

Campra argues that the fantastic is 'ciò che non ha realtà' (1981: 199),²⁰ analogous to Millet and Labbé's argument that the fantastic is the inconceivable becoming reality (2005: 11). These are contradictory arguments, since what constitutes reality depends on the paradigm (see Lugnani below) not to mention the type of reality, whether physical or abstract; and once the inconceivable becomes reality, it ceases to become inconceivable as it is instead conceived. Fabre makes a similar point: citing Bulwer-Lytton, he argues that if the supernatural is taken as impossible, any manifestation must therefore be natural, adhering to rules of which the reader/character is unaware (Fabre 1992: 69). The issue is therefore one of character and reader knowledge of that paradigm of reality, and the degree to which concepts like the inconceivable is conceived, not an absolute measure of real or unreal. What Campra, Millet and Labbé and Fabre draw attention to are some of the paradoxes of the fantastic, and the problems of modal definition. Characteristics like void or nothingness are problematic, because once they are considered, they are given form in terms of

²⁰ Interestingly for the purposes of the following analysis of a selection of Italian authors, in an interview Buzzati defines the fantastic along very similar lines, '[d]irei che fantastico è ciò che non esiste' (Panafieu 1973: 175).

thought and language and therefore no longer stand for the concept they represent. Arguments equating the fantastic with 'unreality' are not useful general models—they do not allow for gradations of reality, including the uncanny and strange—but they do highlight the problems of representing the unrepresentable which, on a scale of the fantastic, occupies the far, and indeed difficult, territory.

A more useful approach is to acknowledge the relation between the extreme end of the fantastic and its points of departure, which highlights a common feature of nearly all models of the fantastic: the fantastic does not exist on its own, separated from recognisable linguistic and cultural constructs; it is rather an extension of the natural and the real, requires familiar language to represent it, and requires realistic modes of representation against which to define itself (Bessière 1974: 13; Brooke-Rose 1981: 81; Jackson 1981: 20; Apter 1982: 111; Lugnani 1983: 55). As Campra rightly notes, '[i]l fantastico presuppone [...], empiricamente, il concetto di realtà' (2000: 16). At one point Jackson locates the fantastic at the edge of language, highlighting how Bessière (1974: 36-38) reformulates Sartre.

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* (Jackson 1981: 75-76; original emphasis).

The fantastic can only reach as far as the limits of language; it still remains within its boundaries, linked to the reality from which it originates, 'between the *thetic* and *non-thetic*'. A pure fantastic is therefore fallacious—the supernatural, to use a structural rather than a linguistic example, is an extension and continuation of the natural, not a separate discrete category—, but this is not to say that links between what is real and what is fantastic cannot vary in degree and complexity. This is why I would argue that a model of the fantastic which works by range or scale not only better accounts for

variations between texts, but is also necessary to highlight the link between how far a text pushes the fantastic away from the norms the reader expects. Binary either/or models are too simplistic.

Hume uses the word 'fantasy' throughout her study and not 'fantastic', and herein lies one point of difficulty in the criticism: the use of terminology. Another prominent critic to use fantasy as a primary term is Rosemary Jackson, but her study also uses the word fantastic in confusing ways; clarification on their respective uses is necessary.

Jackson's theory is open-ended like Hume's, divided into a cultural²¹ and a psychoanalytic approach. Fantasy, Jackson argues, 'is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss' (1981: 3), a return to a lost world (1981: 2), referring in particular to Tolkien who is 'nostalgic for a pre-Industrial, indeed a pre-Norman Conquest, feudal order' (1981: 155). On the other hand, fantastic literature points to what is outside the law, outside the dominant value system. 'The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'' (1981: 4); 'the fantastic exists as the inside, or the underside, of realism' (1981: 25), and its purpose is to uncover what has been covered up (as per the etymology of the word), whence a clear link to Freud's Uncanny and a psychoanalytic perspective. Jackson includes the impossible in this category: ghosts, for example, make the culturally invisible visible (1981: 69). Thus fantasy and the fantastic mean two different things: when Jackson uses fantasy, she refers to a Tolkienesque, quasi-religious world; when she uses fantastic, she is talking about subversive, unstable and undermining forces in a world more like the real world.

²¹ Where Jackson argues that the fantastic subverts, Monleón provides a counter-argument and maintains that historically the fantastic was not an assault on the dominant ideology, but rather was 'the defense of the status quo and the preservation of economic order' (1990:14).

What both share is an impulse of change which mirrors Hume's fantasy impulse; the difference is that fantasy for Jackson is regressive, it is a wish (or 'desire' to use her term) to fill in missing parts of culture, to go back to a past moment, and it is therefore different to the forward-looking transformative impulse Hume proposes.

Jackson's fantastic fits alongside Hume's fantasy and Todorov's hesitation, where norms are no longer stable or certain: the reader hesitates, and questions norms; Hume's fantasy is a departure from consensus norms; and Jackson's fantastic explicitly uncovers what is hidden at the edge of culture, on the periphery of norms. Jackson's *fantasy*, however, even though it has some transformative aspiration on a social and political level, remains clearly within norms.

This binary notion of being within and without norms forms the basis for Freud's theory of the Uncanny, arguably the most cited model in fantastic criticism after Todorov, where what was originally comfortable and homely becomes unhomely or Uncanny when that which has originally been repressed and is therefore invisible visibly returns (Freud 2003: 148). Freud intended this model to account for issues of the mind, but Jackson extends it to include the impossible. The relationship between psychoanalysis and the fantastic is a difficult one, given that even though psychoanalytic models are used to analyse the fantastic (see Jackson 1981 and Apter 1982 for example), psychoanalysis undermines the impossible in narrative, claiming it to be either an illusion or representative of something else, specifically not fantastic. As well as being useful to account for odd or extreme forms of character behaviour—something particularly common in fantastic literature—, the reason why Freud should be mentioned is that he highlights the relationship between the periphery and invisible to the centre and visible. In other words, when something becomes uncanny, it modifies the original comfortable situation. Thus when a text departs from consensus

reality, or there is hesitation, or a reversal of the ground rules, what is important to consider is how these aspects modify the point of departure, which recalls the above discussion of the link between realistic language and the fantastic. Therefore three areas of focus emerge: questioning the point of departure, the fantastic element/point of arrival, and the relationship between the two.

The Uncanny comes under the rubric of the fantastic because it also departs from comfortable norms—Ceserani also considers it fantastic, see above (p. 38)—, and when compared to the supernatural, it is simply less overtly fantastic than a vampire. Clearly, there is a difference between a mad character and the sudden entrance of a supernatural creature; they are different orders of events, but both can be plotted on the same scale as degrees of the fantastic. Caillois, however, argues for a more exclusive definition:

the fantastic is both a rupture in the understood order, an irruption of the inadmissible into the heart of unalterable everyday legality and not a complete substitution of a real universe for an exclusively miraculous universe (1965: 161; my translation).

Caillois' theory contrasts with Sartre's, who insists on a multitude of confirmative signposts outlining a transformed world, whereas Caillois is acknowledging the effect of single elements which challenge how an otherwise unaltered world integrates or rejects something which lies outside of its physical and cultural norms. This is a useful framework because it firstly acknowledges that additions to a paradigm will alter the way it functions (how *do* the laws of nature change to allow for the irruption of a ghost?), and secondly, it shows how a single irruption has subversive potential. In a similar vein Vax argues that the fantastic is a 'moment de crise' (1965: 149) in a reassuring everyday world; likewise with Castex: 'une intrusion brutale du mystère dans le cadre de la vie réelle' (1951: 8). What is different from the models above which

locate the fantastic at the margins is the *centrality* of such irruption, ‘into the heart’ of everyday reality. Rather than being uncovered (Freud, Jackson) or arrived at (Hume), the fantastic arrives from elsewhere, denoting an unknown point of origin, and highlighting how the fantastic is not supposed to exist in a narrative world similar to our own. The theories of Caillois, Vax and Castex have a particular historical application because the irruption of the impossible into the everyday is arguably the central structural characteristic of fantastic literature of the nineteenth century.

Vax points out that the real is reassuring because the impossible is not encountered in the real world, and thus ‘the fantastic must introduce imaginary terror into the heart of the real world’ (1960: 6; my translation), and in a later work, he continues to argue that the fantastic is affective (1965: 8) towards an impossible or inexplicable event (1965: 149). Lovecraft’s focus is slightly different: ‘[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown’ (1973: 12). Both fear and fear of the unknown signpost events or stimuli that have not yet occurred, fear of something that has yet to transpire, whereas terror is an emotion of that fear realised. This subtle distinction is important because terror correlates with an irruption (terror of ghost that has appeared), whereas fear denotes a deferral: the object of fear is absent, like in Jackson’s theory. Fear is merely an index of that absent object. In other words, there is a gap between fear and the realisation of that fear, in the same way that Jackson argues that fantasy is a literature of desire. Desire and fear are unfulfilled stimuli, one positive (desire), the other negative (fear), but both signpost incompleteness due to what is missing. As Doležel rightly notes, ‘[a] necessary consequence of the fact that fictional worlds are human constructs is their *incompleteness*. It would take a text of infinite length to *construct* a complete fictional

world' (1998: 169; my emphasis). Texts are constructions which the signposts of fear and desire demonstrate.

Lugnani, with numerous and indeed conflicting formulations of the fantastic and its relationship to realisms, the Uncanny, the marvellous and the like, puts forward some worthwhile considerations. Firstly, like Todorov he separates the marvellous and treats it as incompatible with the fantastic, and defines the fantastic according to its relation to the strange and the marvellous: 'lo *strano* pare intervenire costantemente come un *componente sintagmatico* del fantastico, come un movimento interno della sequenza narrativa fantastica; il *meraviglioso* pare invece funzionare come un *elemento paradigmatico*' (1983: 51; original emphasis). Secondly, Lugnani defines various terms in relation to the 'paradigma di realtà' (1983: 54), a synonym he employs for norms.²² Lugnani takes the same view as Todorov, that the marvellous has a greater effect in altering the paradigm of reality than a strange or uncanny occurrence. The syntagmatic strange and realistic components operate *within* the paradigm, but when elements are replaced paradigmatically by impossible, marvellous components, then the paradigm changes. Cornwell's own succinct formulation implicitly demonstrates, like Lugnani, the necessary existence of a *boundary* between paradigms.²³ For Cornwell, the fantastic is '[p]rose which primarily attempts to create, describe or operate within, a world transformed, distorted or re-created; a world which departs to a greater or lesser degree from the 'normally' perceived 'real' or historical world in which we live' (1990: 144). Armitt makes an excellent corollary point, saying that 'the realist world gives the illusion of being boundless, but only because we never get a chance to test its limits' (2005: 173). The fantastic, by contrast, reveals those

²² Lugnani does not reference his use of 'paradigm' but Goggi, who also uses 'paradigma di realtà' notes the Kuhnian origin (Goggi 1983: 151).

²³ Cornwell's own literature review of the fantastic is highly detailed and explores aspects such as the genre/mode discussion (1990: 11-41).

boundaries, those limits of cultural and physical norms between paradigms, locating the fantastic on the edge or outside of consensus reality. Bessière concurs, arguing that the fantastic story is one of limits, between being and non-being, and beyond the rules of nature (1974: 216-217).

Albertazzi takes the argument regarding narrative worlds a step further and questions the assumption of a single unreal universe: '[p]iuttosto che parlare di *una* realtà opposta a un universo fantastico si tratta, allora, di ammettere l'esistenza di *diverse* realtà, spesso inconciliabili' (1995: 7; original emphasis).²⁴ In the same way that Ceserani adds multiplicity to the discussion by enumerating many characteristics and signposts by which to identify the fantastic, Albertazzi suggests that the fantastic can occur in multiple worlds and paradigms.

In conclusion, these models of the fantastic are concerned with articulating the limits of the possible and impossible, more often than not contrasting the fantastic with a set of recognisable norms. Although at times discrete, these models do interact, demonstrating both common ground and interrelations. A fantastic text deviates from accepted and consensual norms (Hume), which are delimited within a particular paradigm of reality (Lugnani). This departure can be marked by a glossary of signposts (Ceserani), some of which fit within the possibilities outlined by that paradigm. Those that lie outside denote a change in the paradigm of reality (Lugnani, Cornwell), the boundary of which (Bessière, Amitt) might be unclear or disputed (Todorov, Chanady), require confirmation (Sartre), or represent a point of focus to uncover hidden or repressed components precisely because they are peripheral and ignored (Freud, Jackson). The fantastic might also irrupt into the everyday world (Castex, Caillois, Vax); ground rules may be changed or reversed (Rabkin), and the further the departure, the

²⁴ See the following discussion of Calvino's fantastic in chapter 6.

more difficult and complex the fantastic becomes, with paradoxes such as unreality and the inconceivable (Campra, Fabre, Millet and Labbé), as well as problems of representing that which lies close to or beyond the limits of thought and language (Bessière, Jackson). Different models therefore account for different forms of the fantastic, and implicit in all of the above approaches is a comparative perspective, meaning that the fantastic can be identified and defined by its *difference* to the real world. This is a central consideration because it also demonstrates how, both in structural and linguistic terms, the fantastic within the text is coexistent with the real.

Postscript: the Feminine and Postmodern Fantastic

The following section discusses two subsets of fantastic theory, the feminine fantastic and the postmodern fantastic, in order to clarify how they relate to more general theories of the fantastic and to identify their usefulness in the following chapters.

In the construction of a feminine fantastic, Richter claims that the classical and powerful view of women was as the embodiment of Nature, whereas women today living in a world dominated by the masculinisation of rational thought cannot be themselves. The imagination guards this nostalgic desire to return to a primordial (and irrational) savage feminine state, which is the goal of the feminine fantastic (1984: 11-15). It is unclear whether Richter is referring to the author or the characters regarding who should effect this return, but suffice it to say, she oversimplifies cultural binary oppositions between man/woman, rationality/irrationality because this simply repeats cultural stereotypes; it is a 'really inappropriate theor[y]' (Hipkins 2007: 32). Richter's perspective correlates with how Jackson sees fantasy as a return to a nostalgic, uncritical pre-Norman cultural paradigm; in Jackson's terms Richter is arguing for a fantasy rather than fantastic impulse. The savage feminine impulse precisely covers up that which gender politics seeks to uncover, making Richter's an inadequate model.

Pelletier also sees Richter as reductive, and her own attempts at a feminine fantastic are more politically engaged and clearly laid out: a feminine fantastic should challenge female stereotypes and masculine models of the fantastic. By using *écriture féminine* (1990: 3) and by positioning the women as the subject (for example, as narrator) rather than the object such as a victim (1990: 13), women can challenge the cultural terms provided for them by a patriarchal society. Pelletier also argues that fantastic literature is judged more often by author accreditation rather than structural

criteria, something she argues Vax is guilty of by claiming that the best fantastic literature is written by great authors (1990: 8), which has clear gender-bias implications. Endorsing a more structural approach is certainly a step towards removing questions of authorship, not to mention canon, but gender politics should not be ignored within the texts themselves. The everyday world or paradigm which the fantastic undermines or irrupts into is built of both physical and cultural rules, part of which deal with how men and women function in nature and society: 'irruption in to the everyday' takes on gendered meanings.

Alpini's perspective is broadly the same as Pelletier's, arguing the importance of questioning cultural constructs through fantastic literature (2009: 12). Along with Richter all three identify an important feature in fantastic narrative, that female characters are never representative of the norm. For Richter, they are always smaller or larger than life, always either godlike or degraded, deformed and unreal (1984: 35), for Pelletier they are victims of supernatural monsters or sexual violence (1990: 13). Alpini argues that 'man's imagination/curiosity [is] linked with a successful overreaching for power and knowledge while female fantasy/curiosity is only represented as 'catastrophic'', highlighting the assumption of how 'female fantasy/curiosity is inferior, evil; whereas male imagination/inquisitiveness is superior/good' (2009: 21). Women are therefore either an indirect index of the supernatural and abnormality or they directly embody the deviations from the norms which define the fantastic. The goal which Pelletier and Alpini outline is to correct the view that women are a deviation from a male norm, and this matter is taken up by some of the texts in the following chapters. To this end, Alpini argues for a fantastic which is not irrational, but rather constructs 'a 'different' logic' for women (2009: 229). In other words, any theory assigning chaotic, irrational and destructive impulses to female characters reinforces patriarchal notions

of the female such as the kind of female 'latenza energetica caotica e irragionevole' which Farnetti problematically advocates (1997: 177). A feminine fantastic does not posit unique analytical tools with which to analyse the fantastic, but rather focuses attention on particular aspects (the feminine) in the fantastic.

Likewise, the arguments for a 'postmodern fantastic' are unconvincing, in the same way that 'futurist fantastic' is an incorrect label; rather, the issue is instead the relationship between 'the combination of postmodern techniques and the traditional fantastic' (Horstkotte 2004: 12) which share characteristics: they both 'work by parody and imitation, they question existing power structures and ideologies and strengthen the marginalised figures of history and society' (2004: 10). Ceserani takes a similar approach of identifying postmodern traits in the fantastic (2008) but importantly these recur throughout fantastic literature well before the historical moment of the postmodern, for example in the gothic. Instead, the reason why postmodernism is important to highlight for the purposes of this thesis is because some of the stories in the second part display characteristics of postmodernism and coincide historically with the period of postmodernism. However, postmodernism is only being used to distinguish the cultural and historical climate of the later stories from those dating from the Italian Unification, not the degree to which they adhere to the aesthetic qualifications of the postmodern.

A New Approach: Different Mimetics

This is not a methodology to replace the theories which have just been discussed; indeed it draws from several critics for the concept of scale models, paradigm and incompleteness. The intention is to propose an integrated framework which will further our collective understanding of the fantastic.

The name of the methodology is 'Different Mimetics' because of its fundamental premises. Firstly, that mimesis applies to all representation including the fantastic. As Bruck argues, '[m]imesis does not denote a particular – realistic – mode of representation, as distinct from other non-realistic ones, it is a feature of *all* art work (1982: 189; original emphasis). Secondly, that the notion of a complete representation is fallacious in both realistic and fantastic fiction and that narratives comprise a combination of components. Thirdly, that there is no pure fantastic, but that the fantastic is rather coexistent with the real in different ways and to varying degrees. However, and fourthly, what is considered fantastic is not necessarily reproducible in the phenomenal world and should not be expected to do so, and just because the fantastic does not necessarily attempt to mirror the phenomenal world does not mean it cannot construct understandable and coherent narratives. It is simply a different order of mimesis where focus is drawn instead to how the logic of the fantastic works within narrative, not to how it compares to the world without.

The central theoretical tenet is that in articulating the possible and impossible *the fantastic is constructed by adding and/or removing elements which question and problematize reality in narrative*. The degree to which a story is fantastic can be measured by how changes in the narrative create problems and puzzles in understanding what is going on in the story, and how this is taking place, depending on

what and how much is added or removed. There is no rigid hierarchy as to what is 'more' fantastic, either in terms of what is added, subtracted or the different ways that narrative is problematized. Instead, the purpose of the theory is to better account for how the fantastic operates in a narrative by analysing the different component parts and the mechanics of how they fit together. On the basis of the discussion of mode and genre in the preceding history chapter, this framework is modal, in that the fantastic is reduced to its underlying structures.

There is no single characteristic or trait which is being analysed and therefore rather than following Todorov, whose exclusive model looks at one single momentary trait, this framework draws from Hume's broader range of 'any departure from consensus reality' (1984: 21). Likewise, this model encompasses a point of departure, but includes certain signposts which are used to more precisely analyse the *fantastic mechanics*²⁵ (what is fantastic and how it operates in the text) such as various *objects*, *rules*, and *boundaries*. *Objects* can be both animate and inanimate, referring to anything quantifiable that has been added or removed from the narrative, such as a ghost. *Rules* can mean mental and behavioural processes, and the laws of physics and culture. The manner in which a rule works might be termed a *process* to better render the idea of the application of a rule in a narrative. *Boundaries* simply refers to limits; breaking a social rule means crossing a social boundary, likewise with breaking the laws of physics. Boundaries can also—and most usefully—be used to differentiate between worlds, both realistic and fantastic. *Paradigm of reality*²⁶ is the collective term to refer to the sum of physical and cultural laws which delimit what is considered possible and impossible within a narrative.

²⁵ Whitehead (2006), in her analysis of nineteenth century French and Russian texts uses the term mechanic in a slightly different way to refer to the conditions used to create hesitation. My use is broader to encompass all components and the way they interact through logic and causality.

²⁶ To use Lugnani's term (1983: 54).

Such objects, rules, processes and boundaries may appear confirmed in the texts—for example, a ghost *was* seen—in which case this is termed *manifest*, or there may be uncertainty that a ghost was seen, or there is simply the suggestion of a ghost, in which case this is qualified as a *trace* object.

Rather than ‘adding’ or ‘subtracting’ these elements, however, I prefer the terms *erasure* and *supplementing*. I do so firstly to include Hume’s understanding of erasure as ‘the deliberate destruction of the logical connections we expect’ (1984: 91). In other words, reader expectation is implicit in realising something is missing, and should be accounted for. Hume just mentions logical connections, but here I use erasure to mean anything removed (such as rules and boundaries). Secondly, I use supplementing instead of ‘addition’ because supplement has a double meaning of replacement and addition (a point Derrida makes in *Of Grammatology* 1997: 144-145), and there is therefore a distinction between an object that replaces another (which might also imply an erasure) and one that adds to the narrative world.

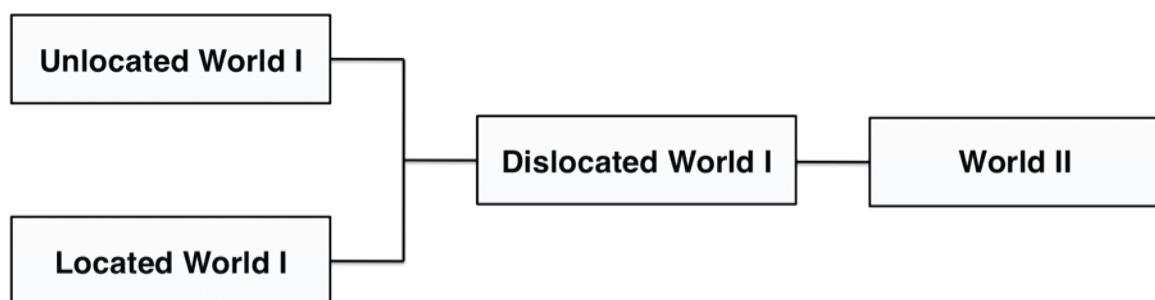
World Location

The expression ‘paradigm of reality’ refers to the sum of laws in a narrative, which operates within a narrative world. However, this need not be a large narrative structure, complete with ecosystem and populations; it rather refers to the space within which the plot unfolds. This could be a dream world, an underground cave, a haunted house or an entire other planet, and there are four categories of World to distinguish them.

1) *Unlocated World* 1 is a category where no temporal or geographical coordinates are given in a narrative; the story might even be realistic, but with no indication of where or when it is taking place; these are worlds without names which

prevent orientation, and stories in this category can present difficulty because with little orientation it becomes harder to measure the departure from norms. As we will see, this is a recurrent World type of Papini's work. 2) *Located World I* means a historically and geographically located narrative world. For instance, Tarchetti begins his story *I fatali* with specific coordinates of Milan in 1866. 3) A *Dislocated World I* is a narrative world where the geographical and/or temporal coordinates cannot be precisely determined, thus setting up a narrative world that is not specific to any time but is likely to be familiar (it is still a type of World I) and can be given a temporal or geographical *range*. In other words, it is a loosely located world, with a few names and details (both real and fictional) for orientation. 4) A *World II* is a world more defined by difference than similarity to the phenomenal world. This last category is open-ended and examples are more infrequent than for other categories—different planets do not necessarily count. Examples of World IIs do however include Bontempelli's *La scacchiera davanti allo specchio* (1921), Borges' *The Library of Babel* (1941), and Landolfi's *Un concetto astruso* (1966).²⁷

These terms can be represented on a scale:



²⁷ Other theories of fantastic worlds include Tolkien, who conceives of a binary model of a real 'Primary World' and a 'Secondary World' of the fantastic (1975: 40-41); and Suvin who uses the term 'zero world' (1979: 11) which is equivalent to a Located World I. However zero is problematic because it suggests that the real world is an unchangeable, immediate constant, rather than a construction.

The most populous category for fantastic stories, particularly those with gothic tones, is Dislocated World I (Caesar concurs, arguing that '[d]isplacement is at the heart of the gothic novel' (2007: 104)), because it is a category which balances realistic coordinates with unclear boundaries which more easily creates a space for the fantastic to coexist with the real. These categories are starting points for analysis, and the importance of each is contingent upon its representation and function in a particular narrative. Therefore, it is reductive to say, for example, that all dream worlds are unlocated, when *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1872) also contains characteristics which apply to a World II classification. What distinguishes dream worlds is the fact that they operate delimited within a character's mind. Whilst from the perspective of another character nothing appears impossible, this is not to say that there are no mechanics at work. The dream is merely a world embedded within the mind of a character who inhabits another world, and the boundaries of which might break down if the dream affects the outer world, for example, in Turgenev's *The Dream* (1876).²⁸

To further separate paradigm of reality from world type, gothic stories and fairytales are usually Dislocated World Is, but have different paradigms. In a gothic story, the impossible may irrupt into an everyday but dislocated setting; in a fairytale, magic may be accepted as part of the makeup of that paradigm. Changes or disturbances *to* the paradigm of reality refer to new rules or objects; in short, if an event is deemed impossible for a narrative world, then the paradigm has changed; if what takes place is considered possible, then there are changes and disturbances *within* a paradigm. A ghost in an everyday setting would be a paradigm-changing event; magic in a fairytale would be contained within a paradigm without any modification; insanity would denote disturbances within a paradigm.

²⁸ Reproduced in Calvino's anthology (2009).

Access

As various elements are supplemented and erased within their narrative world constructions, the reader gains some understanding of the mechanics of how the fantastic elements work, how they integrate with each other, and the internal logic of the text, otherwise known as '*epistemological access*' (Walton 1990: 191; Ronen 1994: 93). For example, Dr Van Helsing in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) provides explanations for Dracula's movements, weaknesses and conditions of existence. However, some elements may remain unexplained because they are inexplicable, inexpressible, or irresolvable; for whatever reason that epistemological access is denied—for example, erasure or supplementing—, there is a certain level of *epistemological restriction* (my term). This category is of note because it can signpost where the narrative problematizes and questions reality, and is important to contrast with what the reader *is* granted access to. *Una goccia* in the following chapter on Buzzati is an example of a text characterised predominantly by epistemological restriction.

Character

In order to analyse characters in fantastic literature, a qualification of psychoanalysis is first needed. This is because when presented with a ghost or impossible object, psychoanalysis either assumes that it stands figuratively for a desire or mental process on the part of the author or the character. In both cases, psychoanalysis denies the existence of the impossible in a narrative. However, this assumes that sufficient information is provided in the text to identify mental conditions and hidden desires. Yet

a central process of the fantastic is erasure—the removal of narrative information—making the application of psychoanalysis to fantastic literature a tenuous undertaking; secondly, the characters might not be human, thus limiting its application. Rather, the objective of the thesis is to analyse the internal logic of the fantastic, not its external figurative meaning.

On the other hand, the point of analysing character reaction and emotion in fantastic narrative is simply one of ascertaining how a human or nonhuman character reacts when confronted with disturbing or impossible stimuli. What might be epistemologically restrictive to the reader may well be perfectly explicable to a nonhuman character, who is itself a construction of different objects and rules. Character is therefore just another component part of a fantastic narrative, the limits of character perception and intellect just another boundary, access to which—*psychological access*—is contingent upon literary example.

In summary, *Different Mimetics* is a modal methodology which is intentionally broad and structural in nature; it does not propose any irreducible characteristic in order to account for a wide range of literary examples of the fantastic, and compare similarities and differences over time. What *Different Mimetics* adds to the discourse of the fantastic is a way of connecting various models together, such as how irruption links to paradigm, or how a world we know as our own links to the inexplicable; the first purpose of this model is therefore inclusion. Secondly, it looks in detail at the plurality of characteristics and different components in order to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a fantastic narrative. A ghost story is not just about a ghost, but includes changed laws of the physical world, rules governing its movement, behaviour and the degree of compatibility and mechanical integration with the environment around it, which requires that the narrative is broken down and a subtler approach

taken rather than simply stating the existence of a ghost. This is therefore a model of narrative dissection. Thirdly, looking at how the fantastic is constructed allows for a better assessment of how convincing the internal logic of a narrative may be, whether the rules are consistent, whether there are internal contradictions, and as a corollary, mechanics can be compared in different texts and authors. Thus the model attempts to overcome the two fallacies which are prevalent in the discourse of the fantastic: the definition of single characteristics and the hierarchy implied by this which are counterbalanced by a focus on plurality; secondly, by focusing on the internal logic of a narrative, Different Mimetics refutes any requirement of fantastic literature to measure up to external qualifications of representing the real world.

Part II

A Brief Methodological Preface

The second half of this thesis comprises four studies of Italian authors of the fantastic out of whose respective corpuses a selection of texts has been chosen for analysis using Different Mimetics. The authors have been chosen because of their importance to Italy's tradition, and their selected texts chosen are among the most problematic ones in narrative terms. As this is a structuralist, non-aesthetic criterion of analysis, a number of texts which appear in the following chapters have been overlooked by the secondary literature.

In the case of the first author, Ugo Tarchetti, the selected stories make up the totality of his fantastic output, which includes a range of texts of varying complexity, restriction and quality. Whilst Tarchetti is primarily an imitator of foreign authors, he is included because he is the first writer of the Italian tradition and represents an important point of departure from which to measure the development of the fantastic. The second author, Giovanni Papini is a figurehead of this tradition of the early twentieth century. He creates narrative works of a different order to Tarchetti, and is instrumental in advancing the fantastic in Italian culture in part through his associations with the Italian Futurists. Thirdly, Dino Buzzati is one of only a few authors in Italy to whom the single label of 'fantastic author' can be applied. Although a journalist by trade, the great majority of his fiction can be classed as fantastic, and he significantly adds to the number of published stories in this genre in Italy between the 1930s and the 1970s. Finally, the most famous literary figure of the four, Italo Calvino, is an author who is responsible for a great deal of critical response to the fantastic in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century, and his work is important not only because of this recognition, but also in modal and structural terms.

There are two further considerations to note. Firstly, there exists little criticism in English on Papini and especially Tarchetti, and their respective chapters are therefore in part a correction of this oversight. Secondly, the question of literary originality which underpins much of the criticism on the fantastic in Italy should be mentioned. None of these four authors write without external literary influence, but complete originality is not a legitimate claim for any writer, and this second section is not an exploration of establishing the literary sources of each author. However, where relevant, influence and indeed plagiarism will be highlighted.

The texts have been chosen as a means of testing the theory, but this is not an exclusive aim. In the case of the chapter on Tarchetti, conclusions drawn apply to all of his fantastic work; and for Papini and Calvino, the principles of the mechanics of their selected fantastic stories are also applicable more broadly to the rest of their fantastic work. For Buzzati, however, given the thematic range and quantity of stories to choose from, some conclusions reflect his wider fiction, others are more specific to the texts analysed. The reason why I focus on a small sample rather than an overview of the work of each author is that such a broad approach already features throughout the critical literature; instead, my approach of analysing the mechanics requires close reading and is therefore influenced by the permitted length of this thesis. The conclusions this thesis draws derive from the application of Different Mimetics, and the wider aim is not to simply list what features in each author's work, but to explore how they operate mechanically, why some texts are more important and convincing than others, and to outline both the changes and similarities of the fantastic in Italy from the late nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century.

In the following four chapters, the order of the authors will be chronological, but the order in which the texts of each author will be analysed will be thematic so as to

reflect the way in which the fantastic works, as a departure from norms and everyday reality, in terms of World Location. The Unlocated and Located World Is will feature first, followed by the Dislocated World Is, and finally the World IIs, which will give a better idea of how far each author takes the fantastic.

3. Ugo Tarchetti: Cautious Beginnings

Introduction

Iginio Ugo Tarchetti (1839²⁹-1869) is a relatively minor figure in the literature of the nineteenth century in Italy. His fame comes chiefly from his associations with a group of Italian bohemians called the Scapigliati—literally ‘the dishevelled ones’—whose ranks included Cletto Arrighi, Camillo and Arrigo Boito, and Emilio Praga. Theirs was a reactionary stance, in the sense that they reacted against a modernising and industrialising society and against bourgeois ideals.³⁰ The Scapigliati were late Romantics, but not entirely in terms of what could be broadly called European Romanticism. In Italy, Romanticism was bound up with the Risorgimento and the European Romantic ideas of Nation, which in the case of Italy also meant political emancipation (Getto et al. 1972: 446). What is absent from Italy’s Romanticism, and which the Scapigliati embarked upon was ‘quelle punte estreme del Romanticismo europeo’ (Getto et al. 1972: 546), that is, the macabre and gothic elements which were present in the national literatures of Britain, France and Germany. Tarchetti is important in this context because he is the first author in Italy to write fantastic stories, as Moretti points out, ‘[p]rima della pubblicazione dei *Racconti fantastici* tarchettiani è arduo ritrovare nella letteratura italiana dell’Ottocento quei temi definiti dal Todorov tipici del genere «fantastique»’ (1977: 103). During this historical period in which the demands of literature were towards realistic modes of representation as well as political and

²⁹ In the introduction to the two-volume *Iginio Ugo Tarchetti: tutte le opere* (1968a: 63) Enrico Ghidetti revises the commonly held belief that Tarchetti was born in 1841 by reference to Giuseppe Degiovanni’s 1939 discovery of Tarchetti’s birth certificate. The correct date is 29th June 1839.

³⁰ Venuti and Galvani highlight how one of Tarchetti’s earlier novels, *Una nobile follia* (1866), was allegedly burned in some barracks because of its unacceptable antimilitarist tone (Tarchetti 1992: 11; Galvani 1969: 24).

ethical questions bound up with the Unification (Ghidetti and Lattarulo 1984: vii; Ruchin 2011: 11), this was no easy literary environment for the fantastic.

Racconti fantastici (1869) thus marks the beginning of the discourse of the fantastic in Italy. Although Tarchetti and some of the Scapigliati wrote stories before 1869 which could be classed as fantastic (including some of the stories in *Racconti fantastici*), this is the first instance of a collection of stories which demonstrates a more systematic approach to this type of literature, rather than the series of occasional ephemeral stories more typical of the evolution of the fantastic in Italy over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³¹

As to why Tarchetti chose to write fantastic stories, from a literary stance and by drawing from foreign texts, Venuti suggests it was a way 'to question the hegemony of realist discourse in Italian fiction' and subvert 'the formal conventions of realism and the individualistic concept of subjectivity' (1992: 197). Secondly, from a psychological point of view, Mangini argues that the fantastic was for Tarchetti 'il genere che meglio di ogni altro assecondava la sua ansia di confrontarsi direttamente con le oscurità dell'anima' (2000: 144), an assertion Tardiola also makes: 'il «racconto fantastico» di Tarchetti è [...] una analisi dell'inquietante natura «notturna» della psiche' (1989: 98). This psychological focus explores the themes of the split subject, again undermining the bourgeois notion of a unified character.³² Tarchetti certainly engages with realistic discourse, but in more tempered and collaborative ways than the combative approach which Venuti maintains. Tarchetti does not abandon realist modes of representation

³¹ Famous examples of Scapigliati texts include Arrigo Boito's *Il pugno chiuso* (1870) and his brother Camillo Boito's *Macchia grigia* (1877). For anthologies of Scapigliati texts, see Finzi (1980) and Carnero (2011).

³² For a further discussion of the split mind and split body in Tarchetti more generally, see Roda (1991; 2009); for the split body in Italian fantastic literature, see Roda (2009); and for psychoanalytic readings of Tarchetti, see Ceserani (1974) and in particular Mangini (2000). It should be noted that Mangini's monograph on Tarchetti does not feature much because it has a different focus to that being explored here.

outright; in fact, in his stories they are rather combined with the fantastic. I would therefore argue a third reason for Tarchetti's fantastic which extends the two above arguments, and which I will explore in more detail below. During the second half of the nineteenth century, pseudoscientific practices such as magnetism and in particular spiritualism in Italy were growing in popularity.³³ As well as subverting bourgeois reality, Tarchetti is also representing an alternative reality which legitimates the supernatural through the subversive use of a refashioned positivism, one whose reach as a science is extended to include the fantastic. Tarchetti himself

had experimented with mesmerism, hypnotism, and animal magnetism in addition to keeping himself informed of the latest accounts of preternatural experiences in Italy; he was familiar with, for example, Teofilo Coreni's *Annals of Spiritism*, which was published in 1864 and which circulated in Italy and in Europe (Del Principe 1996: 80).

However, in his stories there is no systematic position with regard to the impossible; protagonists and narrators both accept and reject the supernatural. Ruchin concurs: 'Tarchetti sperimenterà, nel corpus delle opere a cui accennavamo, queste nuove dottrine in modo come sempre alterno: ora abbracciandole entusiasticamente, ora allontanandosene sospettoso ed impaurito' (2011: 113).

Without any domestic models from which to draw, Tarchetti looks abroad for inspiration, particularly to Poe (through Baudelaire's translation) and Hoffmann. Indeed, almost all of his stories have overt resonances of established nineteenth century texts. It is therefore more difficult to ascribe originality to Tarchetti in the way that originality can be ascribed to later twentieth century authors of the fantastic; on the other hand, at the beginning of any literary discourse, such heavy external influence is understandable and indeed necessary for development. Although Tarchetti is more an

³³ Ghidetti however notes that spiritualism was still a minor cultural moment when Tarchetti was writing, 'quando ancora, tutto sommato, lo spiritismo «scientifico» aveva scarsa udienza in Italia' (2008: 34). Del Principe also shows below that spiritualism, for example, was only a few years old by the end of the 1860s; its heyday occurs in the next few decades.

epigone than an innovator, his work is important because it is precisely the *beginning*, not the most authoritative.

However, the focus here is not on questions of literary legitimacy, but on the mechanics that Tarchetti uses. By comparison to later authors, Tarchetti's fantastic output is limited, further demonstrating the scarcity of fantastic stories at this time. Whilst I have needed to select stories from the works of Papini, Buzzati, and Calvino, the texts below represent the totality of Tarchetti's fantastic stories. *Racconti fantastici* comprises five stories: *Le leggende del castello nero* (1867), *I fatali* (1869), *La lettera U (Manoscritto d'un pazzo)* (1869), *Un osso di morto* (1869) and *Uno spirito in un lampone* (1869).³⁴ The other stories which qualify as fantastic are *Riccardo Waitzen* (1867), *Il lago delle tre lamprede (Tradizione popolare)* (1868), *L'elixir dell'immortalità (Imitazione dall'inglese)* (1868), and *Re per ventiquattrore (Storia di un giorno della mia vita)* (1869). All of these stories were written within a relatively brief period—in fact, Tarchetti's entire literary career only stretches from 1865 to 1869—, but despite this, these stories cover a wide range of fantastic themes: predestination, spiritualism, immortality, alchemy, madness, the fairytale, metamorphosis and utopia.

One important omission from the selected texts requires justification. The unfinished *Fosca* (1869)³⁵ is absent here because *Fosca* is not a fantastic story, as Roda concurs (2009: 21), and it does not fulfil the requirement of problematizing narrative reality. Clara and Fosca are two separate women; they do not form a double like in Poe's *Ligeia*. 'Scapigliato' *Fosca* may be; fantastic it is not.

In the following analysis, I argue that Tarchetti's fantastic stories do not fit either with Todorov's model, or more generally within a nineteenth century framework of

³⁴ Mariani claims that these were 'senza dubbio scritti in anni diversi' (1967: 401), but given Tarchetti's brief life and even briefer period of activity as a writer, they are unlikely to have been written at time much removed from 1869.

³⁵ Tarchetti died before completion; in his stead his friend Salvatore Farina finished the novel which was subsequently published (Ghidetti 1968a: 53).

irruption because they are firstly predominantly normalized, and secondly they temper the fantastic through farce and irony. Furthermore, Tarchetti's stories are unproblematic because the fantastic is balanced with realistic modes of representation, and little is erased. Thirdly, I argue that Tarchetti's stories function by *coincident mechanics*, where two elements coexist in the same space or time which creates the fantastic in the narrative.

La lettera U

La lettera U is Tarchetti's narrative which is most grounded in a reason-centred world: the manuscript of the story is discovered 'nel manicomio di Milano l'11 settembre 1865' (1968b: 64), enclosed in a controlled environment away from the rest of society, and it is an environment which undermines and refutes the validity of the protagonist's claims because he is considered insane by the system which incarcerates him. Concluding that the madman has nothing of value to say moreover reflects the difficulty the fantastic in Italy encountered when it first emerged.

The story is of a man who fears and despises the letter u. Since he was a child, he has hated this vowel, and reacts with violence to its appearance or utterance. Even in love there is no respite, as he cannot bear to be with any woman with u in her name. He makes the mistake of eventually giving in and marrying Ulrica, but when she refuses to change or abbreviate her name, he beats her,³⁶ for which he is incarcerated.

The revelation at the end that this manuscript was written by an asylum patient, as well as the subtitle of 'manoscritto d'un pazzo' not only legitimates the obsessive behaviour, but also requires it: to justify incarceration and the label of madness, the

³⁶ This scene with Ulrica is preceded by a dream in which a giant u is closing its legs around the narrator—which Viazzi interestingly terms an 'incubo vampiresco' (1977: 77)—, and this fear of being eaten or crushed exacerbates the condition of the already perturbed protagonist.

patient and narrator must demonstrate behaviour which is expected to conform to non-normative modes of behaviour. In other words, the subtitle and the final remark noting the discovery of the story normalize the behaviour because it is precisely expected, and these two markers enclose and separate the protagonist's rants much like the physical space of the asylum separates the madman from the rest of society. Rather than madness as subversive or dangerous behaviour, these markers reassure, signalling 'reason at work'.³⁷ Santoro furthermore notes that,

l'elemento perturbante non si manifesta come un evento eccezionale che irrompe dall'esterno, ma come un'ossessione che cresce gradualmente nella mente del protagonista fino a condizionarne l'intera esistenza, prendendo il sopravvento sulla sua razionalità e facendogli perdere il senso della misura (2008: 74).

The protagonist's madness is not a sudden affliction from without, but an internal process which gradually supplements (in the sense of replacing) his rationality. Encountering the letter u triggers a reaction which demonstrates that the protagonist's behaviour is both predictable and consistent because these associations remain—Ulrica still contains the letter u—, not to mention the widespread prevalence of the letter u elsewhere. This omnipresence leads the narrator to see patterns.

Entrai in una nuova sfera di osservazioni, in una sfera più elevata, più attiva: studiai i rapporti che legavano ai destini dell'umanità questa lettera fatale; ne trovai tutte le fila, ne scopersi tutte le cause, ne indovinai tutte le leggi; e scrissi ed elaborai, in cinque lunghi anni di fatica, un lavoro voluminoso, nel quale mi proponeva di dimostrare come tutte le umane calamità non procedessero da altre cause che dall'esistenza dell'U [...](Tarchetti 1968b: 61-62).

When he is incarcerated, he indignantly protests, '[i]o pazzo! Sciagurati! Pazzo! perché ho scoperto il segreto dei loro destini! dell'avversità dei loro destini! perché ho tentato di migliorarli?...Ingrati!' (64). Rather than a madman who is deficient of reason, he

³⁷ This argument is a reworking of that made by Susan Stewart in her book on nonsense (1978: 6).

considers himself a visionary who can see structures which affect the world of which those around him are unaware. However, this is a claim undermined by two aspects: firstly, by the absurd notion that a written letter can be responsible for altering the course of worldly events, and secondly, and more importantly, that no one else has corroborated these findings, which would legitimate his delusions of persecution.

Ironically, in claiming to be a visionary, he fails to see several contradictions. In writing his manuscript, he continually writes the letter both on its own and as part of other words: the attempt to erase the letter u results in a continual reminder of its existence. The narrator fails to see the paradox of articulating that which he intends to keep silent. He also freely admits that his name contains a u, yet never thinks to alter his own name when he asks the same of Ulrica. Stating that he was born with a u in his name distinguishes the narrator from the author: Tarchetti added the name Ugo in reverence to Ugo Foscolo later in his life (Galvani 1969: 10), yet the narrator was *born* with a u. It is not Tarchetti himself who is writing this autobiographical manuscript, but a character with a u in his name, who might also be called Ugo. In the same way that the source of the text is deferred—it is found by (presumably) one of the asylum staff—so too is the character: it is not Tarchetti himself but a character who could be a Tarchetti-esque character who tells the story.

Words alluding to supernatural forces appear throughout the story, ‘profili fatali’, ‘segno fatale’, ‘l’infuenza’, ‘predestinato’ but these same words in other Tarchetti stories such as *I fatali* carry a greater weight because such supernatural occurrences are at least discussed outside of an asylum; within, the writings of this madman read as an articulation of paranoia. Since the narrator does not reveal the contents of his manifesto, proofs of this fantastic supplementary rule linking discrete causes and laws

together are missing, erased. It is at most a trace rule, merely implied and supported by the fervour of the narrator's claim but otherwise falsified by the absence of evidence.

I fatali

I Fatali is the first and longest of the collection *Racconti fantastici*, but here features after *La lettera U* because its central theme of supernatural fatalism represents a reality further from consensus norms than the rants of a madman. Along with *Riccardo Waitzen* and *Le leggende del castello nero*, *I fatali* is distinct from the rest of Tarchetti's fantastic stories in one particular instance: it contains an introductory reflection, in this case on the limits of science, where Tarchetti questions the basis upon which knowledge of the world is constructed in order to create a space for the fantastic that follows in the main body of the story.

[L]a scienza ha analizzato la natura; i suoi sistemi, le sue leggi, le sue influenze ci sono quasi tutte note: *ma essa si è arrestata dinanzi ai fenomeni psicologici*, e dinanzi ai rapporti che congiungono questi a quelli. Essa non ha potuto avanzarsi di più, e ha trattenuto le nostre credenze sulla soglia di *questo regno inesplorato* (Tarchetti 1968b: 8; my emphasis)

which leads to the question, '[e]sistono realmente esseri destinati ad esercitare un'influenza sinistra sugli uomini e sulle cose che li circondano?' (7). The main story discusses such a premise where at the 1866 Milan carnival, the narrator sees a young man in a crowd exchange a few words with a child, who is soon after run over by a coach. That evening at the theatre the narrator sees the same young man and a girl exchange words, and the girl falls ill. A few days later, in the café Martini³⁸ the narrator is listening to an old man talk about a Count Sagrezwitch who exerts inexplicable

³⁸ Roda (1996: 80) and Bonifazi both note that this was the Scapigliati's café in real life, a 'superbo tocco realistico' (Bonifazi 1982: 89).

influence on people when suddenly in walks a man fitting his description. The narrator then tells of Silvia, for whose affections he eventually cedes to another, Davide. A year after the café discussion, Davide finds the narrator and tells him that Silvia is to be married soon to the young man from the carnival, Baron di Saternez, but that she is also dying. Davide decides to invite Sagrezwitch in the hope that a meeting of these two ‘uomini fatali’ would cancel the weaker Saternez out. The two fight, Saternez is killed and Silvia recovers.³⁹

Similar terms and concepts recur as they do in *La lettera U*—predestination, and impossible causes and effects—but here there are witnesses within and not without society (i.e. beyond the confines of the asylum) which thereby provide more convincing circumstantial evidence for the fantastic. Firstly, Saternez’s is a visible sphere of influence, one with overtones of Mesmerism and the concept derived from it of a magnetic power emanating from living things⁴⁰ as does a ‘specie di corrente magnetica che avevano formato i loro sguardi’ (15) between Saternez and the young girl. At the carnival, ‘[l]a folla non si era diradata, ma si era ristretta in modo da lasciare in mezzo a sé uno spazio circolare abbastanza vasto. Nel centro di questo circolo miracoloso v’era un giovinetto’ (10), and later at the theatre, noting ‘una strana relazione con ciò che aveva osservato prima al corso di maschere’ (14), the narrator observes Saternez ‘isolato in un palco intorno al quale ve n’erano cinque o sei altri vuoti, mentre non era possibile vederne da tutte le altre parti del teatro un solo che non fosse occupato’ (14). The narrator identifies a supplementary rule, ‘una virtù misteriosa atta ad allontanare da lui tutto ciò che lo circondava’ (11), whereby those who cross the

³⁹ Mariani notes that *I fatali* draws from Gautier’s 1856 *Jettatura* ‘non soltanto lo spunto ma quasi tutte le situazioni e i personaggi’ (1967: 408).

⁴⁰ Roda (1996: 78) maintains that this mechanic is taken from Hawthorne’s *The Scarlett Letter*.

boundary to this circular space are harmed. However, there is no explicit proof that this action *causes* harm, but only circumstantial evidence.⁴¹

By comparison to Sagrezwitch, Saternez's sphere of influence is significantly smaller. Sagrezwitch is referred to as 'l'uomo piú fatale di cui si abbia memoria' (18), responsible for thousands of deaths all around the world, and contrasts in many ways with Saternez: Sagrezwitch is around fifty years old, bearded and with very black hair; Saternez is young, blonde and beardless—in fact has 'qualche cosa di femminile' (11) about him. The most significant difference is in their stance towards their powers: Saternez is visibly upset that he causes harm, Sagrezwitch revels in his destruction, but the eventual conflict which Tarchetti creates between these polarised characters is not a fairytale balance between positive and negative forces, but unwilling evil against malicious evil. The reason why this is important to highlight is because another fantastic supplementary rule, predestination, absolves Davide and the narrator from any moral responsibility of causing the death of Saternez—a man who is racked with guilt because of his powers—in order to prevent the death of the woman they all love, Silvia. Saternez explains his relationship with his counterpart: '[q]uell'uomo ed io ci *conoscevamo* da tempo, fors'anche ci *cercavamo* [...]. Il nostro incontro era inevitabile perché era predestinato' (33; original emphasis). Saternez forgives the actions of the narrator and Davide because '[v]oi non siete stati che un mezzo nelle mani della fatalità' (33). Earlier, when Davide writes to the narrator revealing that the two men know each other, he provides a similar explanation, '[i]o non poteva né prevedere, né arrestare gli avvenimenti che dovranno compiersi; è la mano della fatalità che li aveva

⁴¹ There is however, an inconsistency. When the narrator is formally introduced to Saternez as Silvia's betrothed, they share physical contact (as do the first two victims) and shake hands—'io gli porsi la mia mano quasi senza avvertirlo' (Tarchetti 1968b: 28)—but no harm comes to pass. Within this handshake moreover, there is a hint of the attractive qualities of Saternez also implicit by the reference to magnetism, something the narrator only experiences in proximity to Saternez.

preparati' (32). Both Davide and Saternez acknowledge an impossibility of preventing events, they recognise a supplementary rule of predestination which eliminates chance and which links separate events in the narrative. Moretti (1977: 107) rightly identifies the Todorovian theme of pan-determinism whereby everything in a narrative has a cause linked to a larger series of events, removing chance, luck or coincidence, resulting in a larger structure of connections 'even if [their] cause[s] can only be of a supernatural order' (1975: 110). There are therefore two levels of fantastic mechanic at work in *I fatali*. Firstly, delimited spheres of influence which operate by a trace rule whereby harm comes to pass to anyone who crosses the boundary of that space for which there is only coincidental evidence, although causality is strongly implied; and secondly, a World I-wide supplementary rule which links otherwise discrete causalities. Importantly, if this second rule is accepted, then the first rule is necessarily manifest, because pan-determinism eliminates coincidence, making the powers of Saternez and Sagrezwitch causal and not coincidental.

When Saternez's body is found, the newspapers reveal his real name to be 'Gustavo dei conti di Sagrezwitch' (40). Bonifazi argues that, since one is Corrado di Sagrezwitch and the murdered man is Gustavo di Sagrezwitch, 'lo schema può indicare anche l'inutile tentativo del figlio di distaccarsi dal padre e dal suo nome' (1982: 90). This is a convincing argument because it firstly demonstrates how these two men know each other, and also suggests that this fatalism (the powers of their spheres of influence) is hereditary, and therefore part of the normal makeup of the world rather than an irruption into it. Bonifazi also argues that the murder takes place because the father had forbidden his son to indulge his desires (1982: 90), which thereby undermines the claim of supernatural predestination because Saternez knows he will

eventually die at his father's hands, not because of supernatural forces over which he has no control, but simply because he has disobeyed his father.

In turn Davide's prediction that 'se l'esistenza di questo potere è verace, l'uno dovrà distruggere l'altro, la disparità delle forze cagionerà lo squilibrio; la sconfitta del più debole è inevitabile' (Tarchetti 1968b: 31) is incorrect as Saternez dies by a dagger through his heart rather by supernatural means. In this way, further evidence of fatalism is undermined by a material explanation, in the same way that predestination is undermined by the motives behind the actions of Saternez and Sagrezwitch. This is not to negate the existence of either rule, but simply prevents confirmation; they remain trace not manifest mechanics, which reflects the balance Tarchetti is keen to provide to the story—'[i]o non voglio dimostrarne né l'assurdo, né la verità. Credo che nessuno lo possa fare con argomenti autorevoli. Mi limito a raccontare fatti che hanno rapporto con questa superstizione' (9)—as well as the balance between the fantastic and the real found throughout these selected stories.

Riccardo Waitzen

Riccardo Waitzen is Tarchetti's most typically nineteenth century story, and as with *I fatali*, Tarchetti also inserts a preamble, where he discusses pseudoscientific topics including Mesmerism, spiritualism and magnetism, albeit unsystematically, 'alla rinfusa' (Guglielminetti 1977: 29). '[L]a scienza ha pure rialzato in questi ultimi tempi un lembo della cortina misteriosa. Mesmer, colla scoperta del magnetismo, sembrò aver fatto un passo gigantesco su questa via' (Tarchetti 1968a: 600). However, since the principles upon which this and other offshoots like intuition and clairvoyance are flawed, 'non si tardò a riconoscere che tutto era fittizio in questa scienza' (600). That said, Tarchetti

acknowledges one pseudoscientific practice with merit, which even requires magnetism: '[c]iò non di meno, una vaga, una poetica illusione è venuta oggi a mettere in rapporto il mondo fisico col mondo spirituale [...] intendo parlare dello *spiritismo*, questa applicazione singolare della scienza' (601; original emphasis). However, Tarchetti still mocks this practice by calling it a 'poetica illusione' and maintains the importance of scepticism, 'il dubbio è la rivelazione della scienza [...] poiché una sola fede esiste, quella del dubbio' (604-605).

In the main story, Riccardo Waitzen, a young aristocrat from Ofen, falls for Anna Roof, a sixteen-year-old with a beautiful voice whom he accompanies at the piano. He promises to love her for all of his life, but Riccardo eventually forgets Anna when she passes away. Years later, when Riccardo begins to play Hummel's symphony at the wedding party of Giorgio and his new wife Emilia, Emilia appears to have uncanny resemblances to Anna. Riccardo suddenly loses control of his hands which start to play the keyboard, crashing together in a loud discord, Emilia leans over to him and whispers the oath verbatim that Anna had once uttered into his ear, at which he flees. He dies soon after of syncope.

Uniquely among Tarchetti's stories, the balance between love story and fantastic story shifts as the narrative progresses, beginning with realistic representation and ending climactically with the irruption of Anna through Emilia. The other story of Tarchetti's in which the fantastic builds to a climax is *Uno spirito in un lampone*, but in that story the fantastic is introduced early on and therefore has no corresponding realistic balance. On the other hand, *Riccardo Waitzen* is more typical of a nineteenth century irruptive ghost story, no doubt due to the fact that Tarchetti draws from Poe's stories, in particular, *Ligeia* (1838). The Lady of Tremaine transforms into the dead lady Ligeia, in the same way that Emilia suddenly speaks with Anna's voice. Even the

moments of realisation and confirmation of the fantastic are italicized in Tarchetti as they are Poe: '*[her hair] was blacker than the raven wings of midnight*' (1994: 64) confirms a physical transformation in Poe, whereas '*Tu mi amerai anche dopo la mia morte, tu mi amerai per tutta la tua vita*' (Tarchetti 1968a: 629), an oath that was spoken only to Riccardo, confirms the supernatural presence of Anna.

The irruption in Tarchetti is tempered (in contrast to Poe) and in part legitimated by the preamble on pseudoscience because it anticipates the topic of the supernatural. However, in the main story the fantastic is set in motion by music not spiritualist doctrine, as Mariani notes (1967: 425). Before she dies Anna tells Riccardo that

il mio spirito veglierà costantemente presso di te, e ti accompagnerà come una guida invisibile [...]. Ma se pure io dovessi talvolta separarmi da te, se tu piú non mi sentissi al tuo fianco, e avessi bisogno della tua Anna... oh allora chiamami; suona quella sinfonia memorabile di Hummel [e][...] io volerò ancora presso di te, dovessi per ciò divellermi dall'infinito [...](Tarchetti 1968a: 619).

The mechanic that Anna is outlining is a means of communicating between worlds signifying that she is not always present, but can be summoned whenever the piece is played. The first time she is recalled, Riccardo's hands move '*come mosse da una forza estranea*' (622) and he feels '*invaso da un'altr'anima, sentiva la sua esistenza raddoppiata*' (623). The second time is a more intense experience because the room has '*una strana somiglianza*' (626) to the room where he first met Anna, Emilia has '*lo stesso profilo di Anna, la stessa persona esile e delicata*' (628), and again he feels possessed, '*le sue braccia avevano smarrita ogni coscienza della loro forza e ogni facoltà di governarla*' (629). In both cases, two minds operate in one space, and this theme of coexistent minds is recurrent in Tarchetti: in *Uno spirito in un lampone*, *Le leggende del castello nero* and *Un osso di morto*. It is important to note the difference to the fantastic topos of the double: whereas a double is a copy of the subject '*fortemente interiorizzato*' (Ceserani 1996: 90) but which also manifests externally, two

minds coexisting refers to the internal and intrusive existence of a *different* subject. Ruchin goes on to suggest that this can be understood as hermaphroditism (2011: 140), which is not a strictly valid conclusion because there is no physical change. Moreover in the final scene, Anna possesses both Riccardo and Emilia simultaneously. In other words, Anna's influence as a spirit is not limited to affecting one mind, but rather is able to coexist with a host in two separate people. In contrast to Poe, this influence does not physically transform Emilia as it does the Lady of Tremaine, and herein lies a structural difference: Anna supplements the minds of Riccardo and Emilia, in the sense that she adds to their minds, rather than replacing their minds; she co-exists in two separate people at once.

For a period, 'Riccardo non amava più Anna' (Tarchetti 1968a: 621) thus breaking his oath, so when he plays Hummel for the second time possessed, Anna's anger comes through the music, 'egli percosse sì violentemente sulla tastiera, che molte corde s'infransero e si arricciarono scivolando sulle altre con uno stridio prolungato e terribile' (629). Her omnipresence as a spirit, an 'inquietante ubiquità' as Roda puts it (2009: 20) creates an environment of surveillance for Riccardo who is literally haunted by the memory of his dead love, a justified fantastic form of paranoia, because he *is* being followed. Furthermore, Anna's omnipresence is a more convincing pan-determinism in Riccardo's life than in the world of *I fatali* because a manifest supernatural spirit has the power to watch and affect Riccardo's mind and the world around him. For example, Anna sets up the conditions for her return in the final scene, and she makes Emilia's music book fall open at Hummel's symphony, the very song which will summon her. Predestination also figures in *Riccardo Waitzen*, but in a more limited sense of 'essi erano nati l'uno per l'altro' (Tarchetti 1968a: 609) rather than the supposed destined conflict with the father in *I fatali*.

Un osso di morto

Spiritualism, the pseudoscientific practice which Tarchetti treats theoretically in passing in *Riccardo Waitzen*, is here addressed in narrative form. However, spiritualism in *Un osso di morto* is not taken altogether seriously; instead, this fantastic practice is itself subverted, undermined through irony and normalized to such an extent that the impossible becomes banal. In this regard, *Un osso di morto* maintains the ludic treatment of the fantastic of the story on which it is modelled,⁴² Gautier's *Le Pied de Momie* (1840).

After the death of his friend Federico M, an anatomy professor at Pavia University, the narrator attends a séance where he is most impressed with what he witnesses, and in a separate room, he tries contacting Federico himself. He succeeds, but is also contacted by the spirit of Pietro Mariani whose kneecap the narrator is currently using for a paperweight, and who that night visits the narrator to collect it. When the narrator wakes up, he is convinced it was all a dream, but then discovers that the kneecap is missing and in its place lies the black ribbon that Mariani left behind.

Three supernatural events take place: two séances and a visitation, the latter being the most problematic. At the first séance run by a magnetist in Milan, the narrator is so impressed that he decides to question the professor 'sul destino umano, e sulla spiritualità della nostra natura' (Tarchetti 1968a: 66): 'io fui sí meravigliato delle risposte che ascoltammo da alcuni spiriti [...] concepì il desiderio di chiamarne uno di mia conoscenza, e rivolgergli io stesso alcune domande' (66). The astonishment, then, is not due to any previous scepticism but rather due to the knowledge the spirits offer; the

⁴² As many note, including Roda (1991: 48) and Ruchin (2009: 115). This story by Gautier is reproduced in the appendix of Tarchetti (1992).

narrator marvels at their higher consciousness. After a few moments, feeling 'sensazioni nuove e inesplicabili', he claims 'la mia mano agitata e convulsa, mossa come da una forza estranea alla mia volontà, scrisse' (67). The conditions of the first séance are not outlined but if on the assumption they are similar to the second then neither séance is irruptive; the spirits communicate through the medium and onto the page, and there is no external manifestation. As in *Riccardo Waitzen*, two minds operate in the same space, the minds of the narrator and of Federico M, but in *Un osso di morto*, communication is by thought and written not spoken word. Not only is the séance internal, it is also a silent process, contrasting with the music in the previous example. During the third event, the ghost of Mariani manifests before the narrator, and on exiting, he stamps his foot upon which the narrator awakens to the sound of the porter banging on the door. This simultaneous action is problematic because it implies that the narrator was asleep, yet gave Mariani the kneecap that exists in the real world. Between the narrator returning home at night and the porter knocking on the door in the morning, there is a gap between the two time periods: the memory of the intervening time has been erased, and the two moments collapsed to occur simultaneously. This separation of the two time frames creates the space in which the ribbon could be replaced and for enough time to pass until the morning.

Tarchetti further problematizes the figure of the ghost by having the spirit of Mariani wish to have part of his corporeal and thus terrestrial form returned. The spirit presences in the two séances are incorporeal; in fact they use the narrator's body as their medium, so why does Mariani, a spirit, need his kneecap? If Mariani were still alive, this would be a legitimate if not gruesome request, but in spirit form Mariani is trying to supplement a corporeal bone to his now incorporeal form. Tarchetti is blurring

the boundary between what is considered corporeal and incorporeal in spiritualist terms because there is no longer just a spiritual encounter, but also a corporeal one.

On being awoken by the porter, the narrator attempts to disclaim what transpired, '[m]a quale insensatezza! Credere allo spiritismo... ai fantasmi' (71), but the supplementary black ribbon prevents him from doing so. Mariani's irruption is more unnerving for the narrator than the first two séances precisely because the spirits of the séance do not manifest in front of him but rather through him, under controlled conditions. Whilst communicating with spirits remains an internal and thus delimited fantastic mechanism, once Mariani manifests externally, he is no longer restricted to a coexistent presence and hence disrupts the paradigm of reality (but does not change it). However, despite the narrator's occasional terror—for even though he accepts spiritualism at the beginning, this is not to deny that he is apprehensive before attending the first séance—, the overall tone is ludic and ironic. Mariani's arrival takes place with a formal politeness, '[p]erdonerete se ho dovuto disturbarvi nel colmo della notte' Mariani begins, to which the narrator hurriedly replies '[o]h! è nulla, è nulla' (70). The ghost bows to the narrator's welcome and begins fitting the kneecap during which the narrator tries to make small talk as the conversation wanes, '[c]he notizie ne recate dall'altro mondo?' (71), also with the intention of salvaging his original idea of asking profound questions to Federico M. However, these are instead superseded by a chore, and the narrative challenges a stereotypical nineteenth century representation of an irruptive ghost by normalizing it to the point where the narrator is simply receiving a guest in the small hours of the morning. As such, the visitation has a distinct Leopardian ring to it, making *Un osso di morto* a rare occurrence in Tarchetti of influence for a fantastic story from within Italy, and not only from without. In the *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie* (1824), Ruysch is visited by ghosts whom he

scolds for waking him, but takes the opportunity to ask about death: '[m]ille domande da farvi mi vengono in mente. Ma perché il tempo è corto, e non lascia luogo a scegliere, datemi ad intendere in ristretto, che sentimenti provaste di corpo e d'animo nel punto della morte' (Leopardi 1977: 764). Tarchetti by contrast trivialises the exploratory potential of the séance similar to Ruysch's questions by having the narrator instead make small talk, as well as mocking the figure of Federico M, 'scettico profondamente e inguaribilmente' (Tarchetti 1968b: 65) now transformed into a spirit, ironically the very 'embodiment' of what he doubted.

L'elixir dell'immortalità (Imitazione dall'inglese)

It is understandable if not expected that in being the first to write fantastic stories in Italy Tarchetti would look to established foreign authors for a yardstick and for inspiration. Poe and Hoffmann are notable sources, not only because their influence (as well as others) has been noted in Tarchetti's work by other critics (Bosco 1959: 128; Ghidetti 1968a: 36; Pieri 2006: 99; McLoughlin 1993a: 431; Del Principe 1996: 33), but also because these two in particular influence many fantastic writers in Italy through to the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. However, *L'elixir dell'immortalità* crosses over into plagiarism. In the introduction to Tarchetti's *Le opere* Ghidetti only refers to 'un introvabile originale inglese' (1968a: 16), and it is not until 1992 that Lawrence Venuti establishes that Tarchetti, with a few modifications to the original not including the act of translation itself, copied Mary Shelley's *The Mortal Immortal* (1833) (Venuti 1992: 196-230). Michael McLoughlin (1993a) 'forse ignaro della segnalazione fatta da Lawrence Venuti' (Mura 2008: 106) likewise and apparently independently identifies the same source for *L'elixir dell'immortalità* as Venuti. In terms

of a legitimate innovative fantastic tale, Tarchetti falls short of the mark, but in choosing this text to plagiarise Tarchetti also selects a particular combination of fantastic mechanics which can be compared to the rest of his work.

A three-hundred-and-twenty-year-old Vincenzo tells the story of how he became immortal. In a bid to win the affections of Ortensia, Vincenzo begins to work with the alchemist Cornelio, but Ortensia feels abandoned and chooses a rich suitor called Alberto Koffer in revenge. One day, Vincenzo is told to watch a vial for any change, but instead of waking Cornelio, Vincenzo drink its contents, believing it to be a potion to cure love. Cornelio throws Vincenzo out, who returns to an overjoyed Ortensia but Vincenzo believes he has lost all affection for her. Five years later Cornelio summons Vincenzo to his deathbed and shows an identical vial, and he reveals it is a potion for immortality. As the years pass, Ortensia ages and Vincenzo remains twenty years old.

Venuti (1992: 211) argues that the opening statement of Shelley's work evokes hesitation through the juxtaposition of a nineteenth century date and the claim of being over three hundred years old. By extension, the same claim could be made for Tarchetti, but I disagree that there is suspension 'between the two registers of fantastic discourse, the mimetic and the marvellous' (Venuti 1992: 212); rather, these are not antithetical statements, both can be true at the same time, and it is not necessary to pick between them. Moreover, since the opening lines contain the keyword 'immortality', hesitation is difficult to support because the claim to be three hundred years old precisely corroborates the title. Arguing against hesitation is significant because hesitation can identify a problematizing of narrative reality; but in this case *L'elixir dell'immortalità* is unproblematic. The mechanics function by a potion which extends a process—Vincenzo's lifespan—and supplements a rule whereby ageing is halted, all of which is naturalised through an ingested liquid: the elixir supplements (in

the sense of adding to) the function of food by sustaining Vincenzo's body indefinitely. In an ironic twist, Vincenzo drinks the potion in error (Bonifazi 1982: 85)⁴³ which he thought would release him from Ortensia, but which does so only eventually, instead drawing out his suffering as he watches her grow old and die whilst he remains in the same state as the day he chose to reject her.

Despite the three hundred year period to the events with Cornelio in 1547, the alchemy of *L'elixir dell'immortalità* shares mechanical similarities with the pseudoscientific practices of the late nineteenth century era in which the narrator is writing, which include the two premises of *I fatali*, *Riccardo Waitzen* and the mechanics of *Un osso di morto*. Spiritualism, for example, requires a series of objects and actions to actualise the process (table, medium, and so on), and it a process which can be repeated so long as the same conditions are created each time. It is therefore a controlled process; it is not a sudden and unexpected irruption into the everyday. Likewise, Cornelio's vial transforms into an elixir at a specific moment in its creation, and Anna is recalled with the correct conditions and song. Cornelio's instructions are clear and accurately predict the transformation: 'nell'istante in cui questo colore incomincerà (sic) a cambiarsi, destami [...]. Dapprima, egli si muterà in bianco, e quindi emetterà degli sprazzi di luce color d'oro' (Tarchetti 1968a: 120), which is exactly what happens and is also the point at which Vincenzo ingests the elixir. When Cornelio repeats the experiment on his deathbed, the same transformation occurs. Thus the process is normalized and the results foreseen; the effects of these processes may differ—Vincenzo eventually yearns for death, and the narrator is nonetheless terrified of the arrival of a spirit in *Un osso di morto*—but the disturbance within the paradigm of reality for each story is minimal.

⁴³ Bonifazi discusses the function of error in Tarchetti's stories both in his *Teoria del fantastico* (1982) and in the 1976 conference on Tarchetti (1977).

Il lago delle tre lamprede

Fairytales are characteristically unproblematic because supernatural modifications to the narrative world are accepted and integrated into the mechanics of how that world functions: what might be understood as impossible in the real world is considered normal, and so the plots which unfold are not examples of disturbances to the paradigm of reality—as might occur in an irruptive story—but rather snapshots of a normal environment where such questions of the impossible are not raised. *Il lago delle tre lamprede*, a story Ghidetti supposes that Tarchetti picked up when he was posted to the Italian south (1968b: 237), fits within this framework, but with one important difference. The dislocation of the narrative world is smaller than in a fairytale precisely because it is set in ‘una grande foresta al mezzogiorno dell’Italia’ (Tarchetti 1968b: 106), not a faraway, unlocated world. One further reason for why *Il lago delle tre lamprede* is unproblematic is that the explicit reference to an omnipotent deity ‘il Signore’ denotes a pan-deterministic structure to which all improbable and impossible causes can be attributed.

In a forest in the Mezzogiorno, the narrator finds himself inexplicably walking in circles. He is rescued by a local who explains that he had unknowingly trampled on magic grass. As she leads him back to safety, she recounts the story of the lake where there used to be a convent, in which three hermits lived. During a drought, all water sources dry up except at the convent. When an old man, in fact God in disguise, calls begging for water, he is turned away, upon which the old man transforms the hermits into lampreys, and the convent into a lake.

When trying to leave the forest, the narrator suddenly notes that ‘mi accorsi di trovarmi tuttora nello stesso luogo dal quale era poc’anzi partito!’ (107), and the second

attempt—‘mi trovavo precisamente in quel primo luogo, donde aveva deliberato il mio ritorno’ (108)—confirms the disorientation. Further confirmation of the supernatural comes from the woman who leads the narrator to safety, and who provides the clearest explanation to the mechanics out of all of Tarchetti’s fantastic stories, revealing that the narrator unwittingly trod on ‘erba maligna’ (108) that grows around ‘circoli delle streghe’ (109). As such, he cannot leave the area without someone else first making the sign of the cross three times, and this mechanic can only be used seven times for each rescuer. This moreover applies to other living things, ‘[v]edete voi questi sciami di moscherini che vi danzano sopra con ali stanche? e queste lucertole che vi girano intorno senza fermarsi? Il loro destino è deciso, essi moriranno qui, perché non potranno più allontanarsene’ (109)(sic). The slug circles and the narrator’s roundabout trip back to his starting point denote a maximum distance each can move from the grass after having trampled it, which bear similarities to *I fatali* where the fatal influences of Saternez and Sagrezwitch operate within delimited circular spaces. The manifest rule of bewitched grass is clearly explained; this is a particularly unproblematic story.

The lake with the lampreys is a static fantastic element, a punishment meted out upon three selfish monks. The metamorphosis takes place after the refusal to carry out a good deed, and they remain incarcerated as lampreys in a lake, trapped in the very substance they refused to give away, echoing the manner in which the contrapassi in Dante’s *Inferno* reflect the crime committed. The first mechanic of magic circles further alludes to Dante, as Tarchetti’s narrator is lost in a wood as night is falling where he has taken a path which leads him back to where he was before, and not out (see *Inferno*, I). A guide appears, accompanies him back on the right track, and explains how the monks were punished. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that the *deus*

ex machina who frees the narrator from an otherwise impossible situation is a local lady, and not the same god of the folktale, although the presence of pan-determinism would suggest that her arrival was caused by supernatural intention. The confirmed rule of the magic grass and the metamorphosis of the monks are not supplementary to the narrative world because they are accepted as possible in a world controlled by an omnipotent deity—in essence, a normalized fantastic mechanic.

To a degree most notable in *Il lago delle tre lamprede* Tarchetti stresses the balance between opposing forces in the story. The flood counterbalances the drought; the misdeed by the monks is balanced by their punishment; and the effect of the grass is countered by the signs of the cross. This attention to balance is typical of fairy and folktales, and as a whole *Il lago delle tre lamprede* is thus unremarkable and unproblematic, and the narrative balances without much need of explanation. In terms of Tarchetti's fantastic stories, *Il lago delle tre lamprede* is exceptional because no other stories normalize and explain the fantastic to the same extent, and from a different perspective, Ghidetti argues that *Il lago delle tre lamprede* stands out in Tarchetti's work because of a lack of precise literary models due to the simplicity of the plot, '[n]on sembra infatti possibile ricondurre la storia, per la semplicità stessa naturale degli elementi che ne costituiscono la trama, a modelli letterari, per cui essa resta come un fatto sostanzialmente isolato nel corso di tutta la produzione narrativa dello scrittore' (1968b: 237); neither qualification however attributes a great deal of merit to this story.

Uno spirito in un lampone

The second folktale of Tarchetti's, *Uno spirito in un lampone* is set in the south of Italy like *Il lago delle tre lamprede*, this time Calabria, but instead of the static and balanced binary processes of the impossible *Uno spirito in un lampone* focuses more on the process mechanics of the fantastic, although it also bears the signs of typical fairytale oppositions. Modelled on Erckmann and Chatrian's *Le Bourgmestre en bouteille* (1862)(Mariani 1967: 423),⁴⁴ this is Tarchetti most in-depth exploration of coexistent minds, and it includes aspects of metamorphosis and, as Del Principe (1996: 120) and Ruchin (2011: 140) argue, hermaphroditism, all binary structures in a single space: two minds, two physical forms (metamorphosis), and two sexes (hermaphroditism).⁴⁵ To this list could be added the thematic juxtaposition of the gothic and fairytale with a murder mystery. Bonifazi (1982: 96) and Guglielminetti (1977: 27) furthermore argue for the theme of the double in this story; however, there is no doubling of the *same* subject, but rather a second presence.

A few months after the death of one his servants called Clara, the Baron of B (sic) goes hunting one November day and is surprised to find a raspberry bush bearing fruit. Having eaten, he begins to feel strange sensations as his mind is taken over by a female spirit. Against his will, he begins greeting people he would never normally acknowledge and his face begins to physically transform into Clara's. As the town gathers to investigate, the baron identifies Clara's killer in the crowd, who confesses to

⁴⁴ Reproduced in the appendix of Tarchetti (1992).

⁴⁵ Pieri goes so far as to qualify the baron as 'il primo "transessuale" della letteratura italiana moderna' (2006: 132). Whilst Pieri provides no further evidence to this claim of primacy, it is more accurate than that of Ruchin and Del Principe. Hermaphroditism denotes reproductive organs of both sexes, whereas transsexual means the psychology of one sex while possessing the reproductive organs of the other; as only the baron's face changes, he is more accurately transsexual.

the murder and to burying the body where the raspberry bush grew. The killer is incarcerated and the baron is given an emetic to rid him of the spirit.

Unlike the static metamorphosis in *Il lago delle tre lamprede* (in that there is simply a beginning and an end point), there is a single supplementary process of change in *Uno spirito in un lampone*, which can be separated out by its effect into: changes to the mind, changes in behaviour—how internal changes manifest externally without physical change—and the physical changes themselves. The changes moreover occur in this order, they are cumulative, and the effect of the fantastic (the presence of Clara's spirit) increases continuously towards a climax over the course of a few hours from ingestion to when the raspberries are vomited. Ghidetti notes the naturalistic way in which the fantastic leaves both the baron and the story by the use of an emetic (2008: 37); there is no external incantation, but instead a normal bodily process to expel substances from the body. Importantly, the emetic is necessary to induce the baron to vomit because the raspberries are not dangerous or harmful and so the co-presence of Clara is not at the cost of the baron's health; his stomach does not react to the intrusive supernatural presence as though it were dangerous. Indeed, the baron eats the berries precisely because he is thirsty, and is unable to distinguish them by their supernatural properties. Mariani notes this aspect of camouflage in both *Uno spirito in un lampone* and *Il lago delle tre lamprede*:

[l]'erba maligna del *Lago delle tre lamprede* non presenta particolari segni che la distinguano dalle altre piante di quel bosco così come la pianta di lamponi cresciuta sul cadavere della giovinetta in *Uno spirito in un lampone* è del tutto simile a quelle cresciute lì intorno (1967: 398).

It should also be noted that the raspberry bush stands out, but not because it is unnatural, but rather because it is out of season. Under its effects, the baron thinks he is not seeing the world 'piú cogli stessi occhi' (Tarchetti 1968b: 75), and feels as though

there are thoughts in his head which are not his, a 'specie di confusione e di duplicità che provo in tutti i miei sensi [...]. riordiniamo le nostre idee...Le nostre idee! Sì, perfettamente...perché sento che queste idee non sono tutte mie [...]'. Parmi di essere un uomo doppio' (76). It is ironic that the baron is talking to himself about having a second self, but again, Clara is not his *double*, but a doppio in terms of a second self.

Clara then begins to affect the baron's actions, whereby he picks flowers, and cannot bring himself to shoulder his rifle. On the way back to town, the baron greets the magistrate's wife, a lady whom he has never met but whom he automatically calls Caterina, some of his housemaids, and passionately kisses the neck of his manservant, all actions over which the baron has no control, and he can only helplessly and passively observe this farcical exchange of roles, trapped within his own body with another mind in control. Besides being overpowered by the spirit of Clara, the baron grows aware of the memories and feelings of this second mind which open to him a perspective he never knew.

Una nuova coscienza si formò in lui: tutta la tela di un passato mai conosciuto si distese d'innanzi a' suoi occhi: delle memorie pure e soavi di cui egli non poteva aver fecondata la sua vita vennero a turbare dolcemente la sua anima [...]. La sua mente spaziava in un mondo di affetti ignorato, percorreva regioni mai viste, evocava dolcezze mai conosciute (80-81).

The changes are therefore more substantial than simple control over mind and body; Clara's spirit is providing psychological access to her past life to which the baron is able to contrast his own, supplementing (in the sense of adding to) his own experiences. The effects of the fantastic on the baron's mind do not harm him; in fact, the supernatural intervention functions as a moral lesson designed to change his mind and behaviour from his three passions, 'della caccia, dei cavalli e dell'amore' (73).

When the physical metamorphosis begins, the baron notes that 'le due vite che parevano animarlo si separavano' (83) but also that 'gli parve che i suoi lineamenti si

fossero mutati, e provò la stessa sensazione come se avesse accarezzato il viso di un altro' (83). The baron regains some independent thought and control, but at the cost of physical changes to his face. When he looks in a mirror, 'vedeva due immagini in una' (83), but the second image is unclear, he can only make out that there is another image 'a profili vaporosi, instabili, conosciuti' (83), a familiar image because it resembles Clara's portrait. However, when he finds the portrait, he loses all control and is found by the townspeople

in preda ad un assalto violento di epilessia; tutta la sua vitalità pareva concentrarsi in quella tela; pareva che vi fosse in lui qualche cosa che volesse sprigionarsi dal suo corpo, che volesse uscirne per entrare nell'immagine di quel quadro (84).

The closer he gets to the picture, 'i suoi profili si modificavano sempre più, il suo volto riproduceva sempre più esattamente l'immagine della fanciulla' (84) until the crowd recognise him as Clara at which they panic when confronted with these supernatural events. From the woods to the castle, the closer to the painting the baron draws, the greater Clara's presence. The painting acts as a source to which Clara's spirit wishes to return, and she uses the baron as transportation from her corpse to her image, in an attempt to return to the real world. The transformation is a supplementary, irruptive, paradigm-changing process, but on the other hand the baron grows used to the second presence quickly. When he first sees his transformed face in a mirror, 'ciò gli pareva naturalissimo, perché egli sapeva che nella sua unità vi erano due persone, che era uno, ma che era anche due ad un tempo' (83), although this could be Clara's influence forcing him to think this. Nonetheless, the acceptance of the supernatural differs from the bystanders to the baron. The progression to metamorphosis as the spirit enters and affects the baron's thoughts, then his actions and then his face, as it gradually comes to the surface, denotes an external manifestation of an internal process, a typically

gothic trait disguised behind a folktale. Moreover, the process, whether normalized or irruptive depending on the particular character's perspective, is also *eruptive*, in that the fantastic emerges from within the body—and also quite literally, when the baron vomits the raspberries. The fruit might be harmless, and notwithstanding the moral lesson learnt through access to her thoughts Clara's increasing presence and control over the baron mirror the effects of a poison. Finally, it is also noteworthy how Clara's spirit is instrumental in solving the murder case, as she identifies her killer, as per her name, by providing *clarification*. The forester then confesses to the murder, confirming that the body was buried under the raspberry bush, and that the source of the supernatural intrusion was the raspberries the baron ate.

Re per ventiquattrore (Storia di un giorno della mia vita)

Roda dismisses *Re per ventiquattrore* as not as being worthy of any 'particolari titoli di merito' (1991: 41), and Bonifazi claims it is 'proprio la negazione del *fantastico*' (1982: 86; original emphasis) but whilst it certainly differs from typical fantastic narratives—in fact, it comes from the collection *Racconti umoristici*—it is worth considering. In this, Tarchetti's only political story (Guglielminetti 1977: 31), the 'molteplici spunti di satira antimonarchica' (Ghidetti 1968a: 20) which Guglielminetti suggests probably refer to Vittorio Emanuele II (1977: 31) are not in themselves relevant; rather the political conflicts in the island of Potikoros provide an example of a *cultural* irruption rather an irruption of the impossible in Tarchetti.

On the morning of the 18th April 1862, the narrator arrives on the island of Potikoros to claim the throne left to him by his father. Upon arrival, the narrator is brought up to speed by his ministers on how Potikoros politics works, he visits his

kingdom and sees the treasure his father had collected, but quickly fails to maintain control, and after a disastrous court session where the narrator passes three ill-judged sentences, the people revolt and execute their king. As he plunges to his death, the narrator wakes up and is told that he has been asleep for a whole day.

Roda (1991: 41) and Guglielminetti (1977: 31) both label the story as utopian, but whilst Potikoros is certainly an island paradise with 'tutte le delizie favolose dell'Eden' (Tarchetti 1968a: 204), it is by no means an ideal or 'good' society (from the Greek 'eu-topos' meaning 'good place'); the king is rather overthrown because he is considered unjust and corrupted by the European values he insists on imposing on the people. The fantastic aspect of the narrative is predominantly focused on the difference between the cultural paradigms of the narrator's presumably Italian home and that of the island kingdom he inherits. Despite not being a 'good place', the island is certainly dislocated from Europe (an 'ou-topos', or 'no place') and the foreign customs further demonstrates an unfamiliar reality to the narrator. There is however one element that can be considered a supplementary fantastic rule: the people on Potikoros are divided into two tribes, the Denti Bianchi and the Denti Neri, a 'distinzione speciale della natura' (207), and this hereditary trait of either being born with white or black teeth is both improbable and unexplained, but importantly, a normal and natural part of the narrative world. Each tribe also has distinct behavioural characteristics: the Denti Neri are a 'dolce', 'mite', and 'affettuoso' group, whereas the Denti Bianchi are 'd'indole sì ribelle, sì feroce sì fiera' (213) and better soldiers than their black-teethed counterparts. The narrator, originally disgusted by the idea of black teeth, becomes more fearful of the aggressive Denti Bianchi; Tarchetti reverses the narrator's binary preconception of associating black and white respectively with negative and positive significance.

Irony underpins the contradictions between the narrator's original idealist notions of society and his actions at his sudden good fortune in receiving a kingdom. He is informed of his new role as a monarch while 'stava scrivendo un giorno una dissertazione sull'influenza del debito nell'equilibrio sociale' (205), a moral position which is evidently suspended by accepting the crown. What emerges from his brief period as king is the narrator's self-centeredness and the unstatesmanlike behaviour of a man unwilling to stand by principles both his own and those required of him. On discovering his newfound vast riches, '[i]o non potei contenere a questa notizia un sorriso di compiacenza' (210-211); when he is being briefed on the army, he is more concerned with his own title, 'io mi era rialzato di due pollici nel sentirmi chiamare Maestà' (209); and to the clear disapproval of his ministers he weakly refuses to bear the kingly mark of a whalebone through the nose for fear it would ruin his face, 'il mio naso greco!' (216), he protests. By refusing to wear the whalebone, the narrator alienates himself from the very society for which he is meant to set the example. He refuses to incorporate himself into this island's cultural paradigm.

However, it is the narrator's hopeless role as a judge that precipitates the uprising. Three defendants come before the king, and three judgements which he hands down are met with cries of disapproval, demonstrating the incompatibility of the cultural paradigm with which the narrator is familiar, and the Potikoros cultural paradigm into which the narrator tries to insert his own laws. Thus, along with his refusal to wear the whalebone, the narrator imposes his rules on a cultural system which are ultimately rejected. The irruption of the narrator's cultural paradigm into the Potikoros cultural paradigm is counterbalanced and nullified through the uprising against and execution of—that is to say, the destruction—of the disruptive legislative processes used by the king. In other words, the narrative balances the intrusion with its

destruction, and due to the geographical dislocation of the narrative world, the irruption does not originate from outside of the narrator's norms of reality, but instead he is himself the irruption into a faraway cultural paradigm.

Le leggende del castello nero

The last of Tarchetti's fantastic stories, *Le leggende del castello nero*, is also his most complex—and in fantastic terms, his most problematic—story, containing coexistent minds, metamorphosis, dream narratives connected to the real world, time travel, variable timelines, and unnatural longevity of life. As with *I fatali* and *Riccardo Waitzen*, there is a preamble where, tempered by an initial scepticism, the narrator asks 'abbiamo noi avuta una vita antecedente?' (Tarchetti 1968b: 42), framed in terms of unexplained memories, '[v]i sono delle rimembranze nella mia mente che non possono essere contenute in questo limite angusto della mia vita, per giungere alla cui origine io devo risalire la curva degli anni, risalire molto lontano..due o tre secoli' (42). Combined with a consideration of dreams as a separate mode of existence, 'un'esistenza distaccata dall'esistenza della veglia' (44) with likewise real events, the mechanics of the main story are introduced in anticipation as a way of legitimating its function.

The narrator Arturo recounts how two old books mysteriously appear; his uncle reveals that they contain the history of their family, upon which the uncle locks himself in his room for days, along with the books. That night Arturo dreams he is by a black castle; nearby a blind man lies as though dead, and the lady of the castle is calling out to Arturo. Through a hail of projectiles, Arturo reaches her, but as they embrace, an 'orribile trasformazione' (51) takes place. The next night, Arturo dreams he is back in the same place; the lady of the castle reveals that three hundred years have passed,

and that Arturo's memories of this period will return after his death. She hopes the man nearby, whom she reveals to be Arturo's uncle, will hand over Arturo's diaries of these three centuries which are contained in two volumes. Back in the real world, Arturo discovers that his uncle has burnt the books, but he can still make out his own writing on the charred remains. Nineteen years later, Arturo is visiting northern France and discovers the ruins of the castle he dreamt of years before.

Apart from the quantity of various fantastic processes, what distinguishes *Le leggende del castello nero* are the missing details: erasure abounds.⁴⁶ The books mysteriously appear at the door without explanation; speaking to himself, the uncle mumbles about a promise once made, that these books were in the possession of someone who does not belong to the family without elaborating further; when Arturo speaks to a local when he visits the castle in the real world years later, he hears a story (which might contain details of his former lives) 'che io non rivelerò mai' (55); the lady withholds information about the life she and Arturo lived together; and back in the real world, the uncle never reveals why he burnt the books. The erasure adds an air of mystery to the story, erasing factual details, but also complicates the mechanics by omitting details necessary for clarification. This is not to say, however, that the confirmation of events is undermined; as Moretti points out, 'i personaggi sono presentati con fisica evidenza' (1977: 109).

During the dreams, the fifteen-year-old Arturo sees the dream world through the eyes of his twenty-five-year-old self, '[s]entiva in me tutto lo sviluppo intellettuale di quell'età, ma ne giudicava col senno e cogli apprezzamenti propri de' miei quindici

⁴⁶ Santoro also notes omissions in Tarchetti's fantastic plots (2008: 70-71). However, whilst in *I fatali*, I agree with Santoro that they function 'per attrarre maggiormente il lettore' (71) such as when the narrator withholds information, '[o]metto il racconto delle mie relazioni col barone di Saternez' (Tarchetti 1968b: 37), such details do not hide aspects of how the fantastic functions. By contrast in *Le leggende del castello nero*, these omissions do: they erase details of the mechanics.

anni. Vi erano due individui in me, all'uno apparteneva l'azione, all'altro la coscienza e l'apprezzamento dell'azione' (Tarchetti 1968b: 49). Although by now a frequent theme in Tarchetti, the coexistence of two minds differs here in a number of ways: the protagonist's is the invasive mind not only the recipient; the recipient is also his older self, not another person; and the process operates in a dream world, not the real world. In this case, the coexistence of two minds does correlate with the theme of the double because Arturo acts as his own double, although he is not a precise copy of his other self because of the age gap.

The classification of dream world is problematic because the life that Arturo and the lady spend together takes place in the real world in order for the physical volumes to exist and be passed down, not to mention the fact that the book Arturo writes concerns his real-life ancestors. Instead, the dreams connect two points in history together: firstly they connect Arturo's present moment as a fifteen-year-old to the first meeting at the castle, then secondly connect the same present only a day later to a moment three hundred years later (with respect to the first dream) by the castle. In other words, the dreams are not themselves restricted to Arturo's mind, but act as gateways between epochs: they facilitate time travel. Historically Arturo moves back in time, but simultaneously moves forward a decade on his own personal timeline; the next night Arturo dreams again, but in the meanwhile three hundred years have passed, again moving forward a decade personally, but still back in time from the present of his waking self. A dream world unlinked to the real world and restricted to Arturo's mind would more easily legitimate the supernatural occurrences of his invulnerability to the projectiles launched from the ramparts and the metamorphosis of the lady, i.e. 'it was all just a dream' (as is the case of *Re per ventiquattrore*), but the

existence of the books as well as the lady's precognitive ability to accurately predict Arturo's death to the very day prevent this explanation.

Focus on the continuity of character lives is a concept required in order to understand the different timelines. During the first dream, Arturo feels through the lady's clothes 'qua e là l'ossatura di uno scheletro' (51) a metamorphosis effected by sudden rapid aging which bears on what she then claims about multiple lives, telling Arturo 'tu hai attraversate undici vite prima di giungere a questa, che è l'ultima. Io ne ho attraversate sette soltanto' (53). In keeping with this rule, the lady has returned to her youthful state by using up one of her lives. In turn this explains how the uncle from the first dream can exist in Arturo's present, not to mention how Arturo could write the two books in the past and recognise his own handwriting in the present: the same characters recur throughout the history of the family. For this reason, I disagree with Mariani who argues that the uncle acquires the books by supernatural means, 'riceve in maniera soprannaturale un manoscritto dall'al di là' (1967: 411). Rather, the books have always existed in the narrative real world, but the process by which their author could be the same as the narrator is supernatural, and indeed this is a world in which the supernatural is part of the norms.

Yet the explanations to the processes themselves are either deferred—where the lady promises that Arturo will eventually understand at some future moment—or erased—in the case of the burnt books, their sudden arrival, and the supernatural occurrences in the first dream. This allows for the supernatural to coexist in a world where Arturo is shocked to discover the existence of his previous lives because the supernatural never takes place in Arturo's waking present moment. It therefore does not directly conflict with its real-world norms: the supernatural exists in the same space but at a different time. In fact Tarchetti centralises much of the erasure by deferring the

necessary explanations to the pages of the book Arturo will eventually discover burned. Tarchetti hence maintains a problematic fantastic, not by making the events in the narrative hard to identify—these are clear—, but rather by withholding the more important explanations of their causes and connections with each other, which is contained within the two volumes.

Importing the Fantastic: Coincidence and Coexistence

These nine stories which make up Tarchetti's contribution to the fantastic broadly demonstrate continuity with their nineteenth century predecessors to the extent to which they draw directly from certain texts and authors, but they also distinguish themselves in a number of ways. In narrow Todorovian terms, there is no hesitation in Tarchetti, and whilst this is not surprising given the restricted application of Todorov's theory, not all of the components of Todorov's theory are absent. Hesitation occurs when confirmation of the ontological status of events in the narrative cannot be given; in the case of Tarchetti, understanding what is going on is for the most part straightforward, which highlights how Tarchetti's stories do not in general problematize narrative reality. These stories do not question whether there has been a supernatural occurrence but instead begin with the premise that the supernatural does occur in each story where it is proposed. This might be challenged by character doubt, but this has the effect of balancing between unconditional acceptance of the fantastic and scepticism—see *I fatali*, *Riccardo Waitzen* and *Le leggende del castello nero*. Doubt demonstrates how firstly the characters and narrator delineate limits of the possible and impossible—in other words, they live in a world where not everything is possible—, and secondly, and as a corollary of the first, doubt can be alleviated by evidence of

such impossible occurrences, which is what Tarchetti provides. For example Saternez demonstrates a fatal sphere of influence, and Federico M's scepticism is proved wrong when he becomes the spirit with whom the narrator is communicating. Tarchetti therefore uses doubt as a means of *legitimizing* the fantastic, by providing evidence required by the questions of authenticity raised by scepticism.

A second way in which Tarchetti differs from his predecessors is that the fantastic in Tarchetti does not fit well within a more general structural model of the nineteenth century, that of the irruption of the impossible into the everyday world, as Tardiola also notes (1989: 96). Tarchetti's discussions of pseudoscientific practices such as magnetism and spiritualism, and the alchemy of *L'elixir dell'immortalità* all normalize the impossible because the processes are foreseen, controllable and repeatable. Supernatural irruption implies an unexpected change to the paradigm of narrative reality often by an outside supernatural force, whereas the above pseudoscientific practices demonstrate humanly engineered processes. Particularly in the case of spiritualism, séances are not considered intrusions but communications which are possible due to the extension of scientific practices. Eternal life and parascientific practices are not impossible mechanics in Tarchetti but rather a consequence of a greater reach of science. Therefore, despite the Poe-esque irruption in *Riccardo Waitzen*—in fact Ghidetti dismisses *Riccardo Waitzen* precisely as 'niente piú che una «ghost-story» tradizionale' (1968a: 38)—Anna's irruption is also tempered because she is expected whenever correctly summoned. Little else in Tarchetti is irruptive other than the transformation in *Uno spirito in un lampone*, but it too is tempered by the baron's acceptance of the transformation as well as its internal, not external point of origin.

This departure from a nineteenth century yardstick takes another form in Tarchetti to the extent that the tone of many of his stories is distinctly unlike the norms of his predecessors. Terror and fear, typically characteristic in the nineteenth century, are still present in some of his stories, but often countered with humour and irony. For example, Bosco notes the banal small talk of English food and Queen Victoria in *I fatali* (1959: 134), and the behaviour of the protagonist of *Re per ventiquattrore* is unstatesmanlike, farcical and cowardly, and he even describes his mind as having 'quella mitezza imbecille dell'agnello' (Tarchetti 1968a: 209). I would also argue that Tarchetti adds a wry ending to *Riccardo Waitzen*. '[E]ra morto di sincope' plays on the meaning of 'sincope' as a loss of consciousness, and 'sincope' the musical term syncopation, an allusion to the discordant piece that Riccardo had just played. This is not a comical tone with the same resonance as in *Un osso di morto* or *Uno spirito in un lampone*, but it does slightly lessen the climactic gothic ending.

One aspect of language on which critics like Ghidetti and Bosco agree is the objectivity present in Tarchetti's writing, and both make the observation that it is a characteristic which anticipates Capuana (Bosco 1959: 129; Ghidetti 1968b: 211-212).⁴⁷ In conjunction with the fantastic, Tarchetti's fiction is also exemplary of a larger binary trend in Scapigliati texts, that of focusing on 'il sogno, l'ombra, quanto di oscuro e inspiegabile è nell'esistere, l'extravisuale [...], l'oltremondo e certi fenomeni occulti [...] *ma sempre con l'aria di chi non perde mai di vista quella forma del sensibile che ci troviamo a toccare/vedere/vivere* (Finzi 1980: 9-10; my emphasis).⁴⁸

The duality between empirical observation and fantastic component is also noted by Ruchin who observes that '[e]sistono, per Iginio, due coppie oppositive: materia/reale contro spirito/fantastico' and terms it 'complementarietà', 'un nuovo

⁴⁷ For a discussion of aspects of verismo, naturalism and realism in Tarchetti, see Pieri (2006).

⁴⁸ This argument of Finzi's also explored in chapter 1.

doppio tarchettiano che coinvolge reale e fantastico insieme' (2011: 103-105). Ruchin is acknowledging a coexistence of realistic and fantastic elements in Tarchetti's works, and I agree that Tarchetti combines the fantastic with realistic modes of representation, and moreover, in combination with his objectivity, there is a further legitimating mechanism to be noted.

Tarchetti's narrative worlds are heavily located World I stories with recognisable signposts, for example 1840, Vienna (*Riccardo Waitzen*). All of the stories discussed above either mention a date or city or in the case of most, both. Such temporal and spatial coordinates set up the narratives with real-world assumptions of how the narrative worlds will function, but with the five stories which make up the collection *Racconti fantastici*, there is an additional qualifier of Tarchetti's to mention. The narrator of each story adds a disclaimer, either stipulating that they are not the source of the story, or that they will try to balance between scepticism and the fantastic, in a similar manner mentioned above demonstrating 'la volontà di apparire soltanto come espositore di fatti straordinari' (Ghidetti 1968b: 213).⁴⁹ For example, the narrator of *Uno spirito in un lampone* meets the guilty forester in prison who passes on the story, 'fu da lui stesso che intesi questo racconto meraviglioso' (Tarchetti 1968b: 85); or the reader is left to decide, such as in *Un osso di morto*: '[l]ascio a chi mi legge l'apprezzamento del fatto inesplicabile che sto per raccontare' (Tarchetti 1968a: 65). Tarchetti displaces the source of his stories; legitimization of the fantastic is either found elsewhere or it is left up to the reader to decide. In other words, responsibility for representing an impossible reality never rests with the narrator, and so Tarchetti is able to juxtapose a realistic world with fantastic elements because confirmation of the fantastic in real-world terms is deferred, either to the original source or to the reader, a deferral which

⁴⁹ Such a rhetorical device is an 'impostazione che sarà dato ritrovare anche in Capuana, non a caso ammiratore convinto di Tarchetti' (Ghidetti 2008: 35).

moreover only takes place in the *Racconti fantastici*, that is, in those stories which explicitly state the possibility of a departure from consensus reality. On the one hand, narrator objectivity and a deferred fantastic implies a sceptical readership who would doubt the supernatural occurrences in the stories; on the other, and particularly in the case of *Un osso di morto*, Tarchetti is also living in a cultural moment when pseudoscientific practices are a part of everyday reality, not to mention the folktales of *Il lago delle tre lamprede* and *Uno spirito in un lampone*. Tarchetti's balance between realism and the fantastic is a means of representing this alternative reality, whilst concurrently acknowledging another, sceptical, readership by devices such as deferring the source. Tarchetti's own position, as Ruchin notes above (p. 68) is inconsistent, and varies between paranormal practitioner and sceptic.

Along with a focus on the real, Tarchetti also infuses his stories with questions of moral behaviour, where the fantastic either legitimates a course of action, or itself reveals a message. The madman in *La lettera U* beats his wife for not changing her name in order to satisfy his paranoia of a world full of instances of the letter u; in *I fatali*, predestination absolves Davide and the narrator from sending Saternez to his death because it was already meant to happen. But the fantastic also punishes action: in *L'elixir dell'immortalità*, Vincenzo is punished for his decision to renounce his love for Ortensia by having to watch her grow old and die; the monks in *Il lago delle tre lamprede* are punished for their selfishness, and through satire, the new King of Potikoros is executed for his corrupt Western values. However, the fantastic also conditions behaviour: the Baron of B's sharing of minds reveals to him emotions which he never knew existed outside of his passions for women, hunting and horses.

Pan-determinism features to varying degrees, but there is little continuity in terms of the form it takes. In *La lettera U*, notwithstanding the validity of the claims

made as an asylum patient, the madman states that '[i]o nacqui predestinato' (Tarchetti 1968b: 59) because he was born with a name containing a u. Apart from this unconvincing self-centredness, the narrator's claim of having discovered the links between the letter u and human destiny is pan-deterministic—because destiny is necessarily pan-deterministic—but this evidence is erased since the narrator never reveals his manuscript. In *I fatali*, accepting predestination confirms the links between Saternez's influence and the harm that results because pan-determinism links discrete causes, but the existence of predestination itself is undermined by the revelation of the family link between Saternez and Sagrezwitch and the punishment Saternez will suffer by natural, not supernatural causes. *Il lago delle tre lamprede* is the simplest example of all, where an omnipotent deity controls all aspect of the narrative world, and this effect is delimited and personalised in *Riccardo Waitzen*, where Anna's spirit only controls aspects of Riccardo's world, not a 'pan' but a delimited determinism. Finally, *Re per ventiquattrore* is pan-deterministic because enclosed dream worlds are necessarily so because the mind controls everything.⁵⁰ Pan-determinism in Tarchetti functions as another legitimating mechanism because the fantastic is beyond the control of conscious protagonists as an unknown force or higher power is responsible. It thus accepts a degree of epistemological restriction in exchange for deferring the source and the responsibility for validating the fantastic, a technique important to the cultural environment out of which Tarchetti's stories emerge, but which also glosses over how those mechanics function. Ruchin neatly summarises the weak effect of pan-determinism in Tarchetti: '[f]atalità, destino, caso, predestinazione, sorte, influenza, ecc., rappresentano la vasta tavolozza di colori che Tarchetti utilizza in tutte le sue opere per un affresco finale *che non è ben definito*' (2011: 163; my emphasis).

⁵⁰ Unlike in *Le leggende del castello nero*, where the dreams are not delimited, but connect with the external real world of the narrator.

As well as the binary pairings of realistic/fantastic, and terror/humour mentioned above, there is a third, mechanical characteristic of Tarchetti's work. A frequent component is the simultaneous existence of two minds in one body, one host mind, the other intrusive. Other simultaneous occurrences include the spirit of Mariani in *Un osso di morto* being both corporeal and incorporeal, and whose narrator both falls asleep and wakes up at (seemingly) the same time; the moment during the baron's transformation when Clara's face appears morphed with the baron's in *Uno spirito in un lampone*; in *Le leggende del castello nero*, the direction of Arturo's time travel is both forward and backwards in time, the blind uncle is both dead and alive, and Arturo exists simultaneously in a dream world and the real world, which in turn denotes two points in history. Metamorphosis (in the case of the Baron of B and the three monks), depending on the stage of the transformation, denotes two identities in one. These simultaneous processes can be separated out into two otherwise normal, possible processes which have been joined: two minds existing separately; being asleep and awake; being alive and dead, and two separate animate entities before metamorphosis. In two special cases, both of the pairings are already impossible mechanics: multi-layered time travel (*Le leggende del castello nero*), and incorporeality coupled with corporeality, that is to say the ghost Mariani who looks for his physical limb when he is incorporeal by nature (*Un osso di morto*). Combined, all these become additional supplementary mechanics, and each component of these pairs of mechanics coincides either in the same space or moment in time. A recurrent feature of Tarchetti's stories is therefore that they function by *coincident fantastic mechanics*.

There are few traces in Tarchetti; with the exception of the powers of Sagrezwitch and Saternez, all other fantastic aspects are manifest, confirmed as processes and objects which directly affect the narrative world. Moreover, there is little

erasure in Tarchetti. Apart from Arturo's manuscript, and the madman's manifesto, nothing physical has been erased. As a result, overall Tarchetti does not really problematize reality; in fact, he does the opposite: the fantastic and realistic modes of representation coexist, and in order to do this, the fantastic does not subvert the realistic aspects, but instead balances with them. That said, the two stories which do problematize reality are *Un osso di morto* and *Le leggende del castello nero*, which are also the two stories with coincidental fantastic mechanics whose component parts to the processes are fantastic in their own right, and I would argue that these are necessarily linked. *Un osso di morto* and *Le leggende del castello nero* are the best of Tarchetti's fantastic stories because their coincident mechanics problematize their respective realities, not through erasure, but by a particular type mechanism characterised by a simultaneity of specifically impossible and not just possible processes.

In conclusion, drawing heavily from the nineteenth century, and at times plagiarising from it, there is little in Tarchetti which can be said to be free of any external literary influence. However, the reformulations he creates distinguish themselves in other ways. Tarchetti departs from nineteenth century structural models, normalizing through the representation of pseudoscientific practices of the day, folk tales of the Italian south, and with humour and irony. His narratives juxtapose the fantastic with realistic modes of writing, in a typically Scapigliato fashion, as a way of legitimating the presence of the impossible in literature, an important consideration as Tarchetti was the first to write fantastic literature in an Italian cultural environment that instead demanded literature which dealt with the real-world political and ethical issues of the time. In the case of his *Racconti fantastici*, the fantastic is legitimated in part by deferring the source of the fantastic; it is either a story passed down, or left to the

reader to decide; it is not explicitly confrontational with the real with which it coexists. Moreover, Tarchetti introduces doubt as a means of proving the existence of the fantastic by providing the necessary evidence to dispel the scepticism of a doubtful reader. Finally, Tarchetti's fantastic is characterised by coincident fantastic mechanics, where two elements, possible or impossible, exist in the same time or space, a trait of Tarchetti's which mirrors his other binary pairings, such as the cultural environment of a both sceptical and credulous readership and society, not to mention his own undecided perspective on pseudoscience, which results in two problematic texts. His narrative and stylistic devices, along with the historical and cultural circumstances of the late nineteenth century, suggest a degree of caution with which Tarchetti writes: he is always careful not to stray too far into unknown territory and pays attention to balance both within and without the texts, but this care should not be taken as timidity, and it does not detract from Tarchetti's importance as an innovative pioneer in Italian letters.

4. Giovanni Papini: A New Ludic Century

Introduction

Giovanni Papini (1881-1956) was a nonconformist and controversial Italian cultural figure, but also ‘uno dei più efficaci promotori di cultura nel primo quindicennio del secolo’ (Contini 1994: 672).⁵¹ A prolific writer and especially an essayist, he is best known for starting and editing the journals *Leonardo* (1903), *La Voce* with Giuseppe Prezzolini (1909) and *Lacerba* (1913), and for his work with Marinetti and the Italian Futurists. A less commendable fame came from his associations with Mussolini, becoming more sympathetic towards Fascism after first rejecting it (Ridolfi 1957: 250-251; Gaye 1965: 94), which led to a decade of cultural ostracism (Cervo 2006: 31). In terms of his fantastic literary production, the majority of Papini’s stories are clustered around three early collections, *Il tragico quotidiano* (1906), *Il pilota cieco* (1907) and *Parole e sangue* (1912), and whereas these stories have a distinct problematizing, ludic and metaphysical feel to them, the later collections *Buffonate* (1914), *Figure umane* (1940), *Le pazzie del poeta* (1950), and *La sesta parte del mondo* (1954)—which Papini added to *Concerto fantastico: 110 racconti, capricci, divertimenti, ritratti* (1954)—are more difficult to term fantastic. In fact Grana argues these later collections have a ‘sarcasmo meno acre [...] un accento moralistico più marcato’ (1963: 332). *Figure umane* is a collection of vignettes, and Livi concurs that the Papini of *Le pazzie del poeta* is a moralist (2008: 60); *La sesta parte del mondo* is more utopian in tone. Some of this tempered fantastic corresponds to the major change in Papini’s life when he converted to Christianity after the outbreak of the First World War. Post-conversion,

⁵¹ For biographical detail see Ridolfi (1957) and Grana (1963), and for a general introduction to Papini’s life and works see Isnenghi (1972).

Storia di Cristo (1921) made Papini famous around the world (Castaldini 2006: 90).⁵² However, this notwithstanding, if Tarchetti is the ‘vero padre del genere fantastico in Italia’ (Roda 2009: 11), then Papini is arguably the figurehead for an Italian *twentieth century* fantastic tradition, because as will be seen, Papini makes a conscious effort to innovate a nineteenth century European fantastic moment in ways his successors did not. Calvino likewise argues that Papini signposts ‘il momento in cui il racconto fantastico italiano si stacca dai modelli ottocenteschi e diventa un’altra cosa’ (Calvino 1995b: 1693).

Two clarifications should be made regarding Papini’s Pragmatism and his relation to Futurism and how, and if, they relate to his fantastic production.⁵³ The Pragmatism Papini expounded was a ‘Pragmatismo psicologico o magico’ (1961: 333), an emancipatory philosophy which expressed Papini’s rejection of limits on intellectual activity (Gullace 1962: 91). Despite its dubious status as a rigorous philosophical method (see Gullace 1962: 92; Invitto 1984: 56; Colella 2005: 195), the reason why it is important to highlight Papini’s Pragmatism is firstly because its recurrent appearance in Papini’s works and criticism needs clarification regarding the fantastic, and secondly, the drive to transcend limits mirrors a similar structure in his fantastic tales, in terms of a tempered transcendence, as I shall demonstrate. However, rather than assert that Papini’s fantastic tales are explicitly Pragmatic, unlike Sereni who argues that ‘[i]l «fantastico» papiniano nasce per derivazione diretta dal pensiero pragmatista

⁵² To say that his religious conversion affected his writings from 1918 onwards is slightly understating things. Religious themes and iconography appear everywhere, including in his fantastic stories after 1918.

⁵³ Papini criticism tends to polarise between either Papini’s Pragmatism and more generally his own life as a cultural polemicist and later as a Christian. See for example Giuliano (1946), Golino (1955), Casini (2007) and Colella (1997, 2005) on Pragmatism; Gaye (1965) on his criticism, Castaldini (2006) and Cervo (2006) on his larger literary output and Vintilă (1972) and Fantino (1981) for his Catholicism. Papini’s fantastic is comparatively speaking a marginal topic of interest, but two recent publications which do engage with Papini’s fantastic are Vannicelli’s excellent monograph (2004) and Mangini (2007).

dell'autore' (2006: 199), I would rather propose that his stories are another indication of his broader tendencies to innovate and challenge, from which I would also argue originates his brand of Pragmatism, as Grana does, for whom Papini 'era già da tempo disposto' to this kind of thinking (1963: 325). Having said that, I do agree with Sereni that a Pragmatic 'what if' theme underpins many stories. Papini's fantastic tales are thought exercises with subversive and playful tendencies, but should be considered in fantastic and not magical pragmatic terms.

Papini met and joined the Italian Futurists in 1913 after having written the first three collections of stories which contain most of his fantastic narratives. In short, Futurism does not equate to the fantastic; rather, both Papini and the Futurists shared innovative and polemical tendencies which drew Marinetti to Papini (Grana 1963: 314). However, it became clear that Futurism was not only stale to Papini but also antithetical (Invitto 1984: 137): it focused on 'la fede piú che la libertà, il rumore piú della creazione, la fama piú della scoperta, l'ubbidienza all'ortodossia piuttosto che la ricchezza delle ricerche' (Papini 1961: 840). In other words, Papini was radical even by Futurist standards, but thanks to how the Futurists broke new cultural and artistic grounds as an avant-garde movement, this in turn brought attention to Papini's fantastic stories and opened the way to other fantastic authors of the twentieth century, which is another reason why Papini is a key figure in the fantastic in Italy.

Most of Papini's stories are normalized, where the impossible mechanic is accepted to varying degrees by the characters, and most take place within an Unlocated World I. Papini is not interested in creating an illusion of reality, 'Papini non vuole che i suoi racconti fantastici appaiano reali' (Borges 1975: 8); they are instead fragments with little description, realistic depth or characterisation; the story is merely a

frame for the fantastic which is either a game or a puzzle.⁵⁴ As Aleramo argues, '[l]e avventure che la sua fantasia crea sono quasi tutte avventure interiori, favole dell'intelligenza anziché del sentimento o dei sensi' (1988: 225).

The texts below—*L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato* (1906), *Due Immagini in una vasca* (1907), *Storia completamente assurda* (1907), *Le Tre Lettere* (1907), *Le Anime barattate* (1912), *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso* (1912), *Il Ritratto Profetico* (1912), *Intervista con uno Spirito* (1914), *Il Congresso dei Pazzi o della Pazzia dei Savi* (1950), and *Il Ritorno (di Franz Kafka)* (1951)⁵⁵—are the most problematic but also broadly speaking typical of Papini's fantastic writing.⁵⁶ Hesitation is a rare occurrence, characters are reduced to figures, the reader is presented with a philosophical point or ludicrous premise to consider, and importantly, the fantastic operates internally not externally, that is to say, a fantastic of the mind, rather than one exterior to it. This is Papini's own theory of the fantastic, one antithetical to Poe's, which Papini outlines in the preface to *Il tragico quotidiano*, and which applies more generally to his fantastic oeuvre. However, not all those stories selected for analysis remain exclusively internal, and coupled with the additional reason that there is little departure from consensus reality in terms of world construction, the following narratives are divided into those which focus on the internal fantastic, followed by those where there are also traces of the external fantastic. In other words, all have internal fantastic elements, but a few have external elements as well. This chapter will explore how this internal fantastic can create problems in confirming or validating the fantastic; and how Papini departs from nineteenth century norms by introducing irony rather than terror. Furthermore I will demonstrate two structural characteristics: a tendency of Papini's of reversing the

⁵⁴ Primo Levi also uses this framing device where science fiction delimits a moral or ethical issue in *Storie naturali* (1966) and *Vizio di forma* (1971).

⁵⁵ From the collection *Il libro nero* (1951); here cited in Papini (1959).

⁵⁶ The inconsistent capitalisation of titles throughout this chapter is Papini's own.

expected fantastic mechanics, and a tempered form of transcendence, which is articulated through this internal fantastic.

Le Anime barattate

The question of identity in fantastic terms, how to be an Other, and the collapse of boundaries between minds, are metaphysical themes which run through a number of Papini's stories like *L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato*, *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso*, and *Non voglio essere quello che sono* (1906). Neither is this a new theme in fantastic literature: Vannicelli mentions Gautier's *Avatar*, Hoffmann's *A Fragment from the Life of Three Friends* and Tarchetti's *Uno spirito in un lampone* (2004: 165).⁵⁷ Papini's own contributions are worth considering because they explore the issue of imperfect transformations as well as incorporating traces of European Romanticism which are for the most part absent in Italy.

Uno proposes to his close friend Altro that they swap minds, something Uno has done before with a poet when he was younger. Altro accepts on the conditions that they get to know each other intimately for a month and that if he wants to change back, Uno will do so. They begin preparing each other for the transition, and on the night of the thirtieth day, the swap takes place. They immediately fall out because they have psychological access to all of the other's hidden thoughts. Years later, Uno wants to change back, nostalgic for the life he had, but Altro refuses. Uno eventually takes Altro to court, but to no avail. Uno's health declines until, before dying, he decides to contact Proprietario, the poet with whom he swapped minds years before, offering him his original mind back. Before dying Uno tells Proprietario of what happened, who in turn

⁵⁷ To which could be added any of Tarchetti's stories which focus on coexistent minds.

threatens to tell Altro's wife the truth. The next morning Proprietario returns to find a dead body.⁵⁸

Although part of the later collection *Parole e Sangue* (1912), this story builds on the theme of an internal fantastic expounded at the beginning of *Il tragico quotidiano*. From an external perspective, nothing has changed: the same bodies correspond to the names Uno and Altro. Neither is the type of material that is transferred considered impossible as it is gathered from normal everyday stimuli. Rather, it is the exacting nature of the material—the thoughts which each tried to hide from the other—as well as the method of transfer, which is fantastic. Not only is the way in which both transcend their situations Romantic—in that they go beyond the restrictions of their selves—, but so too are the reasons for Altro wanting to keep the poet identity: 'l'Altro si godeva gli alberi, il cielo, le acque, le parole *come un estatico*' (Papini 1958: 788; my emphasis). The focus on Nature, as opposed to culture and the industry job Uno takes at the Paris stock exchange, is a Romantic theme, as well as the ecstasis of both literally being 'outside of oneself' (as per the etymology of the word) through the transfer and the feeling of exaltation and delight by the freedom this implies.

As the fantastic transfer displays no external indicators, the lawyer to whom Altro attempts to explain his case considers this internal fantastic madness: '[p]er voi occorre un medico e non un legale' (790). As Sass points out, there is a distinction between seeing madness as a deficiency of reason and considering the possibility of madness as higher consciousness (1994: 4). However, this transfer does not indicate higher consciousness, but simply *more* consciousness: Uno and Altro gain the other's perspectives, but these in themselves do not transcend the limits of human perception, even though the process involved to gain such perspectives is itself transcendental.

⁵⁸ What is transferred is the collection of experiences and thoughts, but not the aspect of self-awareness. In other words, there is a trace of the previous mind left behind after the swap.

The mechanics of the transfer suggests a world where all minds are only loosely attached to their bodies.

Pare che l'operazione accadesse durante il sogno, cioè nel tempo in cui le anime, secondo una vecchia teoria⁵⁹ non ancora smentita, lasciano il corpo e vanno per conto loro in cerca di avventura da poter raccontare al risveglio (Papini 1958: 786).

Dreams are not therefore imaginary but representations of the real experiences that minds gain during the night, the corollary of which is that this is a narrative world in which minds are transferable and bodies separable, except that few realise their own capacity to do so. The possibility of transfer is a narrative world-wide phenomenon, and the case of *Proprietario*, *Uno* and *Altro* is not exceptional in theory, but simply in practice. This fantastic process is normalized as it forms part of the makeup of the narrative world, and is further normalized by the month of preparatory work, transferring memory and experience verbally. Coupled with the limited outcome mentioned above—that there is only additional supplementary not higher consciousness—, there is nothing extraordinary about the mechanics in the narrative: they are part of the norms of this Unlocated World I, and all that is gained is an insight into how each character is perceived by the other. Papini, I would therefore argue, is relativising nineteenth century Romantic concepts of the infinite and limitless exploration by outlining a banal exploration of the everyday through a tempered or mediocre transcendental mechanic.

⁵⁹ Such deferral of the source in order to legitimate the fantastic is also found in Tarchetti (see previous chapter).

Le Tre Lettere

Whilst other stories selected here have a ludic tone to them, *Le Tre Lettere* is an example of a darker, more sinister fantastic in Papini's work, one which deals with heartless and indeed malevolent extremes of behaviour, and focuses on an internal fantastic mechanism in cultural terms, where a promise between friends is kept at all costs, eventually undermining codes of normal behaviour. Nothing impossible irrupts into the narrative. This is an abnormal story in that there is no significant departure from norms of reality; instead, there is a discrepancy between character intention and external character behaviour pushed to extremes.

After years of failing to create anything, B⁶⁰ asks the narrator A to promise that if after one year he (B) fails to create something, A must order B to kill himself. If B refuses, A must produce the letter which charges A with this task; if all else fails, A should kill B and make it look like suicide. A accepts, but after one year, B has created nothing. Taking pity on his friend, A gives B six more months, but after this time B has again failed to produce anything. After an ultimatum of three further months, A discovers that B has fled to avoid his self-administered sentence. A eventually tracks B down and pours poison down his throat.

The arbitrary deadline and the ultimatum are unremarkable to A, '[q]uesta lettera, *che ad altri potrà sembrare strana*, non mi fece nessuna meraviglia' (Papini 1958: 694; my emphasis), and so A makes a particular cultural difference explicit: society might see the actions of A and B as abnormal, but according to the codes A and B live by, these are acceptable parameters. 'Egli [B] aveva l'anima del creatore e gli mancava la mano' (693), and creativity, although a characteristic lost to childhood—

⁶⁰ For purposes of clarity when referring to these unnamed characters, I label the narrator A and his friend B.

‘[s]oltanto l’anima dei fanciulli è libera, fresca, e creatrice’ (692)—is valued above all else: ‘egli sapeva come me che la vita senza creazione non val pena di esser vissuta’ (694); ‘il nostro sogno – *o meglio l’unica ragione per la quale accettavamo la vita e le sue piccole carceri* – era di creare’ (692; my emphasis). This allusion to being imprisoned is echoed elsewhere: ‘i forsennati ciarlieri che ci tengono prigionieri’ (692), and freedom in Nature is linked to celestial, not terrestrial existence, ‘la bellezza del vento e del cielo e la bruttezza della terra’ (691). Along with a focus on freedom and the infinite implied by the heavens, the emphasis on freedom from adult societal codes antithetical to creativity, further indicated by a yearning for childhood, portrays A and B as Romantic artists for whom creativity is worth more than life because they are prepared to give up their lives if they are unable to be creative. This is the logic which underpins the actions of both A and B: the internal fantastic does not focus on subversion but rather on going beyond, transcending the limitations of a cultural paradigm regarding norms of behaviour.

After the second deadline (an additional six months), A is concerned that ‘dovevo abolire quell’unico testimonio della mia vita vera’ (696)(referring to B), thereby acknowledging a distinction between the cultural paradigm by which he lives his life and that of the society around him. Without a companion against whom to compare, A fears being unable to find likeminded people in a society which would otherwise marginalise him. However, during the second meeting when an additional three months is agreed to, ‘[c]i separammo freddamente, quasi con un po’ di rancore’ (696), and when B fails again, A concludes that ‘[l]’amore della vita l’aveva istupidito’ (698): B now values life more than creativity because he has given up his Romantic position and the extreme codes to which he used to adhere. He is no longer willing to take his own life, a point proven by the fact that he tries to escape. In turn this means A’s actions are no

longer those of helping a suicide, but of committing murder. With 'una rabbiosa disperazione' at his inevitable death, B is force-fed poison. 'Lo distesi a forza nell'erba, sulla riva deserta, e rapidamente gli gettai nella bocca semiaperta il liquido trasparente ch'io porto sempre con me in una piccola bottiglia' (698), and A thus changes from reluctant executioner to determined hunter: 'il mio amore per lui si era concentrato nel desiderio della sua morte e la mia volontà cacciatrice si ridestò più potente alla vista della preda' (698).

The boundary blurs between a desire to alleviate B's suffering through death and a desire to kill, and after B is dead, A weeps instead of laughing: '[a]vrei dovuto esserne lieto eppure piansi fino alla sera' (699). It is A's expectation of happiness which is important to highlight because it refers to his own relief after his obligation has been fulfilled. In their final exchange, A says to B '[t]u sai che non posso fare altrimenti? [...] perché tu non debba trascorrere una vita troppo orribile. Capisci tu quanto soffro in questo momento? Capisci la grandezza del mio sacrificio?' (698). A thus suffers because he is absolutist and unswerving in his resolve; B is killed because he fails to foresee that he might have misjudged his own creative capabilities and instead imposes an absolute deadline as an incentive. Ironically however, both consider childhood the measure of creativity, yet the notion of limited time due to impending demise more reflects a perspective of later years and old age. B's new relative position as a victim of his own naivety contrasts with A's absolute Romantic resolve to stand by his creative ideals. From an external perspective, that is from the view of those 'altri [a cui] potrà sembrare strana [la lettera]' (694), A's conviction that B 'doveva morire a qualunque costo' (697) borders on the psychopathic. What Papini is problematizing and indeed subverting is the principle of adhering to ideals within a contingent situation, reversing the norm where in this case creativity is worth more than

an artist's life. Papini also subverts the Romantic tendency to react against restrictive social codes (Getto et al. 1972: 445) because the Romantic A is trapped by his promise, itself a social construct, by which he feels irrevocably bound.

Il Congresso dei Pazzi o della Pazzia dei Savi

Internal fantastic mechanics such as those in *Le Anime barattate* are only convincing and legitimate alongside adequate epistemological access; from an external point of view, such processes, with no external manifestation or any other means of confirmation, can easily be considered cases of insane or deviant behaviour compared to a particular set of social norms—see for example *Le Tre Lettere. Il Congresso dei Pazzi o della Pazzia dei Savi* reverses that position; it discusses society from the point of view of insanity and problematizes the concept that the insane are deficient of reason.

The first conference of mad men and women meets to discuss fighting for rights. The speakers point out examples of madness in the everyday life of the sane, but before the final speaker can finish, men in white coats burst in and break up the meeting with minimal resistance.

The conference proceeds with calm and order precisely because the ‘assenza degli odiosi medici e degli insopportabili infermieri dava a tutti i convenuti un senso di tranquilla letizia’ (Papini 1958: 1095); the faces of the attendees are no different from everyday sane people, and ‘tutte le case di cura per malattie mentali eran presenti con i loro delegati’ (1095). Ironically, therefore, the convention of people labelled deficient in reason proceeds in a calm and controlled manner. Indeed the meeting is called in order to organise a political movement calling for rights for the insane, the very qualification

of which ('insane') is undermined and the motion legitimated by the fact of holding the conference in an ordered and rational way. The newly elected president Gumè 'il famoso paranoico superiore ricordato anche nei piú diffusi manuali di psichiatria' (1095) comes across as a political leader at a rally, yet the meeting is being held in secret, the delegates having escaped from asylums in order to attend. In other words, the insane not only have no political voice, they are systematically excluded from society.

Gumè claims that 'la maggior parte dei sedicenti normali, non soggetti alla reclusione, sono somigliantissimi a noi nei loro pensieri e nei loro atti e costumi' (1096), but it is the principle of *self-proclaimed* normal people that raises the question of the criteria by which the insane are separated from normal people if indeed they are so similar in many ways. Taibon 'la baccante del Mezzogiorno' continues, on the subject of dancing and drink, arguing that while society accuses them of 'crisi isteriche e di accessi deliranti', sane people '[s]udati, accaldati, eccitati e quasi allucinati e forsennati [...] si affaticano a saltellare come chi è morsa dalla tarantola, a vorticare come dervisci, a dimenarsi e a contorcersi' (1096-1097). Baron Suk then argues that accusations of immoral perversions levelled against the insane are hypocritical compared to going to the cinema (he describes without using the word cinema) where the films the sane watch detail 'l'apologia della corruzione, dell'inganno, della frode, dell'adulterio, della prostituzione, della violenza e dell'omicidio' (1097). Dottor Sauroctono describes fans at a football match (without saying the word football), and finally Fatilù the megalomaniac talks about megalomaniacs who are present throughout society. In each case, the hypocrisy is highlighted and questions raised about how the sane and insane are separated, and to each example, '[p]sicosi collettiva' is the response all the mad men and women voice to the abnormal behaviour of the sane.

The defamiliarized perspective on drinking, watching films, going to a football match and self-aggrandisement—all normal aspects of the everyday—suggests that what distinguishes the sane from the insane is the context of collective action: screaming and shouting are only acceptable within the social parameters and conventions of a football match, which is in turn demonstrated by how the insane are capable of acting like the sane at the conference, within a set of conventions, something they are apparently unable to do when otherwise screaming, writhing and pretending to rule the universe because they have been labelled as mad.

When men in white coats break up the meeting, it becomes clear that the delegates are all patients talking in the garden of an asylum, and the qualifier of *psicosi collettiva* thus extends to the patients who all think they are having a meeting after escaping from their respective institutions. Whilst this ironic twist might undermine the validity of their political cause for a voice, it questions the label of what defines insanity because firstly the scene shows how the sane judge the insane according to the correct correlation of behaviour and circumstance, but also that the insane can in turn easily act sane by applying the correct correlation which underpins a particular circumstance. In other words, the label of insane in the story is arbitrarily assigned, depending on whether a person can mimic a prescribed behaviour for a scenario correctly, which in turn raises the issue of how these codes are assigned and by whom, but more interestingly, who has been legitimately and falsely assigned the title of sane and insane.

The fact that the sane and insane look similar and can act in a similar manner demonstrates how determining sanity is an external judgement using a flawed method because some people can hide behind correct behaviour—such as for the duration of the conference. The barriers between the two cultural paradigms of sane and insane

thus break down because it is possible to have members of one group in the other and vice versa. Moreover, insanity and sanity are mutually dependent for definition, but the way in which either definition is constructed is relative because they are based on contingent cultural practices, such as watching shadows on a screen tell a story of violence. Papini thus subverts definitions of sanity, defamiliarising the sane by reversing the societal point of view and observing the sane through the perspective of the insane.

L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso

Hesitation in the Todorovian sense is a rare characteristic of Papini's fantastic tales; *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso*, which combines hesitation with the recurrent papinian theme of an internal fantastic, is one such example.

At a masked ball where everyone is dressed in the same way, the protagonist looks at himself in a giant mirror and cannot pick out his reflection among a mass of identical reflections. The doctors say that he has lost his reason not himself, but the protagonist thinks differently. He begins looking for himself everywhere, even putting up 'lost' posters. In the street he is recognised and dragged to his house for the reward, but no one appears as he lives alone. Finally, in a lost and found boutique, the protagonist finds his white cloak and black mask. Overjoyed, he claims his identity back, but has never had the courage to take off the mask and cloak since.

The ball itself creates an environment which prevents self-identity—'un'atmosfera pirandelliana' which anticipates *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921)(Di Biase 1999: 81)(also noted by Livi (2008: 52))—where 'tutti quanti si doveva andar vestiti con un domino bianco e una maschera nera e ballare senza far parola'

(Papini 1958: 801); indeed, the narrator points out that men must have been dancing with men, and women with women. With individual differences and noise erased from the situation, the protagonist is perturbed: '[q]uel silenzio sotto le grandi lumiere calme—quella folla bianca e nera erano più paurose di una messa di morti la notte' (801). In front of the mirror, 'con la faccia voltata verso lo specchio...ma ce n'è tanti che la voltano! Io son alto e son quasi tutti alti e magri come me! Mi muovo per riconoscermi ma tutti quanti si muovono intorno a me!' (802). The suggestion that narrator is looking into a cracked mirror and thus at many reflections of himself has insubstantial evidence: he describes the huge mirror without mentioning any defects and he indeed remarks how at a distance he can see the whole room of dancing masked men and women reflected from where he stands. However, when he faces the mirror, all the reflections are identical with each other and follow the protagonist's movements when he waves in order to pick out his own. Importantly, the fantastic here does not concern the absence of a reflection, but more simply how the reflections appear identical and linked. In other words, the reflections of the other guests have transformed or been replaced (supplemented) and a rule introduced to link the reflections together. The fantastic is localised to the mirror, and the hesitation of the narrative is between this supplemented rule and the possibility that the protagonist is hallucinating. In point of fact, moments before seeing his many reflections he feels light-headed and sick: '[s]entivo una confusione, uno smarrimento [...]. Mi pareva che il sangue scendesse a poco a poco giù dal cervello [...]. Ero per svenire' (801-802).

However, this hesitation is not balanced; as the narrative progresses, the evidence against the protagonist's reliability outweighs the evidence for a manifest fantastic rule. The doctors who treat him think he has lost his reason, and comparing his predicament with Peter Schlemil's, the narrator argues 'lui non aveva perduto quasi

nulla appetto a me, che avevo perduto anima, corpo, tutto!' (804)(sic), yet by virtue of his being able to walk and to talk to his doctors and friends, he does not realise his self-deception in that he is correlating loss of reflection with the loss of his real physical body.

The protagonist returns to the house where the host is sympathetic: 'mi fece girare tutta la casa per farmi certo ch'io non ero rimasto là' (804), echoing scenes from Gogol's *Nose* (1835).⁶¹ In *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso*, however, only the host of the party entertains the protagonist's fears, whereas in Gogol's *Nose* the whole narrative plays on the idea that the nose and Ivan are leading separate lives because both alternatives are confirmed by different witnesses.⁶² When the protagonist finds his abandoned mask and cloak, he rushes back home and confirms his individual identity in his own mirror: '[e]ccomi! Ero io! Son io! M'ero ritrovato [...]. Non c'erano altri uomini intorno a me [...]. Mi riconobbi' (808), counter-intuitively recognising himself through a mask, an object which functions precisely to prevent identification. The disruption caused by the presence of other identical masks at the ball leads to this crisis of identity because the protagonist lacks an individual masked reflection. But now that he has identified himself, he refuses to remove the mask. I would argue that it is not the protagonist's need to find a reflection that indicates a deficiency of reason—because it simply balances the loss of masked identity with its recovery—but instead the refusal to take the mask off, thereby refusing to acknowledge his former *unmasked* identity. The goal of correcting a narrative imbalance—in this case finding the lost reflection—is

⁶¹ Reproduced in Calvino (2009).

⁶² Along with von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* and allusions to Gogol's *Nose*, the narrative bears a similarity to Jean Lorrain's *Les Trous du Masque* (reproduced in Calvino 2009) which Soldateschi (1997: 140) and Mangini (2006: 188; 2007: 107) also note, where at a masked ball none of the guests have faces beneath their masks, including the narrator—a mechanic Calvino himself uses in *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959).

logical according to the mechanics, whether imagined or real, but keeping the mask on is not.

From an internal fantastic perspective, only the protagonist feels he has lost his reflection, something which no other character confirms because there is no external indication of a lost self. In his mind, the protagonist confirms a supplementary rule whereby all the other reflections are replaced or transformed into copies of his reflection which mirror his actions, but from the outside, there is no confirmation. For this reason hesitation is not balanced, but this in turn demonstrates how Papini reverses a typical fantastic gothic mechanic. Rather than an external fantastic manifestation of an internal desire or wayward behaviour—such as a vampire—, there is an external manifestation of abnormal behaviour which is an index of an internal fantastic process of an erased self: odd behaviour which indicates fantastic thoughts. This reversal tempers the fantastic, as insanity becomes the more credible external explanation, but within the narrator's mind, where the fantastic operates, the impossible has taken place.

Il Ritorno (di Franz Kafka)

One limitation of Todorov's model is that it only permits an either/or conclusion; antithetical explanations are considered mutually exclusive. *Il Ritorno* has a both/and explanatory structure in which viable explanations coexist. However, this fantastic mechanic is not as intricate as in Gogol's *Nose* (another story with a both/and structure) because this story bears on the private doubts of the protagonist: an internal fantastic. What separates these personal doubts from those of the protagonist in

L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso is the type of recognition where the protagonist cannot identify himself; in this story, the protagonist does not recognise his wife.

The narrator finds a few notes by Kafka of a story he never finished: W.B is an insurance salesman who has to leave his new wife Maria for two months because of work. Upon his return, everything appears the same, except for his wife, who is a different person to the one he left behind. Yet she embraces him as if everything were normal. W.B does not voice his concerns but thinks over what could have happened, and decides to pretend as though nothing were the matter; the fragment of Kafka's notes ends here.

The mechanics are based on an incongruity of the social dynamics of recognition. The gardener's dog and the housekeeper 'che l'ha visto bambino' (Papini 1959: 760) both recognise and welcome W.B, confirming that W.B has not mistaken the house. Despite returning home at night, this new Maria is physically distinct from her predecessor in the low light: 'Maria è bruna come una meridionale e questa ha i capelli d'un biondo cenere; Maria è di media statura e un po' rotondetta; questa è alta, slanciata, magra' (760). This new Maria embraces W.B affectionately, her rapport with the housekeeper appears unaffected, and even the old dog plays with her as he used to with real Maria. W.B understandably thinks he is dreaming, and all indicators but one, the change in physical form, confirm that new Maria is his wife.

W.B considers three possibilities to explain the situation. Firstly, that '[s]'era trasformato lui, in quei due mesi di assenza, fino al punto di non riconoscere più la sua sposa amata' (761), a legitimate question given the circumstances. Secondly, that 'la sua Maria, senza che nessuno intorno a lei se ne fosse accorto, era diventata a poco a poco, in quelle settimane, tutta diversa da quel ch'era prima' (761), but this explanation denotes physical change including gaining height, which is to all intents and purposes

impossible according to the paradigm of reality which is based on the assumption that W.B is sane and living in a World I. Thirdly, that in league with the servants, the real Maria has been killed and another woman has taken her place.

Only W.B sees anything wrong with the paradigm of reality, and he is constrained by politeness and cautiousness not to challenge his wife to reveal whom she really is and in turn be accused of insanity. The only difference he perceives is in the physical appearance, that is, what he can see. All other information which confirms that new Maria is old Maria is outweighed by visual information. A credible explanation is therefore that W.B no longer recognises his own wife. His old housekeeper, the old dog, and his boyhood home are stable and familiar parts of his life. His new wife is the only new addition to this familiar environment and his inability to see the same person may be a reaction, albeit unconscious, to the irruption of his new wife into this familiar cultural setting, an irruption which threatens to remain and therefore change the paradigm. Indeed, he calls new Maria 'l'intrusa' (762): she is his unconscious reaction to change. Understandably, W.B is unwilling to immediately suspect that he is going mad. However, the alternative explanation of the supplement—in both the sense of a new object and a replacement—of real Maria, replacing her as well as all the networks of relations which integrated her into W.B's life, is a tenuous explanation at best. In terms of mechanical integration, this is an unconvincing solution.

In Freudian terms, for W.B, his boyhood home becomes unhomely as what was hidden—a personal resistance to change—manifests as a reaction to his wife by distorting her appearance. On the surface W.B sees an impostor, but in reality his mind is simply reacting to having a new presence in the house. Buzzati's *Un verme in casa* (Below, pp. 163-165) also portrays an unwelcome intrusion into the home and both in Buzzati and Papini, the protagonists do not know how to react because the intrusions

are subtle: not enough to go unnoticed, but subtle enough to avoid direct conflict—at least until the end, in Buzzati's case.

As another example of Papini's internal fantastic, what separates *Il Ritorno* from the above examples is that the internal fantastic is localised: W.B does not speak his mind, nor does he challenge his wife. Maria asks him what the matter is, but he is able to evade the question by saying he needs to think and have a lie down. His fantastic suspicions, that he has changed enough to be classed as mad, or that Maria has changed to an impossible extent, or that he is a victim of a plot, remain internal. This means that his suspicions are not challenged as fallacious, the possible explanations remain legitimate causes for changes both to the physical and cultural paradigms. His solution is to defer choosing an explanation: '[f]orse, con l'aiuto del tempo e con la tenacia dell'osservazione, sarebbe arrivato a scoprire la verità' (762). However, the passage of time and an unquestioning reliance on his sight are the two factors which precisely contribute to the creation of the problem of this fantastic puzzle, rather than to its solution.

Il Ritratto Profetico

Il Ritratto Profetico bears a close resemblance to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)(Livi 2008: 52), not to mention Poe's *The Oval Portrait* (1842)(Vannicelli 2004: 187), but 'la situazione, con gusto tutto papiniano, è rovesciata rispetto a quella del Ritratto di Dorian Gray' (Vannicelli 2004: 189). As well as demonstrating Papini's awareness of nineteenth century fantastic texts, *Il Ritratto Profetico* further demonstrates a structural tendency of Papini's to reverse the mechanics of the fantastic.

Having accepted to model for a portrait painter called Hartling, the narrator is disgusted at the grotesque results. To his horror, Hartling takes the portrait on tour, and in a bid to keep his reputation, the narrator buys the portrait and locks it up. 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.

The portrait the narrator sees on first inspection has ‘capelli rossastri’ (he is blonde), ‘la bocca era fatta da due fregghi arcuati di sangue con una fila di denti enormi’ (Papini 1958: 858). In the intervening six years, ‘molte apparizioni dolorose avevano occupata la mia vita’ (861), and when the narrator looks at the portrait again, ‘*il ritratto ora somigliava!*’ (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 (861-862).

Even the red hair has grown. Hartling ‘[a]veva indovinato le mie sofferenze, le mie noie, le mie malinconie’ (862). This is an important point: the portrait is not a representation primarily of the change in physical features. Only a few years, not decades, have passed; it instead traces the more rapid change in the narrator’s psychology, indicated by the hard times he has suffered. This is in fact how Hartling describes his work, ‘dipingere un’anima’ were ‘queste le sue precise parole’ (855). In gothic terms, the portrait is a representation of the external manifestation of his inner state of mind. Not only does Papini in part reverse the mechanism in *The Picture of Dorian* (as Maria Papini (1991: 60) also notes)—in which the portrait grows older and the subject never

ages, and where immortality at a fixed age disrupts the paradigm of reality⁶³—but in so doing normalizes the fantastic element upon its discovery.⁶⁴ In other words, when the narrator first sees his painting, he merely considers it a poor representation. When he reviews the portrait six years later, he acknowledges Hartling's fantastic capacity to foretell his psychological development—not to mention changes in his physiognomy such as red hair—and because the portrait now functions as a normal portrait, the fantastic has been normalized, indeed neutralised. There is no overt manifestation of the impossible in the present, rather a trace of how Hartling was able to foresee a particular point in time six years previously.

Hartling is a seer-artist, he exhibits a transcendental capacity to imagine beyond the confines of his present and importantly, with accuracy, because his predictions are correct. However, this transcendence, like in *Le Anime barattate*, is tempered, restricted to a small time frame. At both points when the portrait was first finished and six years later, it does not change, and only the narrator has the capacity to interpret all the subtleties. Even Hartling denies he knew what he was doing, '[a]llora non sapevo dipingere e non capivo nulla' (Papini 1958: 863). This delimits the fantastic to one portrait, as now Hartling paints portraits for rich Prussian ladies, and limits the source, because Hartling no longer has any transcendental capacity. His view of art is now mimetic with a few additions: '[l]'arte, caro amico, deve rivaleggare con la natura. Bisogna riprodurre scrupolosamente il vero a forza di pazienza e tutt'al più abbellirlo con gusto' (863). Hartling's art no longer goes beyond the world he represents. In other words, the fantastic only exist from the narrator's perspective, another example of

⁶³ Immortality at a fixed age is a mechanic also found in Tarchetti's *L'elixir dell'immortalità (Imitazione dall'inglese)* (above, pp. 84-86).

⁶⁴ In Poe's *The Oval Portrait*, the narrator describes the portrait as 'an absolute *lifelikeness* of expression' (sic) (Poe 2004: 189; original emphasis); Papini reverses this when the protagonist talks about another portrait representation of two men as '*vivissime e inverosimili*' (Papini 1958: 857; my emphasis).

Papini's internal fantastic, and like the protagonist in *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso* who cannot identify himself in the mirror, the narrator does not recognise himself in the portrait when he first looks at it: '[l]ì dentro non c'era nulla di me' (859)—although this is not as important to him, unlike the protagonist in *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso*. Identity in both cases figures as an internal mechanic, but the portrait has subtler mechanics than the mirror.

Faced with the discovery of a prophetic portrait, the narrator's reaction is one of fear, but the cause of a second reaction, '[i]l terrore di un tale ritrovamento era paragonabile soltanto a quello della riscoperta del ritratto profetico' (863), refers to how Hartling discredits his previous work, believing art should be mimetic. In the preface of *Il tragico quotidiano*, Papini argues that the goal of fantasy⁶⁵ is '[v]edere il mondo comune in modo non comune' (482) something which he claims all poets and philosophers should do—a qualification which applies to artists because Hartling demonstrates such a perspective by painting the prophetic painting. However, by accepting a comfortable life, no longer exiled to the margins of society, and copying reality 'in un modo comune' instead of representing new perspectives, Hartling has abandoned the calling as an authentic artist by complying with the bourgeois reality his new clients want represented. Rather than injecting fear, Papini and thus by extension the narrator is being sarcastic, equating the paradigm-altering effects of fear of a fantastic portrait with contempt for an artist who sells out. The character A in *Le Tre Lettere* is likewise disparaging towards B for not being artistic or creative. Ironically, when Hartling is painting the portrait and adds the narrator's gaze to the portrait, he tells the narrator, '[g]uardate come se aveste dinanzi a voi un nemico che state per vincere a forza di sarcasmi' (858), surely realising at the time—because he foresaw the

⁶⁵ Papini's understanding of fantasy falls within the broader umbrella notion of 'fantastic' outlined in Chapter 1 (pp. 7-8).

expression, but forgetting when that time came—that *he* would be the enemy. Sarcasm and irony remove the aspect of genuine terror from the narrative, locating the portrait, a nineteenth century fantastic object, in a twentieth century context and appropriately so, because the mechanics in *Il Ritratto Profetico* are normalized upon discovery, a characteristic, Todorov argues, indicative of the twentieth century (1975: 173).

Intervista con uno Spirito

Along with Todorovian hesitation, spiritualism is a rare theme in Papini's fantastic stories. Referring to *Intervista con uno Spirito* Livi argues that '[i]l gusto per l'occultismo e la magia, ancora dilagante nel primo quindicennio del Novecento, è il bersaglio del primo racconto' (2008: 56), and Papini does mock spiritualism—as Tarchetti also does in *Un osso di morto* (1869)—, but unlike Tarchetti, Papini reverses the premise, whereby spirits instead explore the human world.

During a séance the narrator and a spirit talk about humankind and its relation to the netherworld. Spiritualism is not a human invention, the spirit claims, but instead was developed by spirits to better study humans. Spirit anthropologists have not reached favourable conclusions concerning the human race, and the spirit warns the narrator that this needs to be corrected.

Vannicelli argues that stories in the collection *Buffonate* (1914)—from which *Intervista con uno Spirito* comes—undermine the fantastic due to irony and sarcasm (2004: 224), and Grana (mentioned above in the introduction) points out the moralising tone of these later stories (1965: 332). Vannicelli further notes that the metaphysical adventures of earlier collections disappear by 1914 (2004: 224), and while this may be true of many titles such as *La Rivolta dei Ragazzi*, *Il Genio Satanico* or *Nein ladro*, one

exception is *Intervista con uno Spirito*, a story subversive *through* irony which raises questions of existence that link to the fantastic. Moreover, *Intervista con uno Spirito* is more a thought exercise than a ghost story or an attempt to disturb. Di Biase argues in a similar vein that '[l]'autore tende più al fantastico-filosofico che al surreale' (1999: 82), but highlights a 'venatura surreale' underpinning Papini's earlier fantastic work (1999: 379) more generally.

The difference between expectation and reality of the spirit calls into question different types of intelligence. The narrator calls it '«una intelligenza intelligente» e non di uno dei «soliti ignoti» che si limitano a trasportare tavole come facchini o a far suonare i tamburelli come mendicanti' (Papini 1958: 883). Moreover, the spirit itself says '[s]e tu fossi meno intelligente potrei toglierti la seggiola di sotto; far ballare per l'aria i tuoi libri, o tirarti i capelli fino a farti male' (884). Two assumptions are revealed: firstly, that from a human perspective, there are classifications of type of spirit which exhibit either adult or childlike behaviours, in turn suggesting some sort of societal structure. Secondly, from a spirit perspective, there are also different levels of credulity of séance participant, the irony being this intelligence stands for little if the subject is convinced they are speaking to the netherworld. Not all spirits act like a barbaric 'Other' and not every human participant needs to witness flying furniture.

The link between spirit and real world was not a great discovery of mankind but part of a spirit initiative to observe humans: 'non vi siete ancora accorti che siamo noi che abbiamo istituito queste esperienze per meglio conoscervi' (884). The eventual goal would be to 'stabilire rapporti regolari con esseri così inferiori a noi, come voi siete' (885). Not only is the hierarchy of human over spirit challenged, so too is the human ingenuity needed to make such a link with the netherworld. Instead, continues the spirit, 'abbiamo inventato le sedute spiritiche e abbiamo scelto quegli strumenti di

osservazione che voi chiamo «mediums» [...] [per mezzo di cui] vi abbiamo obbligati a tutto il complicato cerimoniale delle sedute medianiche' (885). For the spirits, it was important to make humans feel they were in control for the purposes of observing human behaviour, who in turn felt that they were controlling the tools they used to bridge between worlds. Papini thus breaks down the hierarchy of civilised and rational human medium over inferior barbaric and emotional spirit.

Removing this assumed control questions the legitimacy of extended positivism which underpins spiritualism, because this pseudoscientific method is not therefore responsible for exploring the netherworld. Instead, the link between worlds is created from the other side, not from the human world. In other words, Papini is limiting the reach of extended positivism, that is to say, the late nineteenth century scientific replacement to Romantic transcendental yearning. It is worth mentioning that from the point of view of positivism, the extension of its scientific method to include sensation and feelings subverts what positivism itself stands for. Pseudoscientific practices using extended positivism are a subversion of positivism, and in turn Papini subverts extended positivism by showing it to be a redundant method for spiritualist communication, and one over which humans have no control.

Incorporeal, more intelligent and unfamiliar with human beings, the corollary implication is that these spirits are not the souls of the dead: they are a different order of being. In Leopardi's *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch* for example, Ruysch talks to 'morti' about the nature of death and the process of dying; in Tarchetti's *Un osso di morto*, the spirits are the dead souls of Federico M and Pietro Mariani. Here in Papini, the spirits have no former knowledge of humans, raising the question of where the human dead go; he challenges the notion of life after death—a concept Tarchetti and Leopardi do

not—but on the other hand proposes a new supplementary form of life on another supplementary world.

There is no irruption or paradigm-altering fantastic component to this story, nor fear but instead a ludic tone: human curiosity, fears, and ironically both credulity and scepticism are all ‘difetti gravi’ (886) according to the spirit. The fantastic does not problematize narrative reality directly; there is no question, ambiguity or lacuna of what is going on in the text. Instead, the narrative firstly embodies that papinian tendency to reverse fantastic mechanics. Spiritualism, rather than being an exploration of the netherworld, is here an exploration by spirits of the *human world*, and the spirit bypasses a medium and speaks directly to the narrator in Italian, an ‘immediate’ encounter. Secondly, *Intervista con uno Spirito* is indirectly subversive. The hierarchy and control which underpins spiritualist assumption over the spirit world is reversed, and whilst nothing is unclear in the text, the concept of extended positivism is subverted, which is itself a subversion (although not necessarily intended by spiritualist practitioners) of positivism: Papini advocates a certain comeuppance. In turn, Romantic notions of transcendence are undermined and tempered by demonstrating a limit or end point to potential netherworld exploration because the information to which human spiritualists have access is under the control of and limited by the spirits.

Due Immagini in una vasca

Due Immagini in una vasca is among the most frequently cited examples of Papini’s fantastic literature—‘uno dei racconti più significativi e riusciti de *Il pilota cieco*’

(Verdenelli 1993: 15)—and also one of Papini's most interesting explorations of the theme of the double, as Borges puts it 'rinnova la leggenda del doppio' (1975: 8).⁶⁶

On returning to his boyhood home, the narrator meets a man in the garden who looks strangely familiar, and on seeing his reflection in the pond, realises that this is his former self from seven years ago. They spend days talking but after a while the narrator starts to grow tired and bored; he sees all the naivety and youthful idiocies which he left behind when he moved out. However, when he discusses his intention to leave, the younger self refuses to let him go. Eventually the narrator drowns his other self in the pool, and leaves happy.

As with *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso* and *Il Ritratto Profetico*, the fantastic functions through an object designed to represent reality—a pond reflection—, but in addition to a double trapped in the reflection of a mirror and in a portrait, here a second double is created. During his childhood, the narrator would stare into the pool, 'fissavo [il mio volto] così lungamente che mi sembrava di non esistere più per mio conto, col mio corpo, ma di essere soltanto un'immagine fissata nella vasca per l'eternità' (Papini 1958: 572), and as his double explains, '[a]vevi lasciato la parte più sottile della tua anima nell'acque di questa vasca e di quest'anima ho vissuto fino a questo giorno' (573-574). The pool fixes the narrator's image, then in turn creates a double from that image, which, not limited to the confines the pool, irrupts into the narrative world. The gothic mechanism of externalising an internal process is applied twice here: firstly the internal 'sottile' of the narrator's soul is transferred to the pool, then that reflection which is enclosed within the pool is in turn externalised in the form of the double with whom the narrator interacts. Interestingly, both internal 'anime' remains enclosed either in the narrator or in the pond, and neither embody negative, deviant, and socially

⁶⁶ See also Sereni (2006) for a close reading of this short story.

unacceptable modes of behaviour that are more typical of this mechanism in gothic literature. Unlike other papinian tales, this internal fantastic manifests externally, but there is no other person to confirm the irruption; in other stories, no external manifestation occurs, even though there are potential witnesses to confirm the irruption. Therefore it is not the case that the internal fantastic of *Due Immagini in una vasca* is confirmed but rather, like in *Il Ritorno*, no other person can question its validity outside of the context in which it occurs by measuring it to the real, external world.

The narrator notes how his double is still as romantically inclined as he remembers his younger self who used to imagine an eternal existence in the pool: '[l]a sua testa era ancor tutta piena di quel romanticismo generico, a grandi masse, fatto di chiome disordinate, di montagne maledette, di foreste oscure, di tempeste e battaglie con rullío di tuoni e tamburi' (575).⁶⁷ His younger self's idealist thoughts dwell on unstructured but nonetheless Romantic tendencies of longing, as well as desires for adventures in faraway lands. His 'ingenuo orgoglio, la sua inesperienza del mondo, la sua ignoranza profonda dei segreti della vita' (575) exasperate the older more realist and pragmatic self who has outgrown these tendencies. *Due Immagini in una vasca* thus demonstrates an ironic self-awareness. As mentioned above, in the preface to *Il tragico quotidiano* Papini elevates the creative potential of the child mind to envisage fantasy, as the younger double is able to do. Yet the older narrator finds this idealism intolerable, as Papini argues happens to adults once they grow up except for philosophers and poets (and artists such as those in *Il Ritratto Profetico*).

Rather than a dislocated narrative world in space, the return to the boyhood home is a dislocation in time, but is otherwise unlocated, an environment which normalizes the appearance of his younger double: 'sapevo ormai che soltanto

⁶⁷ Sereni, Mangini and Maria Papini all note the allusions to Narcissus (Maria Papini 1991: 60; Sereni 2006: 217; Mangini 2006: 174; 2007: 106).

l'impossibile diviene qualche volta reale e perciò non fui troppo atterrito' (573). In an otherwise real-world setting, this unquestioning acceptance, especially acknowledging the impossibility of the double, is at first unconvincing. However, by being unsurprised, the protagonist demonstrates that he has not discarded the very childhood perspectives which he considers inferior in his double.

When the narrator is forced to kill his double,⁶⁸ he smiles at how 'sono il solo uomo che abbia ucciso se stesso e che seguiti a vivere' (579). However, rather than malice, the narrator's happiness comes from a resolved feeling of shame he feels for the memory of his younger naïve self, and a sense freedom, not only from his temporary captive, but also from his childhood, and in so doing also neutralises that impossible element which the traces of his capacity to accept the impossible legitimated. In other words, in killing his younger self, who stands for the capacity to fantasise about precisely such a fantastic occurrence as a double, the double is erased as the protagonist metaphorically leaves his childhood and this willingness to believe in such impossible occurrences behind. Indeed, the double is the embodiment of the belief both the younger and older narrators hold that impossible things sometimes do happen, legitimating the way in which both see the world in Romantic terms.

Sereni and Mangini rightly point out that this story articulates aspects of the Freudian Uncanny (Sereni 2006: 208; Mangini 2007: 88). In *Le Tre Lettere*, similar psychotic behaviour is legitimated because society does not understand A's point of view; here, the behaviour is acceptable according to the narrative logic because the metaphorical and literal levels combine. Suppressing or destroying his former self is a necessary step in order for the narrator to avoid being trapped with his past, but this is

⁶⁸ An allusion to Poe's *William Wilson*, Mangini argues (2007: 93).

also enacted on a literal level where the only way the protagonist can escape is by getting past his double.

Both the supplementary object of the double which adds the narrator's younger life to the narrative world and the acceptance of it are cancelled out, balancing the narrative. It is furthermore symbolic of the balance in the mechanics that the narrator drowns his former self in the pool from which he first emerged, indeed throwing him into the reflection which appears as the double enters the water: 'lo gettai col viso sopra l'acqua, nel punto ove appariva la sua immagine' (Papini 1958: 578). Drowning his double in the pool, the boundary across which he emerged, is an attempt to return him to being a trapped reflection, to internalise or suppress the external manifestation.

Storia completamente assurda

As the story Ghidetti and Lattarulo selected for their anthology *Notturmo italiano*, *Storia completamente assurda* is certainly oneiric in tone, it also challenges different aspects of world construction, and explores psychological access.

A visitor calls and gestures to the narrator to take a seat; without revealing his identity, he produces a book and begins to read. Hours go by and the narrator is shocked to hear the stranger read out a complete and exact account of his life. Convinced this book must never see the light of day, the narrator expresses his dissatisfaction with the work; the stranger claims he must now kill himself and jumps into the river. The next morning the narrator feels as if he were already dead.

The fantastic operates through the book whose author has never met the protagonist until that very moment; the first erased detail which likewise puzzles the protagonist is how an apparently imaginary story 'pensata e immaginata per lunghi

anni' (Papini 1958: 585) exactly corresponds to his own life, '[una] *narrazione precisa e completa di tutta la mia vita intima ed esteriore*' (583; original emphasis). It is indeed its *precision* (like in *Le Anime barattate* and *Il Ritorno*) which causes the most disquiet: '[l]a mia confusione e la mia paura provenivano da questa esattezza impeccabile e da questa inquietante scrupolosità' (584). However, the concept of an albeit 'grosso volume' containing a complete record of the protagonist's life is unconvincing, as all literary representations are exercises in editing; a *complete* account of the narrator's life would take far longer to recount than a few hours.⁶⁹ Therefore the reliability of the narrator is called into question if he accepts that such a large volume of information can be condensed down to a period of a few hours, yet this is based on the assumption that the protagonist is an ordinary everyday character to whom something extraordinary occurs. However, I would argue that in order to make sense of the story, this assumption has to be reversed: it is not the book along with its author that irrupts into an everyday normal world, but rather the environment of the narrator is itself an unlocated—and impossible—World I into which irrupts an ordinary stranger with an ordinary book. The stranger has both psychological and epistemological access to the protagonist, but not because of any rule of telepathy or secret information. Instead the stranger is the author who has written a book about 'un uomo fantastico al quale accadono le più singolari ed insolite avventure' (581) and enters his own narrative to present his character with his life story. In other words, this story needs to be read in a metaliterary not literal way, where the boundaries between writer-world and story-world collapse and the authors meets his protagonist. The book the author reads out is therefore *necessarily* complete because it contains all, *and the only*, information that

⁶⁹ In the same way that Doležel notes (see chapter 2, pp. 47-48) that it 'would take a text of infinite length to construct a complete fictional world' (1998: 169) so too would it take a timeframe far longer than a few hours to credibly represent a full account of the protagonist's life.

has been written about his protagonist. The book is perfectly normal; the character being made aware of his finite literary existence is fantastic. This furthermore explains how the stranger can have such detailed knowledge of his character: the author, who reads out the story, is precisely an omniscient narrator.

Faced with an impossible event in his world—the book reading, not the presence of the stranger—, the narrator cannot explain his feelings: ‘la lettura mi dava un fastidio inesprimibile, una impressione penosissima di sogno assurdo e sgradevole senza speranza di risveglio’ (582). He either assumes he is dreaming, and thus imposes no restriction on the type of mechanic which would explain such details—after all, the material for such a book if he were dreaming would be his own mind—, or he is unable to articulate his feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. The protagonist, faced with this new stimulus is understandably unsure of what he feels, which is ironic when he is presented with precise details of what he has felt up to that point in his life. The stranger, by contrast, commits suicide with little demonstration of suicidal behaviour, and reads the book on condition that ‘se non vi piace mi ucciderò dentro un giorno’ (581), and in fact commits suicide immediately after the protagonist turns him away, that is to say, he leaves the narrative world of his protagonist and abandons working on this particular story in his reality. Indeed the very next morning, the narrator awakens with ‘una strana impressione. *Mi sembra di essere già morto*’ (587; original emphasis). On a metaliterary level, in the world to which the author has returned, the novel which contains this protagonist has been put aside, and will no longer be worked on. Mangini also mentions the metaliterary content of this story, but goes no further in elaborating (2006: 179).

What Papini is challenging is the assumption that the protagonist in a fantastic story represents the norm to which something abnormal happens;⁷⁰ here, the extra-textual norm is in fact what irrupts into a story world through the erasure of an inter-literary level boundary. There is nothing extraordinary about the author, protagonist, or the book; it is rather the access the protagonist has to knowledge which he could not possibly have, and the combination of these elements, which is fantastic. Papini demonstrates how irruption is not restricted to the world we know to be our own, but applies to any world construction where an irruption does not belong to that paradigm of reality. The ‘absurdity’ to which the title refers—that is, to the absence of meaning because the necessary explanatory links are erased—is resolved if the direction assumed by irruption is reversed, as well as the perspective implied by this change in position. Once again, Papini reverses the expected mechanic.

L’ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato

In terms of original mechanics, philosophical games and Papini’s own internal fantastic, *L’ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato* is one of the most interesting of Papini’s fantastic stories and one the most surreal. Livi is particularly enthusiastic, saying that ‘sembra suggerire del fantastico, in quanto genere, più che un repertorio tematico, è forse un brillante esercizio di scrittura’ (2008: 46). On a more sombre note, Vannicelli see this story as encapsulating a central theme in Papini, the boredom of a life without purpose (2004: 45), although I would disagree because boredom is not as central to the narrative as the theme of freedom. In hermeneutic terms, *L’ultima Visita del*

⁷⁰ Richter correspondingly argues that female characters in fantastic literature are often abnormal, deformed or unreal (1984: 35)(see Chapter 2, pp. 51-52). In other words, female characters signpost the fantastic whereas male characters encounter the fantastic.

Gentiluomo malato has more levels of meaning—psychoanalytic, figurative, moral and fantastic—than many of Papini's other stories.

The *Gentiluomo malato* is a man who claims to be the manifestation of a dream: someone or something is dreaming *him*, and he wants to discover its identity.⁷¹ At first the *Gentiluomo malato* does everything he can so as 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 horrible things as possible. Even after arson and torture, he is unsuccessful. His last attempt is his current idea: to let his dreamer know it is dreaming in an effort to force self-awareness.

As in *Storia completamente assurda* Papini reverses mechanics; like a character that is *being* written and read, here the *Gentiluomo malato* is *being* dreamed instead of actively dreaming. The reversal of narrative world is more overt in the former, whereas the status of the narrative world in which the *Gentiluomo malato* and the narrator inhabit is less so. A dreamer who has been asleep for years on the *Gentiluomo malato*'s timeline implies a non-human dreamer as the *Gentiluomo malato* himself argues: '[c]erto 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' (Papini 1958: 540). The source of this irruption of the *Gentiluomo malato* into the narrative world is a dreamer in a narrative world with a different paradigm of reality, and whose dream has 'talmente duraturo ed intenso che'io son divenuto visibile anche agli uomini che vegliano. Ma il mondo della veglia, il mondo della realtà concreta non è il mio' (539). The intensity of the dream causes the *Gentiluomo malato* to transcend his existence to reality from dream world to which he wishes to return, '[l]a mia vita vera è quella che scorre lentamente nell'anima del mio

⁷¹ As Di Biase notes for *L'Uomo che ha perduto sé stesso*, Fain too notes how this search for a dreamer anticipates Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (2011: 76).

addormentato creatore' (539). Papini is reversing the Romantic mechanic of transcending limited reality towards the limitless potential of dreams by having the Gentiluomo malato transcend from dream world to another reality, and trapping him there.

The irruption of the Gentiluomo malato is not like the irruption of an object like a vampire or a ghost; a dream character suggests that the world in which this character is found is itself the dream world. Indeed he argues that '[f]orse il mondo intero non è che il prodotto perpetuamente variabile di un incrociarsi di sogni di esseri simili a lui' (540) which provides an explanation of the mechanics. The Gentiluomo malato is a dreamed character of a non-human dreamer who irrupts into the dream of another non-human dreamer, one who has not been asleep for as long, otherwise its characters would also be self-aware like the Gentiluomo malato. Instead, these characters—which include the narrator—think their dream world is the real world, and consider him deficient of reason, not bestowed (as he actually is) with higher consciousness. Yet, they are mistaken, the rules of their narrative world are not rigid but flexible, 'quando la sua mano toccava qualche oggetto sembrava *che questo entrasse a far parte del mondo dei sogni*' (537; my emphasis). There are therefore two Unlocated World Is of two different dream worlds, the boundaries between which allow for dream characters to transcend into the other depending on the intensity of the dream, a more complex but structurally similar mechanic to that used in *Le Anime barattate*.

This articulates an important distinction regarding the relationship between realistic modes of literature and the fantastic: the illusion of referentiality, where a text refers to the real external world. This premise which underpins realistic modes of representation is challenged in fantastic literature where an impossible element enters the narrative, disrupting the illusion. However, this illusion is further questioned here

when neither the narrative world nor the world of the irruption refers to the outside/real world. What *L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato* is highlighting is the view that fantastic literature is self-referential, that it adheres to the internal logic of the text, not the rules of the phenomenal world;⁷² for this reason I would classify this story, along with *Storia completamente assurda*, which also breaks this illusion of referentiality, as among Papini's most important fantastic texts.

The Gentiluomo malato is aware that his behaviour mirrors that of someone who actively worships a deity. 'Immaginai per qualche tempo ch'egli fosse una specie di paterna divinità evangelica e perciò m'industriai di menare la più virtuosa e santa vita del mondo' (541). Ejected into this second world, he treats it with indifference and disrespect—ironically as one might in a dream, free from retribution—by acting in whatever socially unacceptable way he chooses. When he decides to create a nightmare for his dreamer to force him awake

[u]ccisi 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 (541-542).

After no sign or response from his dreamer, the narrator embarks upon these psychotic acts for the sake of attention and subsequent annihilation. The other characters, because he says such horrible things, call him 'un *seminatore di spavento*' (537; original emphasis). Interestingly, they react more to his behaviour than to his ghost-like appearance or his ability to render solid furniture diaphanous. There is moreover some contextual irony to note: during the period in which *Il tragico quotidiano* was published, Papini himself was still an atheist, yet after the searing indictment of religious credulity in this story, he converts to Christianity a little over a decade later; moreover, Ridolfi

⁷² McLoughlin makes the same point for Bontempelli's work: 'Il mondo del testo [...] è autoreferenziale e segue una logica indipendente da qualunque altra' (1993b: 21).

mentions that as well as the pseudonym Gian Falco, Papini was also called 'Il Gentiluomo malato' (1957: 63-64).

Thought Experiments: Mechanical Reversals and Internal Transcendence

With echoes of confrontational futurist rhetoric, Papini claims that 'io, come artista, come scrittore, ho creato un genere, nuovo in Italia, di storie assurde, inverosimili, e irreali' (1961: 876). In terms of creating a general fantastic tradition, this is a tenuous claim, but as a type of absurd and unlikelike narrative, which his stories discussed above exemplify, Papini certainly updates a nineteenth century tradition. When analysing the fantastic in Papini, many critics including Verdenelli (1993), Soldateschi (1997), Sereni (2006), and Mangini (2007) focus on Papini's preface to *Il tragico quotidiano* (1906), as do I because it provides a useful framework with which to draw conclusions about his fantastic stories and because it articulates how Papini differs from his predecessors.

In the preface, Papini addresses three types of reader: he speaks '[a]i Poeti', '[a]i Filosofi' and '[a]gli Eruditi', and it is the address to philosophers which is the most relevant. Papini wants to 'suscitare la meraviglia e lo spavento' but not like those 'novellieri fantastici' which include Poe, whose fantastic is 'straordinario ma *esteriore*' (1958: 481; original emphasis) in which 'uomini normali' find themselves in 'situazioni anormali' (482). What Papini instead proposes is to make his characters and by extension his readers 'pensare e sentire in modo eccezionale dinanzi a fatti ordinari', in other words, mirroring what philosophers, poets and children already do: '[p]ensare quello a cui nessuno pensa' and '[v]edere il mondo comune in modo non comune' (482).

The focus on an internal fantastic, that is to say, the fantastic occurring within the mind with little or no external manifestation is important because it raises the question of the legitimacy of fantastic occurrences. Simply because the fantastic takes place in the mind does not make it inherently less fantastic than external fantastic occurrences; rather, it depends on circumstance. After all, the internal fantastic is real to the subject. Indeed Papini considers the internal fantastic superior: '[i]o credo fermamente alla superiorità di questo *fantastico interno* sul *fantastico esterno* degli altri novellieri' (483; original emphasis). I would, however, argue that this is a claim made in order to legitimate a stance against Poe's external fantastic. This notwithstanding, the internal fantastic draws attention to the dynamics of perception and *how* the fantastic is considered, rather than focusing on objective, exterior confirmation of the fantastic.

This broad principle of the fantastic of the mind, both in terms of cultural and physical paradigms, applies to all the above texts in different ways. It is therefore unsurprising that insanity should be a central theme when discussing an interior fantastic since it correlates directly to questions of legitimacy. To the protagonists who experience another mind, lose their identity or who think they are the victims of a plot to replace a loved one, these events are real to them, but society labels them as insane because the fantastic lacks external evidence. Even with stories which do provide such external proof, such as *Due Immagini in una vasca* and *Il Ritratto Profetico*, there are no other characters who can confirm the existence of the fantastic. However, this does not undermine the claims the protagonists make because there is a difference between *not confirming* and *disproving* the impossible, an important subtlety to note when psychological access as well as external confirmation is restricted. What Papini draws attention to is the validity of the fantastic within a delimited context which operates without the need of external confirmation. Whether or not secondary characters confirm

that the fantastic has taken place does not negate the existence of the mechanics in a story, exemplifying a central principle of the non-referentiality of fantastic literature. Mechanical analysis and the discussion of existence depending on the literary level are two different objectives; Papini's is the former, expressed through a fantastic which operates in the mind.

Papini's internal fantastic narratives are thus quite literally thought experiments, puzzles which articulate philosophical questions such as what it would be like to swap minds or to be a dream dependent on a dreamer, which accords with Calvino's qualification of a modern fantastic as an 'uso intellettuale' (1995a: 267). Papini's fantastic stories, not only with regard to the above stories, but more generally, are characteristic of the twentieth century from its very beginning, a claim Soldateschi also makes (1997: 132).

The turn of the century also heralds the arrival of psychoanalysis, which is not entirely unconnected to Papini's internal fantastic. Papini mentions Freud in his later works such as *Gog* (1931)(David 1966: 295), but the issue is whether Freud influences the form of Papini's earlier fantastic stories. Tordi identifies an article published in *Leonardo* in 1905 addressed 'agli psicologi' in which 'Papini non fa il nome di Freud ma la terminologia che usa è inequivocabile' (1983: 301). David however disputes that Papini's knowledge of Freud was anything other than 'molto superficiale' and that 'non sembra essersi accorto dell'importanza di Freud prima del 1920' (1966: 294). Therefore whilst Papini may have been aware of Freud—both Tordi and David note the difficulty in being definitive on this matter—, I would not argue that this translates into direct influence. Even though Papini, like Freud, focuses on the mind, and his stories do allow for psychoanalytic readings (as many of the above stories demonstrate), he explicitly identifies Poe as his point of departure, not Freud. However, this is not to

deny a correlation between the beginning of a new cultural moment, psychoanalysis, and a new and concurrent internal focus of the fantastic in Italy.

Philosophy is important to Papini because it highlights a mechanical characteristic of his fantastic stories. In 1912, he published *L'altra metà*, 'una congerie bizzarra di sofismi e di capovolgimenti' (Ridolfi 1957: 141), a philosophical treatise which focused on concepts like 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' (Papini 1961: 203). Papini set out to '[f]are quel che *nessuno* fa', and '[a]ccettare gli astratti, anche quelli della metafisica più sospetta e della dialettica più temeraria', both of which are a 'compito degno della filosofia' (1961: 191; original emphasis). Although *L'altra metà* was published after the three main collections of fantastic stories, it articulates an innovative tendency Papini exhibits throughout the period of his early career as a contrarian or as Grana puts it, '[la] sua esasperata e disperata sofistica negatrice' (1963: 343): a tendency to counter norms. In *Il Congresso dei Pazzi o della Pazzia dei Savi* the insane discuss the sane, in *Il Ritratto Profetico*, the portrait stays the same, whilst the character grows to match the portrait. The spirits in *Intervista con uno Spirito* are exploring the human world, not the other way around if compared to the practices of spiritualism. In *Storia completamente assurda*, the character is being read, rather than reading, in the same way that in *L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato*, the character is being dreamt, not dreaming, and this list is not exhaustive; reversal is in fact a more general characteristic of Papini's work. His is a fantastic of mechanical reversal, and in so doing these stories align themselves more with the theoretical framework of reversed ground rules which Rabkin (1976) proposes than with todorovian hesitation.

Maria Papini argues that themes central to Papini are '[...]lo smarrimento dell'identità' and '[il] doppio' (1991: 57)(the double is also noted by Mangini (2006)); Di Biase similarly argues that the central theme of *Il tragico quotidiano* and *Il pilota cieco* 'è il sogno di essere un "altro", il sentimento dell'altro" e del "diverso"' (1999: 74), and Verdenelli highlights the 'tema dello sdoppiamento di personalità', particularly in *Parole e sangue* (1993: 17). Whilst I agree that this exploration of identity is important, and indeed that the double as a binary topos is characteristic of Papini in structural terms, I would extend this to argue that in fantastic terms, from the above examples, this takes the form of a tempered and delimited transcendence. In *Le Anime barattate*, Uno and Altro can only gain the additional perspective of the other, and the mechanic only allows for one swap at a time, nor is the transfer itself a complete transcendence of the mind into another body, there is always the trace of the former mind. Indeed, it is not the mind, but the memories and experiences which transcend. In *Il Ritratto Profetico*, Hartling's prophetic capacities to transcend time and see into the future are limited by the fact that on discovery of these capacities, they are negated because at that point the portrait functions as a normal painting. The human world, in *Intervista con uno Spirito*, is treated like a laboratory experiment where human subjects, thinking they are transcending the phenomenal world, are in fact only exploring as much as the spirit anthropologists allow them to: transcendence is not only an illusion, but by remaining within the very rules of the physical world that it is trying to overcome, it is moreover controlled and limited. Lastly, the *Gentiluomo malato* moves from world with no limits to a world of limits, the reverse of what is implied by a Romantic transcendental impulse.

Transcendence implies crossing boundaries and it is worth noting that the examples of transcendence in this chapter do so, but with relatively little disruption to their respective paradigms of reality. This is a tendency applicable more generally to

Papini, where the impossible is normalized, which is also in part due to the internal nature of the fantastic. Transcending between two points, whether minds or literary levels, complements the qualification other critics make of a surreal tone to Papini's work (Grana 1963: 333; Di Biase 1999: 70) because it is indicative of the structure of the surreal whereby paradigms overlap and boundaries collapse.

Negative emotional reactions like terror, shock or fear are absent in Papini, replaced with the comic and irony. This firstly separates Papini's fantastic stories from those of the European and North American nineteenth century fantastic tradition which on the whole are defined by character reaction and irruption. Secondly, and as a corollary of the former, Papini is distinct from Poe's type of fantastic: Poe is characterised by irruption and fear, Papini by play and normalization; Poe's is an external fantastic, Papini's is internal. Thirdly, Vannicelli argues that in Papini's work 'una benevola ironia stempera i toni tenebrosi' (2004: 270), and that irony undermines the fantastic, '[n]on c'è più spazio per il fantastico laddove un'ironia demistificatoria impedisce di prendere sul serio i fatti raccontati' (2004: 224). Vannicelli is not saying that Papini is an inauthentic fantastic writer, but it is reductive to use such a nineteenth century yardstick: Papini is more indicative of a twentieth century ludic fantastic. Fourthly, taking events seriously implies a correlation of referentiality between the real world and the narrative world, from which Papini distances himself. His stories are deliberately unrealistic, and they problematize reality by precisely articulating ludicrous, absurd, unreal concepts, which irony does not undermine. Indeed, irony occurs in some stories as a result of reversing the mechanics.

In representing this unreality, Papini's style of writing has been criticised by Aleramo for being '[r]ozza ed accorta' (1988: 228), as 'ancora un po' grezzo' by Ridolfi (1957: 109), and his stories are written 'con estrema economia di mezzi' (Livi 2008:

46). There is certainly a distinct lack of description, plot and character development, as well as an unsophisticated use of language. However, I would argue that Papini uses this reduced and simple form to frame his 'racconti metafisici' (Cervo 2006: 20) or 'fuga metafisica' (Vannicelli 2004: 268), a label I agree Papini merits. Indeed, Sereni notes how although Papini values philosophy above literature where he claims '[i]o non potevo soffrire la letteratura [...], la filosofia stessa mi ricondusse all'arte' (Papini 1962: 111)(Sereni 2006: 201). Moreover, she asserts that '[i]l *Tragico quotidiano* e il *Pilota cieco* sono dunque frutto di un *progetto filosofico* che trova compiuta realizzazione nell'arte appunto e in particolare nella narrazione fantastica' (Sereni 2006: 202; my emphasis). Papini is therefore more interested in the philosophy and the questions he raises using the fantastic than in its form. The extent to which his stories are unlocated furthermore demonstrates the erasure of establishing detail, but it is also unsurprising that Papini's are unlocated stories given the internal fantastic.

Despite creating a fantastic which he considers antithetical to Poe's, I would further contend that Papini stylistically adopts a technique Poe uses to signpost the fantastic. At pivotal moments, usually at the climax of the fantastic, Poe italicizes his prose: '*Madman, I tell you that she now stands by the door!*' (*The Fall of the House of Usher*), '*it was blacker than the raven wings of midnight!*' (*Ligeia*), '*I say to you that I am dead!*' (*The facts in the case of M. Valdemar*), and '*[s]he was dead!*' (*The Oval Portrait*). In Papini, '*io sono della stessa stoffa colla quale son fatti i vostri sogni!*' (*L'ultima Visita del Gentiluomo malato*), '*[l]a storia che aveva letta quell'uomo era la narrazione precisa e completa di tutta la mia vita intima ed esteriore*' (*Storia completamente assurda*), '*la sua immagine rassomigliava perfettamente a quello ch'io riflettevo sette anni innanzi!*' (*Due Immagini in una vasca*), and '*Il ritratto ora somigliava!*' (*Il Ritratto Profetico*). Such signposts serve to confirm the fantastic, erasing

ambiguity and the possibility for hesitation in both Poe and Papini, but there is a distinction between the exterior stimuli to which Poe's characters react and the interior reactions of Papini's character that only they can confirm. Papini thus adopts Poe's technique when creating his own 'straordinario' internal fantastic.

In conclusion, Papini's type of fantastic is broadly binary in form, it reacts in opposition to its predecessor Poe, it focuses on interior not exterior reality with a playful and ironic tone, rather than creating an atmosphere of fear and terror, all of which responds to what Papini himself outlines in *L'altra metà* and the premise of *Il tragico quotidiano*. What Papini contributes to the discussion is a fantastic which focuses on mental processes and minds as enclosed paradigms in which to operate and without the need of external confirmation or a measure to the real world, together with the application of two structural characteristics: a reversal of mechanics and a delimited transcendence. In turn, these are indicative of Papini's more general tendency to react to, and innovate, modes of thinking and cultural construction, and his fantastic narratives are just that: thought experiments, designed to question and subvert, which explicitly break with realistic modes of representation.

5. Dino Buzzati: an Italian Fantastic Writer

Introduction

Dino Buzzati (1906-1972) is an author who has been described as having 'il coraggio di proporsi come autore fantastico' at the height of the Italian neorealist moment (Giannetto 1989: 13; 1996: 29), demonstrating a lack of engagement which was criticised heavily particularly by Marxist and neorealist critics (Danstrup 1979: 86). However, it is such 'courage' that separates Buzzati from what Ghidetti and Lattarulo identify as a characteristic of the fantastic in Italy: a typically ephemeral literary experiment with a low output (1984: xii). By contrast, Buzzati's much larger and *continual* production, not to mention its various forms, refutes this label: within the Italian context, Buzzati is by no means a marginal figure. He is one of the most prolific writers: instead of treating the fantastic as an occasional literary *divertissement*, Buzzati is one of a few writers in Italy to whom the label of fantastic author can legitimately be applied in part because of the quantity of stories which he writes. Buzzati is a signpost for an expanding Italian tradition. As Danstrup notes, 'il situe la plupart de ses œuvres dans le domaine de la littérature fantastique' (1979: 84), and Ghidetti and Lattarulo place Buzzati alongside Pirandello, Landolfi, Bontempelli and Calvino as the 'nomi celebrati' of the twentieth century Italian tradition (1984: vii). Bonifazi (1982) also recognises Buzzati's place by including him along with Tarchetti and Pirandello in his monograph on the fantastic in Italy, as does Lazzarin in his study (2004).

The importance of Buzzati's work also rests on his literary associations with Kafka. Of the many influences (Panafieu 1973: 25-29), Kafka is arguably the most cited

in the critical literature regarding the fantastic. However, to call Buzzati ‘il Kafka italiano’, even if correlated with the success of *Il Deserto dei Tartari* (Arslan 1974: 140), is too simple because it reduces Buzzati to a ‘mediocre epigono’ (Arslan 1974: 126; see also Lazzarin 2004: 144). Zanzotto has a more balanced view, arguing that between Buzzati and Kafka ‘potevamo così cogliere le affinità, *ma molto di più le differenze profonde* tra i due autori’ (1982: 77; my emphasis). Buzzati does not simply reproduce what Kafka writes, but rather expands and innovates the discourse of the fantastic in Italy. For this study, however, the reason why Kafka is important to mention—whatever his status in Buzzati—is not on account of literary influence,⁷³ but because he is a signpost for a twentieth century fantastic tradition, embodied in *The Metamorphosis* (1915) where the impossible is normalized (Todorov 1975: 171), a characteristic which also defines much of Buzzati’s output, as will be shown by the texts selected below. More broadly, Giannetto claims that ‘tutta la sua opera è contrassegnata da un’inequivocabile marca novecentesca’ (1996: 76).

This normalizing tendency, I would argue, takes three forms. Firstly, as Bonifazi also notes, there are Christian themes prevalent (1982: 162). Whether in *Il sacrilegio* (1942) or *La creazione* (1966) there is a literal *deus ex machina* present, where the figure of an omnipotent god undermines the impossible because it denotes a paradigm where everything is possible.⁷⁴ Secondly, Buzzati makes use of scientific and technological themes bordering on science fiction. Again, the provision of explanation and clarification removes much ambiguity and disruption—see *La macchina* (1957), or *La macchina che fermava il tempo* (1957). Thirdly, the fable recurs in Buzzati where the impossible is accepted—see *Il segreto del Bosco Vecchio* (1933) or *L’invasione*

⁷³ In his own words, Buzzati states that Poe is the most influential fantastic writer on his own work, and remains deliberately unclear on Kafka, ‘lo non dico niente’ (Panafieu 1973: 175).

⁷⁴ See also Tarchetti’s *Il lago delle tre lamprede* (above, pp. 87-89).

degli orsi in Sicilia (1945). There are, of course, exceptions to these rules but in general terms, Buzzati's is a normalized fantastic from which come the texts selected below.

Within the secondary literature, which comprises both monographs and journals,⁷⁵ there are two dominant threads to note. Firstly, within Buzzati's fiction—for his journalistic output during his career at *Corriere della Sera* is another matter—critical attention is broadly speaking divided between *Il deserto dei Tartari* (1940) on the one hand, certainly Buzzati's most successful publication (Gianfranceschi 1967: 39), and everything else on the other.⁷⁶ After the other novels *Il segreto del Bosco Vecchio* (1933), *Barnarbo delle montagne* (1933), *Il grande ritratto* (1960), and *Un amore* (1963), all but a canonical few of the prodigious output of short stories have received worthwhile critical attention, and there is a tendency to generalise between the collections *I sette messaggeri* (1942), *Paura alla Scala* (1949), *Il crollo della Baliverna* (1957), *In quel preciso momento* (1950), *Sessanta racconti* (1958), *Il colombre* (1966), and *Le notti difficili* (1971).

Secondly, critics are often concerned with symbolic or allegorical meanings of Buzzati's work (see Giannetto 1989: 13; Rivera 1992: 480-490; Laganà Gion 1983: 15-89), rather than with literal interpretations, a tendency no doubt linked to the recurrent themes in Buzzati such as death, waiting, anxiety, mystery, destiny and fear.⁷⁷ *Il Deserto dei Tartari* raises many existential questions, and so, given its status, it is unsurprising that similar questions have been put to the rest of Buzzati's work. However, this kind of analysis is reductive to the extent to which it asks universalising

⁷⁵ Between 1977 and 1982 the journal *Cahiers Buzzati* published six issues and demonstrates the interest in Buzzati in the French tradition; from 1996 *Studi buzzatiani*, the journal of the Centro Studi Buzzati has since been an active source of Buzzati criticism. For biographical studies and more general overviews of Buzzati's work, see Arslan (1974) and Toscani (1987).

⁷⁶ Note further how *Il Deserto dei Tartari* is the only novel by Buzzati to have a book from the 'Come leggere' Mursia collection dedicated solely to it (Carlino 1976). The more general introduction to Buzzati is *Invito alla lettura di Dino Buzzati* (Arslan 1974).

⁷⁷ Noted by Geerts (1976), Mignone (1981), Bonifazi (1982), Cirillo (2000), and Siddell (2006).

questions and extrapolates totalising premises to analyse human existence as one single concept. The majority of Buzzati's stories are simple to the extent that settings are generic and the characters lack depth because they are merely figures, and therefore drawing out allegorical and symbolic interpretation from these stories leads to generalisation. This sort of grand narrative approach can be misleading and has also marginalised literal interpretations and close readings of Buzzati's works, an aspect this chapter will address because of the nature of the approach used.

The ten stories below reflect some of the different ways in which Buzzati problematizes narrative reality, encompassing elements of fairytale such as in *I sette messaggeri* (1942), *Ragazza che precipita* (1966), and *La moglie con le ali* (1971); the oneiric in *Il dolore notturno* (1942) and *Il corridoio del grande albergo* (1950); the uncanny in *Un verme in casa* (1957); the abnormal in *Sette piani* (1942) and *L'inaugurazione della strada* (1958); and those with a primarily mechanical focus such as *Una goccia* (1949) and *La giacca stregata* (1966).

These stories occupy an extreme end of Buzzati's fantastic fiction as the most problematic, and this chapter explores the ways in which, within a predominantly normalized body of work, these are exceptional texts. I will discuss two characteristics: firstly, that Buzzati stretches cultural and physical paradigms to improbable or impossible degrees, and secondly, and to some extent as a corollary of the former, that Buzzati's narrative is characterised by instability, not in terms of hesitation, but rather in the sense that the certainty of mechanical and factual explanation is undermined by the lack of details provided. This makes for a more complex fantastic, and much of the following analysis is taken up with establishing mechanical and factual clarification to a greater degree than in the other author chapters. Paradigm-stretching and instability

are characteristics identified by the methodology, and I demonstrate in the final section how they both further and challenge the traditional understanding of Buzzati's work.

Some comment is warranted to explain the absence of some of the more familiar texts. *Il deserto dei Tartari* is missing because there is nothing impossible about the plot, and whilst this is not a necessary criterion for selection, other texts like *Un verme in casa* and *Il dolore notturno* explore the improbable in more interesting ways. *Il segreto del Bosco Vecchio*, certainly fantastic in the fairytale sense, does not however problematize reality enough to merit selection, and for the same reason that artificial intelligence is a given, not a problematic, premise, *Il grande ritratto* is omitted. Among the short stories, *Il borghese stregato*, *La macchina che fermava il tempo* and *Appuntamento con Einstein* are not as adequately problematic as those selected, and in order to avoid generic allegorical and existential interpretation, *Ombra del sud* and *Il mantello* and other similar stories do not feature.

Una goccia

Set in an unspecific unlocated apartment building, *Una goccia* is the story of how the tenants of staircase E hear a drop of water climbing the stairs. They hear this intermittently at night, and neither is any trace, nor is a satisfactory explanation ever found. The narrator himself lives on the sixth floor and can hear the drop coming up towards him; others hear it pass their doors, sighing in relief as it does so.

Caspar argues that the opening statement of '[u]na goccia d'acqua sale i gradini della scala' (Buzzati 1982: 193) demarcates a neat rupture with the everyday, normality and the real (Caspar 1990: 111), and Zangrandi (2011: 198) also assumes the drop is manifest, but in fact the mechanics, which function primarily by ambiguity and erasure,

undermine this certainty. The question firstly arises as to whether there is a single drop which is climbing the stairs, which the narrator suspects—‘Come fa? Saltella?’ (Buzzati 1982: 193)—or whether each drop is discrete; both are problematic. In the case of the former, the mechanics become more complex because this implies that the single drop is both able to move against gravity—denoting a source of energy and means of motion—and moreover that the direction in which it moves is being controlled. In the latter case, the question is one of the source of these drops while ascending.

As none of the residents visually witnesses the phenomenon, this casts doubt on the narrator’s reliability: how can he be sure it is a drop of *water* if he has never seen or tested it? Indeed, all that can be confirmed is that the residents have heard a sound that evokes an emotional response, ‘indecifrabili paure’ (194), which are integrated as part of the ordinary night time: ‘[m]eglio sentirlo, il rumore, piuttosto che passare le notti nel dubbio se ci sia o meno’ (194). In other words, it is more reassuring, having accepted that this drop exists, to be able to locate it and therefore ascertain its proximity, than to fear it stopping outside one particular door without any warning. The sound is therefore *expected*; if it does not occur, that paradigm of reality is disrupted. The drop is therefore a normalized trace irruption.

Caspar argues that anxiety underpins this narrative (1990: 99), but anxiety is not necessarily object-specific. Fear, on the other hand, is focused on an event or aspect which has not yet been realised.⁷⁸ Rather, in *Una goccia*, the residents fear what the drop can and will do—anxiety is, I would argue, too vague a notion. Structurally, fear denotes erasure: a gap between the expectation and the realisation of an object or event. What is specific to this narrative is that not only do the residents fear what they do not understand, but they also fear what they have not yet identified:

⁷⁸ Terror, for example, is an example of an emotion of that event realised.

they have not seen the drop, nor can they tell how it moves, how big it is, and the mornings after each event, there is no trace left, '[a]l mattino, uscendo di casa, si guarda attentamente la scala se mai sia rimasta qualche traccia. Niente, come era prevedibile, non la più piccola impronta' (Buzzati 1982: 194).

The solution is neither definitively supernatural or natural, nor is there hesitation between the two; rather, too many details have been erased to even construct competing solutions. The narrator is not unreliable, *per se*, but rather has to extrapolate from limited experience that the drop is *water*, that there is only *one* drop, and that it is travelling upstairs. The same limited response applies to the residents as well. In fact, there is no confirmation that it is an actual drop of water, but instead merely the confirmation of a *sound* of a drop of water. Certainly, the sound is the index of something that makes it, in this case, the drop, but the physical form of a drop may or may not be present. It has a confirmed yet ambiguous sound—some think it may be a mouse (194), but they do hear *something*—and the physical form is not a confirmed manifest presence. The necessary recourse to auditory rather than visual conceptualisation, as Siddell rightly argues, is due to 'the limits of perception' (2006: 66).

Mignone makes a convincing argument that Buzzati is undermining the laws of induction—that is, under gravity water falls and has always done so, and *therefore* it will continue to do so—by having a drop of water go *up* the stairs (1981: 59-60). However, the drop lacks the necessary confirmation of status to make this assertion, and to argue that a *sound* is going upstairs does not have the same paradigm-changing consequences of refuting induction. Not only, therefore, does *Una goccia* undermine and subvert the stability of its narrative reality, but in turn it also undermines

the explanations offered: it is, to a degree greater than other texts here and indeed in the whole thesis, epistemologically restrictive.

Overall, one trace process is supplemented to this narrative, the rule that a drop of water can travel against gravity and (assuming it is one drop) in particular directions. Water itself is not new to the narrative world—as shown by the assumption that water normally obeys the laws of gravity—, and the irruptive element, if it even is an impossible one, is small, quite literally.

Consequently Buzzati adopts a derisory tone; through the nightmarish and oneiric feel to the narrative, coupled with the fears evoked, Buzzati creates the same gothic atmosphere that might precede a more significant irruption like the entrance of a ghost, but instead, the focus is on a drop of water acting outside of its expected parameters: the atmosphere outweighs the aspect that is foregrounded. Mignone argues that for Buzzati, just because water normally descends does not mean it cannot ascend ‘in un «preciso momento»’ (1981: 60), and in so doing articulates a certain ‘«humor nero»’ (1981: 61). I would further this argument by saying that Buzzati is playing with concepts, not representing weighty supernatural motifs, which complements the way in which *Una goccia* demonstrates how even small irruptions in fantastic literature create problems regarding how they are inserted (or not) into the story world and, in this particular case, what elements need to be erased in order to make the fantastic problematic. This is thus an example of the complexity of the mechanical integration of the fantastic into its narrative environment.

Un verme in casa

Un verme in casa hardly figures in the critical literature, but it contains similarly disturbing fantastic mechanics as those found in *Sette piani*, one of Buzzati's most canonical short stories. Like in *Sette piani*, the cultural paradigm is stretched beyond accepted norms, and in both texts, what is missing is psychological access to the thoughts of the characters. Neither story is irruptive; both are instead culturally subversive.

Andrea Filari meets a man professing to be his long-lost school friend Egidio Molla but Filari has no such recollection. On being invited home, Molla begs permission to study some of Filari's books. Gradually Molla imposes himself on the household in different ways, until Filari can stand it no longer. Pulling a gun on Molla in the middle of the night, he misses and shoots Molla's hand. Now Molla owns half of everything Filari has, always with an expression of friendship and forgiveness on his face. As the title suggests, Molla worms his way into Filari's life, is overly apologetic for everything he does, professes guilt at every convenience of which he takes advantage, appears disarmingly vulnerable, yet what he is able to achieve in terms of influence and power over Filari and his wife Maria demonstrates how implicitly rather than explicitly manipulative he really is.

In the space of a few weeks, Molla, without a single threatening action, takes control of Filari's life, but acts as though this came about by accident rather than by intention, as though his friendship were the most important consideration and money a secondary concern. However, Filari never positively remembers Molla as a childhood friend, 'benché non riesca assolutamente a ricordare' (Buzzati 1982: 329). Instead, Molla's entrance into the household hinges on two aspects: partial recognition—'[c]hi

è? La faccia non mi è nuova, però non riesco a darle un nome' (329)—and Molla's assertion that they used to write countless letters to each other, not to mention his being able to recognise and call Filari by name. The dynamics of social etiquette dominate Filari's doubts, because Filari is prepared to play along in order not to appear rude: 'sì, adesso mi ricordo' (329) he falsely replies to Molla.⁷⁹ In the same way Filari plays along not to alienate this man professing to be his friend, Molla also does all he can not to alienate Filari as *his* friend. Yet both men stretch the cultural rules of hospitality and friendship to extremes: Filari tries to kill his guest, and Molla forgives and stays with the man who tried to kill him.

This is the fantastic element underpinning the narrative: two cultural rules being stretched beyond where they should logically end, creating an absurd situation—a host does not try to kill their guest, and attempted murder is hardly a reasonable premise upon which to continue a friendship. In Molla's case, his imposition as a guest is only accepted because his actions are incremental and he does not refer to previous allowances: for example, he does not mention food after he extends his long library hours but afterwards develops a voracious appetite, nor does he mention how, having been profusely apologetic for sleeping in Filari's bed, he has now taken that bed permanently after he begins working in the shop. The fantastic functions by deferral, shifting attention away from past allowances to the present one, thereby lessening the new (current) imposition. It is precisely because Molla's actions are subtle and his intentions hidden that even by the end, Filari cannot come to any conclusion as to whether Molla is really this forgiving and pious or whether he is expertly manipulative, driving his host to madness deliberately in order to gain leverage over him.

⁷⁹ In a manner similar to the way in which W.B does not want to challenge Maria outright in Papini's *Il ritorno* (see chapter 4, pp. 126-129).

Filari's actions indicate how much information he is withholding from the reader, as in the space of a few weeks, Molla drives Filari to murder, but Filari only reveals his anger the moment before acting on it: '[I]o ammazzerò. È l'unica. Stasera. Gli sparerò nel sonno e poi farò credere a un suicidio' (332). Even though there is no access to Molla's mind, his actions do at least demonstrate a progressive invasion of privacy, whereas Filari weakly and continuously capitulates before suddenly resolving to take drastic action. Filari's behaviour is the more unpredictable, thus not only are Molla's motivations erased, but also Filari's real thoughts. Like Giuseppe Corte in *Sette piani*, it is important to note that the narrative also obscures the true thoughts of the *protagonists*. Corte is portrayed as a victim with no control over his circumstance, but then why does he travel to receive treatment at a famous hospital if he were not worried his life were in danger? For a simple cold, an ordinary hospital would have sufficed. Similarly, why does Filari not instead ask Molla explicitly to leave, telling him he has no recollection of their past friendship, before even considering shooting him?

These are valid questions to ask because although Filari and Corte are victims, they are not entirely blameless, and it is because the cultural rules which underpin these narrative are stretched ludicrously far that this aspect of the plots is glossed over, effectively erased. Filari was a victim of an overzealous, but technically temporary houseguest, but after trying to kill Molla, he becomes irrevocably bound to him. Sympathy for Corte's continual transfers to different wards would lessen if he revealed the full extent of how much he knew about his own condition. The fantastic in both narratives not only stretches modes of reasonable behaviour but also erases details which allow for a fuller account, and as such, like with *Una goccia*, there is difficulty in *forming* stable explanations, rather than deciding between them.

Sette piani

Sette piani undermines and destabilises its narrative reality, and masks explanatory details by representing events exclusively through the protagonist's eyes, a hospital patient who grows ever more paranoid as the information relayed to him becomes increasingly unconvincing, and which complements his perceived loss of control and ability to avoid a feared outcome.

Giuseppe Corte checks himself into a famous seven-storey clinic for what is originally described as 'un po' di febbre' (Buzzati 1982: 22). Each storey corresponds to the severity of this one ailment, with the least aggressive cases on the seventh floor and the most serious cases on the first floor. Over time, via a series of unnerving coincidences and convenient excuses by the medical staff, Corte eventually finds himself moved from the seventh to the first floor upon which the window blinds begin to close around him, implying his death.

Each floor transfer is justified by a reason that Corte presumes unlinked to the original condition: he accepts moving to the sixth floor so as not to separate a newly arrived mother from her children; the transfer to the fifth is a result of a hospital restructuring program; a secondary illness, eczema, 'assolutamente indipendente dal male principale' (28) is cause for treatment on the fourth; access to better hospital equipment is motive for the next transfer to the third; relegation to the second floor is due to the third floor being closed for a holiday; and finally the first floor placement is a direct order from Professor Dati, the head doctor.

What is not made explicit is that because Corte's condition is getting worse (and it is) the medical personnel are equally powerless to prevent his descent. On the sixth floor, Corte is told that 'il processo distruttivo delle cellule è assolutamente agli inizi'

(26), on the fourth, that 'la febbre fu alta' (29). Yet, by foregrounding the dialogue and the events such as the third floor closure, rather than the real diagnoses, the narrative gives the impression, as Crotti argues, of an 'assurdo complotto burocratico e ospedaliero' (1977: 44). Corte sees himself as a victim of circumstance or, as Bonifazi argues, of error (1982: 146), as the unlikelihood of such a series of mere coincidences increases. However, Corte's feeling of victimisation is based on his assumption of a causal association he makes between being transferred to lower floors and his condition. In other words, he feels that the floor transfers directly exacerbate his condition, and that the staff are pushing him towards the first floor and therefore towards his death. As Rawson puts it, the situation 'looks like a conspiracy to send a man down by lingering degrees to a certain death on the ground floor' (1984: 194), and Corte is certainly more concerned with floor level than with the gravity of his condition. However, few details are provided to make the firm assertion that the medical personnel are trying to *dispose* of Corte, but circumstantial evidence, coupled with the absence of any real inquiry into the issue of Corte's misplacement, makes this the most credible explanation to him.

On the other hand, spending only a quarter of an hour before dying demonstrates how Corte's arrival on the first floor is timely and intended, but not for reasons of persecution, but because the doctors are unable to cure him: they are pushing him further down because better help is found on lower floors, not because being on a lower floor aggravates the condition. Moreover, Corte ought not to be as shocked as he is: he travels to this city with the specific intention of checking himself in, the implication being that he knows to some degree of the potential risks of the disease. His position as victim is thus undermined by the fact that he voluntarily enters the hospital. Furthermore, psychological access to the doctors' thoughts is erased: are

these apparent excuses that they give really a mechanism used with other patients to calm them? After all, the hierarchy of the floors is well known among the other patients—it is how Corte learns the system—and thus it is easy for them to associate the floor with their health.⁸⁰ Corte is not being persecuted, nor is he the victim of bad medical care, but simply incurable.

As with *Un verme in casa*, the mechanics function by stretching parameters of reality: in this case, the boundary between intention and coincidence. The series of six independent coincidental reasons for floor change appear as a whole systematic and thus caused. However, the links between the coincidences which are necessary to put forward a causal explanation are erased: they may *appear* causal, but there is no evidence to support such a claim. On the other hand, Corte dies shortly after arriving on the floor where terminal patients end up, implying that at each level Corte's illness was correlative to the gravity of the condition treated therein, but because his illness is a secondary concern to the main reason for being on each floor (one of the six excuses) his actual condition is never discussed in clear terms, thus undermining proof of causal transfers. Even if there were design behind Corte's movements, it is unlikely that Corte's demise was orchestrated, because otherwise the staff would have left him on the top floor with minimal care, furthest from Professor Dati and the best medical attention. Rather, Corte's fear is justified but not because of persecution, but because of inevitability: he does not realise he is incurable. Corte feel powerless towards the medical staff rather than feeling powerless, along *with* the medical staff, towards the *illness*. The fantastic in *Sette piani* does not propose an impossible reality, but rather undermines the stability of what is probable, and prevents a resolution between a causal or coincidental explanation for Corte's movements by erasing or withholding

⁸⁰ It is significant that no mention is made of patients who go *up* a level. If the hospital floor system is merely a mechanism to placate the terminally ill, judging by Corte's emotional turbulence, questions arise as to its efficacy.

necessary signposts, and by foregrounding the least objective perspective to this situation: Corte's.

La giacca stregata

Rightly described as '[u]n altro piccolo capolavoro' by Bonifazi (1982: 168), *La giacca stregata* maintains a focus on causal and coincidental events, and explores how the fantastic interacts with an otherwise non-fantastic/realistic narrative environment. This story is also an example of mechanical equilibrium in the way balance is restored when the supplemented and erased elements are negated. However, even though the effects of the fantastic are eventually cancelled out, there is still a degree of ambiguity characteristic of Buzzati.

The narrator discovers that banknotes magically appear in one of the pockets of his new jacket. After extracting as many banknotes as he can, he shortly afterwards learns of a bank robbery where the amount of money stolen is exactly the same as that taken from the jacket pocket, and which results in the death of a passerby. Similar events occur each time the narrator puts his hand into his pocket, until he finally decides to burn the jacket, at which point all his money disappears, along with everything bought.

The narrative is set in a located World I, Milan, with real addresses such as via Ferrara and via San Cloro, demonstrating how the bewitched jacket is a supplementary irruption to a narrative world to all intents and purposes similar to the phenomenal world. Bonifazi (1982: 168) rightly notes the diabolical tone, and the narrator himself thinks he has entered into 'un patto col demonio' (Buzzati 1982: 665) but this does not explain how the pact works. On discovering the first banknote in the jacket pocket, the

narrator logically assumes that the tailor, Corticella, has left it by mistake; it is only when he removes the money, thus creating an empty space, that a new banknote fills the gap. In other words, the jacket is unremarkable when there is a banknote in the pocket, and only when it is removed is the mechanism of replenishment set in motion.

With all his riches, the narrator buys a large house, paintings and a luxury car, and when he decides to burn the jacket on the assumption that he is responsible for the apparently coincidental deaths linked to the identical sums of money he extracts, these all suddenly disappear as well. Once the source of these purchases—the jacket—has been destroyed, the objects are erased, suggesting how the effects (the car and house) require the jacket in order to exist, which demarcates a wider sphere of influence and causality in the narrative world than the confines of a pocket: it is not a contained irruption.

Ma sullo spiazzo erboso, la mia macchina non c'era più. E, ritornato che fui in città, la mia sontuosa villa era sparita; al suo posto, un prato incolto con dei pali che reggevano l'avviso «Terreno comunale da vendere». E i depositi in banca, non mi spiegai come, completamente esauriti. E scomparsi, nelle mie numerose cassette di sicurezza, i grossi pacchi di azioni (665).

The explanations to these disappearances could be coincidental in the same way that there are no necessary links between the narrator and the victims; the car could have been stolen or the bank records lost, but such a series of unrelated coincidences is more difficult to accept if seen as a whole, like in *Sette piani*. When the narrator returns to work, the entire diabolic episode is questioned when 'nessuno sembra meravigliarsi della mia improvvisa rovina' (665), after having unfortunately destroyed the evidence for his story. The ending suggests that the narrator was deluded or was imagining his good fortune, but within this daydream, two of the more credible ways in which the jacket might operate mechanically are either it transports the notes to the jacket pocket, and therefore the robbery, fire and deaths are caused by the jacket, or there is no

causal link, the events are uncannily coincidental, and the jacket therefore creates new banknotes out of nothing.

The type of mechanic in the jacket differs subtly between these alternatives: a jacket which transports banknotes only signifies a supplementary process whereby the notes disappear from a source elsewhere in the world and reappear in the pocket. On the other hand, the pocket which *creates* banknotes denotes a supplementary process which creates new banknotes that supplement (in the sense of add to) the narrative world. Thus transportation denotes changes within the paradigm; creation *ex nihilo* denotes changes to the paradigm.

The effects of either are important to consider. In the former case, logically, the money returns to its various sources, and the irruption is thus neutralised, but confirmation is erased. This is further complicated by the absence of any mention of what happens to the victims. In the latter, the items bought with the money are negated because the jacket is destroyed, but again, there is no confirmation of a causal relationship between the destroyed jacket and the disappearance of the house and car. There is moreover an interesting correlation to note: where a subtler mechanic of transport is being deployed, the effects in the narrative world are greater because of the suggestion that real-world events and other people are interfered with; in the case of an irruption of new banknotes, the space in which the fantastic operates is delimited to the pocket, and the luxury objects which disappear (if these are indeed linked) only matter and affect the narrator. The subtler alternative has the greater impact.

On the other hand, if the entire story is imaginary, then although the fantastic does not take place in the narrator's world, the mechanics still take place in his mind, and so it is a question of determining the literary level on which the fantastic operates.⁸¹

⁸¹ See the previous chapter on Papini for a discussion of a similarly delimited internal fantastic.

Whatever the status of the impossible, there is a moral message of uncontrolled greed, but no punishment or forfeit: the narrator does not lose more than he had before, he simply goes back to his job, and due to mechanical erasure, the victims of theft are indirectly linked to him, thus absolving him of direct responsibility even though he feels blameworthy.

La giacca stregata does not stretch its paradigm, but instead explores the reach of a particular supernatural object (the jacket) within an otherwise normal real-world environment, and like *Una goccia*, focuses on the complexities of determining degrees of and confirming mechanical integration. There is no hesitation in a Todorovian sense, but rather an inability to choose between two impossible or supernatural explanations (not a natural and supernatural pairing), the legitimacy of which rests on the suggestion of hallucination or daydream. Unlike *Una goccia*, where aggressive erasure undermines all explanation leaving the text open-ended—as is also the case with conventional Todorovian hesitation—, in *La giacca stregata* erasure is tempered, creating a more stable yet unresolved fantastic text. The mere existence of possible explanations moreover differentiates this text from other Buzzati stories.

La moglie con le ali

As one of the more located stories in this selection of Buzzati's fantastic fiction, *La moglie con le ali* leaves little doubt as to its real-world setting. The narrative challenges traditionally irruptive elements by normalizing them, playing with the tendency in gothic literature to dislocate, and it is because of the balance between gothic irruption and fairytale normalization that this story stands out. Caspar also highlights how the metamorphosis in *La moglie con le ali* is 'transitoria, caso poco frequente nella

narrativa buzzatiana' (1992: 219), an important point in terms of the story's mechanics, as instantaneous or given transformations (such as in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*) present problems in analysis because there is less material with which to work. It is moreover hard to ignore the gender politics at play, particularly regarding Lucina's incarceration, which are bound up with the mechanics.

Count Giorgio Venanzi discovers two bumps on his young wife Lucina's back. As time passes, the bumps grow bigger into a pair of wings. Terrified of the potential scandal, Giorgio consults don Francesco who suggests the wings might be of divine origin. Far from reassured, Giorgio keeps Lucina locked up for months, but she eventually begins to escape at night to fly around. One night she encounters Massimo—Giorgio's best friend—after which the wings disappear.

Such an overt and quickly normalized irruption as a pair of wings suggests a more fairytale than real-world landscape, but references to a telephone (Buzzati 1982: 835) and the front line of the Vietnam war (840) approximately locate the narrative historically, but dislocates it slightly by giving no geographical location; it is simply a nondescript provincial setting. Such dislocation can be found in gothic literature, not to mention Giorgio's social standing as a count, but what is missing, however, is the aspect of fear. Instead, for Giorgio, 'non c'era nulla che gli facesse terrore più dello scandalo' (836) and the emergence of wings on his wife's back does not stop him from sharing the same bed as her. Lucina herself is unperturbed 'sorridente, come una stupidella' (836). As Caspar notes, '[l]'inverosimiglianza del fenomeno che snatura la ragazza non è menzionata da nessuno dei personaggi' (1992: 219).

The wings begin as merely '[u]n cosino duro' (Buzzati 1982: 834), then quickly develop. After ten days, they are precisely one hundred and twenty-two centimetres with a wingspan of over three metres (838). Although described in terms which allow

for this rate of growth in the real world—‘[c]on una rapidità di crescita che egli aveva riscontrato soltanto in rare specie del regno vegetale’ (836)—, Giorgio thinks of the wings as a ‘brutto scherzo’ (835), a disease or a curse, which Lucina has contracted or been bewitched with, as evinced by his questions concerning Lucina’s recent whereabouts, ‘[n]on sei stata per caso in qualche fiera...Sai, dove ci sono gli zingari’ (835). The speed at which the wings grow mirrors the spread of a disease, again normalizing the wings through a recognisable frame of a natural process, and don Francesco indeed advises Giorgio not to keep Lucina locked up like a leper. Whilst the wings grow over a period of days and remain fully-grown for weeks, this contrasts with the rapidity with which, after Lucina encounters Massimo, the wings suddenly disappear with no explanation.

However, this lacuna in the mechanics allows for a correlation between character action and the wings. The way in which the wings can be said to stand for Lucina’s emotive state draws from a gothic tradition where types such as the vampire represent an external manifestation of an internal desire or struggle. Lucina’s wings—signifying both the capacity and will to free herself from her arranged marriage and her angelic obedience as a submissive wife—have the opposite effect when Giorgio decides to imprison her, forbidding her from speaking to anyone, including the servants. The wings disappear when, as is implied, Lucina has an affair with Massimo, precisely undermining these labels of subservient and obedient.

Rather, the angelic wings lead to adultery—or at least facilitate it—and demonstrate how Lucina resists Giorgio’s control, by exercising a certain autonomy over her own body to spite her husband who is hardly a ‘modello di castità e morigeratezza’ (836) himself. The growth of the wings corresponds to her growing desire to escape, and thus the period of quarantine does little to quell this urge, and

when her desire is sated, the wings disappear as a consequence. Lucina's desire is not necessarily sexual, but is merely translated so, and she does not wish to free herself completely from her husband, but just to assert some form of independence. For this reason, I disagree with Caspar who argues that Lucina's metamorphosis stands for an unconscious desire (1992: 219); rather, that desire is a *conscious* thought, and is important to note because it shows how Lucina is an active, not an unconscious, participant in this conflict: the fantastic is thus more controlled and balanced than Caspar suggests.

The mechanics in *La moglie con le ali* comprise a gradually irrupting object which is normalized effectively into the characters' world, demonstrated by how the disappearance of the wings is a more sudden and climactic event than their appearance. In part because of this, as can be seen further on, *La moglie con le ali* is the least problematic text in this selection. The mechanics themselves are epistemologically accessible; what are missing are more concrete prompts to explain the source or cause of the wings, but these are minor erased details. Although circumstantial, the evidence for a causal relation between Lucina's desires and the growth of her wings is more convincing than any sudden miracle cure or spell; it is ironic that despite the heavily catholic tone, a specifically monotheistic supernaturalism is an unconvincing explanation, and in doing so Buzzati brings a mechanism more commonly found in gothic literature into a modern day setting.

Il dolore notturno

In a manner similar to *Un verme in casa*, *Il dolore notturno* deals with an unwelcome intrusion, but where at least there is dialogue which hides intentions in the former, the

silence which underpins *Il dolore notturno* makes for a fantastic story of a different structural order. *Un verme in casa* hinges on Molla's hidden intentions; by contrast the narrator's revelations obscure the facts in *Il dolore notturno*, and it is for this reason that the text is worth focus. Rather than allowing a greater level of epistemological access to the facts, the additional details provided obscure what is going on: the text problematizes the omnipotent narrator position in the fantastic.

One night, fifteen-year-old Carlo tells his older brother Giovanni (who is twenty) that someone is waiting to come in, and outside, a man is indeed waiting. He enters the bedroom, and pulls out two canvases which Carlo tries not to look at. For two hours they all remain in silence before Carlo falls asleep and the man leaves. Every night for two weeks the man returns, and keeps Carlo awake by poking him each time he begins to fall asleep. On the final night, the man remains outside the house, and the next morning at dawn, the brothers rejoice.

Although oneiric, the narrative is loosely located and attempts to give enough details for a realistic setting: '[v]erso la periferia, in un quartiere giardino c'era una villetta [...] [che] era circondata da un piccolo giardino, e, benché nel viale davanti passassero molte automobili, dava una impressione di solitudine' (Buzzati 1982: 89); in addition, when the mystery man does speak, all he says is '[t]utti dormono', '[f]uori che te' (93), highlighting how Carlo is awake. However, this is not to undermine the nightmarish tone to the events, not least of all because they occur at night. To this end Lazzarin notes the diabolical tone and argues that Buzzati draws from the figures of the vampire in creating the stranger (2004: 127; 2008b: 91).

Given that Carlo is in bed because he does not feel well, one explanation for this unannounced and permitted entrance is that the stranger is a doctor, but his behaviour and actions undermine such a suggestion. He forcibly prevents Carlo from

sleeping and terrifies him with his mesmerising canvases, the second of which is problematic: 'quasi identico al primo, ma pure completamente diverso' (Buzzati 1982: 92): a paradox of two paintings that are both similar and dissimilar at the same time. Certainly this might be a trick of perception, but harder to explain is how Giovanni is only able to distinguish 'due foglie di carta immacolata' (92). The more difficult problem is not how the pictures are paradoxical, but rather how Giovanni is unable to see what his brother can. Noting that Giovanni does not know that the stranger is outside the door on the first night, Siddell argues that '[t]he fantastic derives from a struggle between two world views which corresponds to the struggle between the two brothers to establish knowledge about what is beyond their immediate field of vision' (2006: 63), a conclusion which highlights this discrepancy in perception—Carlo can perceive more than his brother—but does not go far enough to explain why this is the case because that information is precisely missing, erased.

The eerie atmosphere, along with the mostly silent protagonists, is created by the incomplete prompts the narrator gives the reader. Carlo 'aveva una strana impressione, come se la porta fosse rimasta aperta' (Buzzati 1982: 90), a feeling which correctly alerts him to an open door and the presence of the man outside; when the stranger walks in Giovanni realises that 'sarebbe stato inutile resistere' (91); thinking to alert his brother, he desists 'che il ragazzo sapeva già' (91). In each of these instances (and more), the narrator does not explain how or why such judgements can be made. On the one hand, this could simply be a crude narrative device used to create an air of mystery and suspense; on the other, they obscure and legitimate a particularly surreal series of events. There is no issue as to whether these events occur; rather, the man *does* enter, but explanations as to his purpose, and the thinking behind letting him enter are withheld, which likewise applies to *Una goccia* and *Un verme in casa*.

Moreover, beyond the bizarre but possible, there is an insubstantial amount of evidence to suggest a supernatural explanation.

The narrative proposes inexplicable lapses of judgement on the part of the brothers—at least in *Un verme in casa*, how Molla enters the house is clear—and it is this inability to form explanations through erasure of necessary details which problematizes and destabilises the narrative. The cultural paradigm is stretched to the extent that it is unclear whether the brothers are tolerating a stranger's behaviour against their wishes, or whether they are somehow in league with him, and the stranger's essentially forced entry is legitimated by Giovanni's inaction making him therefore complicit in his brother's suffering. Moreover, the narrator's incomplete prompts which show that there is something the reader does not nor will not know about the circumstances further legitimates these actions by portraying these events as fated and unstoppable.⁸² It is from this inaction and passive acceptance, not just the stranger's malice, that the discomfort and ambiguity evoked in this story arise.

L'inaugurazione della strada

The texts covered so far have predominantly focused on the extent to which cultural paradigms are stretched to unrealistic and extraordinary lengths. *L'inaugurazione della strada* differs in that it stretches both cultural *and* physical paradigms of reality, and in this respect, it also serves to introduce those Buzzati texts which stretch world construction such as *Il corridoio del grande albergo*, *I sette messaggeri*, and *Ragazza che precipita*. Whereas in the following discussion of *Il corridoio del grande albergo*, the extended space is unexpected, the reverse is true here: the expected road disappears.

⁸² A technique Tarchetti uses in *I fatali* (see Chapter 3, pp. 73-77).

This results in a continually lengthening journey, contradicting the original purpose of a road as a structure delimiting a distance between two set points.

On 20th June 1845, a new road, eighty kilometres in length leading from the capital to San Piero is inaugurated, even though construction has not completely finished, and a party led by Carlo Mortimer leaves the city on the first journey. One by one, the carriages fail due to bumps and holes in the unfinished road, until finally the road simply stops. Mortimer decides to press on, but each time he asks for new directions from passersby, San Piero always appears further away. Finally, the entire party except Mortimer—who considers it his duty to complete this journey—turns back, and Mortimer carries on, now across an empty desert.

In structural terms, journeys are mechanisms of dislocation where the point of departure grows more distant. What is different about *L'inaugurazione della strada* is that the point of *arrival* is constantly deferred, there is no closure, thus endlessly extending the length of the journey. In other words, from being a located and rigid narrative structure—simply getting from point A to point B—, point B (San Piero) is displaced to the point of erasure. To all intents and purposes San Piero does not exist, at least where it should. It is said to be 'quasi ai confini del regno' (Buzzati 1982: 489)—a detail that echoes *I sette messaggeri*—, a city with a population of forty thousand people who have been sending messages by dove welcoming the party in advance, thus confirming its existence, if the road there were not proof enough. An old man in a shack claims that San Piero is only two hours walk away, but this estimation is revised by the next old man who (after two hours of walking) says that San Piero is another four hours walk. Yet, this second old man also proves to be wrong when a third man vaguely 'segnò con un dito l'orizzonte' (492), further dislocating San Piero. Importantly, this third man adds 'San Piero o San Dedro, forse. Ma, in fondo, io non ci

ho mai creduto' (492). Not only is the city further away, but its existence and name is also being brought into question: the closer the party get to the San Piero, the less real it becomes. Despite this, Mortimer decides to carry on alone 'verso il desolato orizzonte, per il glabro deserto che sembrava dovesse continuare in eterno' (493).

The goal of this journey has now subtly changed. The original purpose, of inaugurating a road has been quietly dropped and Mortimer is being foolish because while common sense dictates that San Piero clearly does not exist, or at least does not exist in the particular direction laid out by the road, Mortimer feels personally invested in his duty. Having come so far he is relentlessly committed to continuing on until he achieves his goal, yet this contradicts the purpose of the inauguration journey, because there is no longer a completed or accurate road to inaugurate. Mortimer stretches those cultural rules of what he feels is expected of him to ludicrous and unrealistic proportions.

It is through the erasure of the final part of the road that the distance increases. More space is supplemented as the narrator progresses, and the mechanics have an inverse relationship between distance covered from the located World I of the capital (point A) and the distance to San Piero (point B). As the narrator moves further from A, the distance to B increases, although not through impossible means. Rather, once the certainty of a fixed distance ends when the road disappears, there is nothing more to anchor or signpost San Piero's position. It is therefore significant that the distance only begins to increase after this point: the erasure of the road allows for the supplemented distance, an example of convincing mechanical integration.

Further mileage is supplemented to the expected distance (and erased road), but always on the assumption that San Piero is only a little further off, rather than at the much greater distance which Mortimer refuses to accept. This stretching of the physical

paradigm is similar to the stretched cultural paradigm in *Un verme in casa* where Molla always asks for a little more: in both cases, the full extent of the changes is never revealed as a whole, but instead gradually. The deferral of a point of arrival is similarly taken up in *I sette messaggeri*, but in contrast to *L'inaugurazione della strada*, the purpose of the journey is to discover where its Point B lies, not to confirm its already known location. In both cases, the way in which the physical paradigm is stretched is by the erasure of that point B, but the two texts go about this in different ways.

Il corridoio del grande albergo

Largely ignored by the critical literature, *Il corridoio del grande albergo* continues with the mechanic of extended space, a structure which culminates with the impossible geography of *I sette messaggeri*. What separates *Il corridoio del grande albergo* from other such examples is the manner in which the cultural rules are stretched which conceals the physical changes to the hotel corridor.

One night, the narrator, a hotel guest, goes to the bathroom and runs into another guest at the door. Uncomfortable at the idea of entering together, the narrator hides in a doorway, and the other man does the same. When the narrator then tries to get to the bathroom again, the other man reappears. In rage and desperation, the narrator decides to stand his ground, hidden until the other man has gone to the bathroom—but he never emerges. Time passes and the narrator eventually falls asleep. When he wakes up, he sees around him hundreds of others like him in dressing gowns sleeping in hundreds of other doorways on the corridor.

Although his intentions appear obvious, the other guest's actions are circumstantial, no words pass between him and the narrator; what is peculiar is the way

his actions *exactly* match those of the narrator: when they emerge, it is ‘con un sincronismo impressionante, quasi la telepatia’ (Buzzati 1982: 469-470). In spite of such coincidence, it becomes gradually more difficult to accept that there is no fantastic mechanism linking the two men after each encounter.

Such coincidence bordering on the incredible also figures in *La giacca stregata* and *Sette piani*, but unlike these two examples where there is a choice between causal and coincidental explanations, here there is little evidence for a causal explanation—in this case the suggestion would be telepathy. Instead, the text focuses on the predictability of the characters’ behaviour rather than a supernatural cause for such coordinated action. It is therefore ironic that the narrator becomes angry instead of realising that he is as equally predictable as the other man, and this principle of predictability is pushed to an extreme when the next morning, the narrator sees hundreds of others: ‘chi in ginocchio, chi seduto sul pavimento, chi assopito in piedi come i muli; pallidi, distrutti, come dopo una notte di battaglia’ (470).

At this point, the focus shifts from coincidence to logistics. If these other men have been through similar experiences—as is implied by their being, like the narrator, dressed in dressing-gowns and looking as though they had spent all night in the corridor—then within the small timeframe between the narrator falling asleep and waking up, it is improbable to the point of being impossible that the scenario could have been repeated so many times within a real-world setting. The structure of the narrative world itself has altered to accommodate the events taking place within it.

In fact two structures have been altered: the time frame, and the physical dimensions of the corridor. While the narrator sleeps, exhausted, more time has been supplemented to allow for each scenario of men wanting the bathroom to play out. In terms of the physical dimensions, it is suggested that the corridor length has expanded

but not necessarily by impossible means, a darkly lit corridor is sufficient explanation. However, such a long corridor with hundreds of doors itself borders on the unrealistic: it is possible, but improbable. Moreover, along with the expanded timeframe and hundreds of similar coincidental night-time meetings implied by the presence of the other guests, it makes for a more oneiric reality when the narrator wakes up than during the night with the first dream-like scenario.

The fantastic only crosses a boundary between paradigms of the possible to the impossible if all the narrative elements are considered together. Each separate component is possible if improbable, and the expanded timeframe only exists on the assumption that the hundreds of other guests are acting in a similar, predictable way to the narrator. It is only when combined that both the cultural and physical paradigms change and the fantastic can be said to have crossed a boundary from an Unlocated World I—simply a ‘camera d'albergo’—to a World II where time passes at different speeds, physical space expands to highly unrealistic proportions, and where innumerable examples of identical behaviour (the cultural paradigm change) are motivated by a similar desire to go to the bathroom.

I sette messaggeri

Among Buzzati's best known short stories, *I sette messaggeri* bears the title of the whole collection in which it was first published, and ‘perdura l'eco del *Deserto dei Tartari*, con un accentuato simbolismo’ (Gianfranceschi 1967: 49), as well as themes like the frontier (Panafieu 1978: 67-83). Its inclusion here is not however for reasons of canonical recognition or an exploration of existential themes, but instead for its narrative world mechanics. Whereas the extended spatial paradigms in *Il corridoio del*

grande albergo and *L'inaugurazione della strada* are unexpected and therefore to some degree signposted as abnormal, in the case of *I sette messaggeri*, it is not the extended space but rather its normalization that warrants attention.

A prince sets off from the capital to find the edge of his father's kingdom, taking with him seven knights to act as messengers on his journey, named alphabetically Alessandro, Bartolomeo, Caio, Domenico, Ettore, Federico, and Gregorio. Writing *in medias res*, the narrator has been riding for eight years and has not yet reached the border. In the meanwhile, his father has died, his older brother has taken the throne and he (the narrator) has been left for dead. The following morning he will send Domenico back home, the last messenger who will return within the narrator's lifetime.

Buzzati is being unashamedly spartan in his writing: there is no characterisation of the narrator, few recollections or episodes from his eight-year journey, and naming the messengers alphabetically reduces them to mere figures. The names of the city, the narrator, the king and all other details are left unmentioned, with the exception of the 'monti Fasani' (Buzzati 1982: 10) which are passed before six months of travel have elapsed. The almost complete absence of spatial or historical coordinates of any sort makes for a highly unlocated narrative, which is important to mention because of how the narrator's journey will dislocate him from this indeterminate point. In other words, the purpose of finding the edge of the kingdom is undermined by not knowing the point from where this distance is being measured. Why, moreover, is this task even necessary? If the boundaries are not known, how can this area be called a kingdom, or claim be stated over it? This is further problematized by the question of communication: after four years, vagrants tell the narrator that the boundaries are not far off, but this makes the notion of kingdom dubious by challenging how a capital city can exercise control over such an area if the fastest messages take years to deliver. Indeed the king

dies before his son reaches the edge of the kingdom. Therefore not only is there doubt over the boundary, but also over the nature of what that boundary encloses and delimits. Single ownership of this vast area is a ludicrous proposition, but is nonetheless affirmed by the vagrants recognising a boundary in a kingdom in which they are subjects.

Giannetto has called the expanse ‘quell’infinito meridione’ (1996: 18), a critical cliché because such a judgement requires knowledge that there is no end to the narrative world, which is precisely what is lacking and which constitutes the narrator’s goal; it is merely a large area, not an infinite one. However, by doing so Giannetto does raise the issue of the size of the kingdom compared to that of the phenomenal world. In calculating message delivery times, the narrator asserts that ‘in una giornata, mentre noi avanzavamo di quaranta leghe, [il messaggero] ne divorava sessanta’ (Buzzati 1982: 10), and that he has been travelling for ‘otto anni, sei mesi e quindici giorni di ininterrotto cammino’ (9). At a rate of forty leagues a day for over eight years, the landmass over which the narrator is traversing is certainly, within a literary framework, difficult to visualise, but when compared to the phenomenal world, the extent to which space has been supplemented demonstrates how dislocated the world really is. The distance covered is over fifteen times the circumference of the Earth, and even accommodating for mountains, deserts and woods, the narrator does not record arriving at the sea. Yet this is still not the edge of the kingdom: this expanse of thousands of leagues is one landmass.⁸³

⁸³ This distance is greater than the circumference of the planet Jupiter. I do not think that this mode of comparison is overreaching: the goal is not to compare exact mileage between the narrative world in *I sette messaggeri* and the planets, but rather to give some idea of the enormity of the scale. Walter Geerts has made a more precise calculation of the distances each messenger travels in the first forty days in order to check Buzzati’s figures which he concludes are correct (Geerts 1976: 4). In other words, Buzzati’s choice of distances and time intervals are deliberate, confirming the scale of this supplemented but well-hidden mechanic.

Tempting though it may be, it is problematic to conclude that *I sette messaggeri* is set in a World II. Nothing is radically different from the phenomenal world—even if there is arguably a fairytale tone (Martin 1995: 72) and Arabian Nights gloss to the narrative—; indeed it is simply the distances covered from which problems arise. Rather, thousands of leagues of landscape are supplemented to this originally unlocated World I to dislocate it beyond the point where it can be said to be set terrestrially, but which is not different enough to justify a World II label. It is not of a different order, simply an extended but similar structure. I would argue that Buzzati's extension of space in this text is subtle, not only because its impossibility is hidden, but also—given the erasure of details of landscapes traversed, horses changed, struggles and the like—because of the sheer scale of the degree to which the world has been extended, not to mention because of the absence of disbelief on the part of the narrator. Moreover, the lack of adventure normalizes the journey narrative making the daily forty leagues of travel little more than the day's work: it becomes the narrator's everyday way of living and thus incorporates the steadily increasing distance as part of that norm, echoing how Filari and Mortimer also adapt to how their paradigms, both cultural and physical, are slowly stretched. The narrator therefore does not express consternation at the distance covered, but instead contemplates the erasure of a boundary signposting that distance.

By contrast, in *L'inaugurazione della strada*, Mortimer has a firm conviction that San Piero exists, and the constant deferral of its location is what keeps him motivated. At least the narrator of *I sette messaggeri* is committed from the start to his arduous task, transforming the journey into an everyday routine, and as a result, means that the extended space is not as overtly signposted as in *L'inaugurazione della strada*.

Normalization and the erasure of narrative signposts conceal a paradigm-extending narrative world in *I sette messaggeri*.

Ragazza che precipita

Finally in this selection, *Ragazza che precipita* is one of Buzzati's most inexplicable and surreal narratives, not only problematic regarding its fantastic mechanics, but also regarding its internal story logic. Why the events are taking place, both in terms of the norms (girls fall) and the instance represented in the text (a girl called Marta falls), are erased. Indeed, the extent to which basic non-fantastic details have been erased is such that even the unquestionably allegorical meanings of the text (Lazzarin 2004: 142) such as desire and death (Bonifazi 1982: 169) let alone the literal meanings, are difficult to unpick—Bonifazi precisely leaves his analysis at these two generalisations.

The story tells of Marta, nineteen, who jumps off the top of a skyscraper and slowly begins to fall, exchanging a few lines of conversation with the people on each floor. Around her, other girls are falling as well, and by the time she reaches the bottom (or near it) she is an old woman.

The first mechanic to highlight is the fact that Marta is falling slowly enough to talk to people as she passes, 'come si precipita infatti allegramente quando si hanno appena diciannove anni' (Buzzati 1982: 711). By accepting that she is falling, rather than flying, the strength of gravity has been partly erased to slow the rate of descent, rather than a mechanic supplemented which would allow her to fly. As dawn breaks, a couple on the twenty-eighth floor is having breakfast and spot '[u]na vecchia decrepita' (714) passing outside. The husband grumbles that they only ever see old people passing, never the young, but his wife responds saying that 'quaggiù almeno si può

sentire il tonfo, quando toccano terra' (714) to which her husband replies '[s]tavolta, neanche quello' (713) after listening for a few seconds. Since the husband expects to hear Marta impact the ground, it demonstrates how she is travelling a lot faster, much closer to the speeds more familiarly associated with gravity in the phenomenal world. This implies that the pull of gravity increases with age. In other words, gravity in this narrative is a variable force which makes people fall at different speeds depending on factors other than mass, surface area or atmosphere.⁸⁴

The skyscraper shares similarities with *Il corridoio del grande albergo*, *L'inaugurazione della strada*, *I sette messaggeri*, and particularly with *La Torre Eiffel* (1958)(Buzzati 1982: 706-710) in that it is a building which has undergone supplementation to such an extent (the building is five hundred floors high) that it ceases to be a feasible real-world object. Interestingly, of course, this may not remain the case in the future, but for the purposes of a twentieth century discussion, it is an improbable object. The supplement in the narrative is simply one of adding on more floors like previous examples: more doors, more distance to San Piero, more distance covered to the edge of the kingdom and more floors on the Eiffel Tower. These supplements are not necessarily irruptive, but are still problematic to incorporate into a paradigm which begins with some degree of World location similar to the phenomenal world.

The question remains whether *Ragazza che precipita* counts as a World II. I would argue that gravity which attracts something other than mass is of a different order entirely because this denotes a supplementary process in two senses: firstly because there is a new mechanic which asserts a pull on age; secondly, this additional mechanic does not appear to affect the 'normal' function of gravity, as no other objects

⁸⁴ Variable gravity is also a mechanic which features in Calvino's fantastic stories (see Chapter 6).

are floating around outside or inside the skyscraper—it is therefore localised gravity. Moreover, the accelerated ageing process does not affect the couple on the twenty-eighth floor: it too is localised to the category of girls who fall. Finally, Marta's unexplained disappearance, and the reaction of '[s]tavolta, neanche quello' demonstrates how some do disappear, other do not: a mechanic supplemented by which some vanish into thin air.

There is a subtle shift in tone at the end: the fairytale opening devoid of any concern of real-world consequences is balanced by the unpleasant but inevitable consequence of some fallers impacting the ground at a velocity closer to the normal speed of falling under gravity. The tone shifts from fairytale to realistic, but the couple's lack of sympathy for those who do fall upsets this neat distinction: rather than exhibiting any reaction like shock, they display the same accepting behaviour of these mechanics as those residents many hundreds of floors above. Thus any suggestion that the world structure transforms from one where a slowed descent can take place into one where people fall to their deaths as they might in the phenomenal world is undermined.

Therefore, combined with an improbably tall tower around which the whole narrative pivots, the narrative world of *Ragazza che precipita* is a World II, one constructed by supplementation, rather than erasure, as is the case with *Una goccia*.⁸⁵ Here in Buzzati, access is restricted to how the mechanics both cultural and physical work, and how they relate: the only stated facts are that people jump, that this is a normal practice, that they fall at different speeds, and can age along the way. These facts are the only signposts, but the mechanics in *Ragazza che precipita* are based on implication, making for a more problematic fantastic story.

⁸⁵ Or even Calvino's *Tutto in un punto* (chapter 6, pp. 223-227).

Pushing the Boundaries: Paradigms and Instability

Previous analyses of Buzzati's fantastic tend to focus on figurative rather than literal meaning. However, two studies contribute thematic and structural frameworks which complement the conclusions which can be drawn from these ten stories. Giannetto, first in *Il coraggio della fantasia*, then later in *Il sudario delle caligni*, argues that Buzzati's fantastic narrative can be divided into four types, which can be summarised as: stories which begin with the fantastic; stories which begin realistically into which the fantastic is gradually introduced; stories which begin realistically into which the fantastic irrupts; and stories which focus on the improbable, the absurd and paradox rather than the fantastic strictly speaking (Giannetto 1989: 19-20; 1996: 42-43). This is a useful typology because to varying degrees the ten stories above fit all these criteria. The fourth category in particular which 'contengono degli elementi portati oltre il limite della probabilità, o perché esagerati nelle proporzioni o perché esasperati da un'iterazione troppo insistente [...] o da un accumulo inverosimile di coincidenze di per sé verosimili' (1989: 20)⁸⁶ reflects what has been referred to in stories like *Un verme in casa*, *Sette piani* and *Il dolore notturno* as stretching the cultural paradigm. The especial focus on coincidence identifies the mechanics in many of the stories above but Giannetto does not specify what the effect that an overload of coincidence can have on a narrative.

Secondly, as per the title of his monograph, Mario Mignone argues that Buzzati's narrative is characterised by abnormality and anxiety ('anormalità e angoscia'), which certainly applies to the ten texts here. However, both terms are vague and non-specific. At the very least, the fantastic deals with the abnormal, either in the form of the strange (Todorov 1975: 46) or a 'departure from consensus reality'

⁸⁶ Giannetto omits 'perché esagerati nelle proporzioni' in her 1996 monograph, but adds 'eventi' to 'coincidenze' (43).

(Hume 1984: 21): Mignone is hardly making a claim unique to Buzzati. That said, if translated into more structural terms, these are useful tools: abnormality denotes that stretching of cultural rules—a distance from norms—which has been mentioned throughout, and character anxiety towards an event or outcome means recognising an instability of the narrative paradigm, both cultural and physical. I mention above that anxiety as a character-response is non-specific, and here it is worth reiterating that Caspar argues elsewhere, like Mignone, for anxiety as a general characteristic of Buzzati (1990: 233), not to mention Zangrandi who argues that Buzzati ‘è maestro nell’insinuare inquietudine nel quotidiano’ (2011: 45). However, if understood in terms of a structural *instability* in the narrative world, where there are problems in forming explanations and understanding the plots, this can be more usefully applied to a circumstance or setting. Mignone’s terms can be reformulated and his arguments furthered: abnormality and anxiety become paradigm-stretching and structural instability.

The first observation to make of these ten Buzzati stories is the extent to which normalization underpins all these narratives. This is unsurprising given that the rest of his work is also normalized (see the above introduction), but in the case of these more problematic texts, it demonstrates continuity with the rest of his work as does the fact that the stories fit within Giannetto’s typology. Irruption is almost non-existent, whence the link to Kafka and a twentieth century fantastic tradition. For example, *Una goccia*’s drop is only a trace irruption, and Lucina’s wings grow like a spreading disease, and are therefore normalized and disguised behind natural processes. However, normalization does not automatically exclude problematic fantastic mechanics, nor, moreover, does it mean that the same normalized processes, objects and mechanisms are found in *all* the narratives, as has been demonstrated.

Buzzati's stories have more complex mechanics than many being investigated in this thesis, and in order to show why this is the case, it is necessary to look at the extent to which erasure affects narrative access and mechanical details. Firstly, Buzzati's characters lack psychological access, such as to the thoughts of Molla and Corte. Secondly, it is not only psychological erasure (as it were) that should be addressed, but also erased narrative details, which both establish the facts of the narratives and explain the mechanics. This does not however apply as much to *La moglie con le ali*, *L'inaugurazione della strada* and *I sette messaggeri* as the facts of the narrative are clear and there are fewer problems in resolving the mechanics. Importantly, these are three examples for which no internal psychological access is strictly necessary to stabilise the narrative. In other words, either psychological access or more narrative details or both can stabilise a narrative: it is simply a case of the more details the better, and conversely therefore, fewer details leads to more problematic and inexplicable narratives, such as the lack of eye-witness accounts in *Una goccia*, or why Carlo and Giovanni let a stranger into their house night after night.

In terms of mechanical erasure, details of how the fantastic operates are missing throughout these stories. However, *Una goccia* is an interesting exception in that the extent to which factual details are erased makes it difficult even to *consider* the mechanics; without an eye-witness account, it cannot be ascertained whether the mechanics apply to one single drop or many—let alone the question of whether the source is natural or not. Therefore the lack of factual access to *Una goccia* implies a lack of mechanical access, because the question of how the fantastic works can only be answered when the issue of the circumstances and context has been resolved. // *dolore notturno*, along with *Un verme in casa* are two stories which can be classed as uncanny, not only because of Molla's malicious intentions and the stranger's persistent

torment of Carlo—which recalls Hoffmann's *Sandman*,⁸⁷ reversing the topos by having the stranger *prevent* Carlo from sleeping—but also because their respective homes are the setting for the disturbances.

The necessity of elements such as psychological access and factual and mechanical details leads to a first conclusion of how the narratives are unstable, not primarily due to irruption but rather due to the way in which the details of factual and mechanical explanation are undermined by erasure. In other words, where Todorov's theory posits two competing explanations, the lack of textual evidence in Buzzati makes it difficult to even *advance* competing explanations.

A second conclusion to draw is that Buzzati's narrative is characterised by a stretching of cultural and physical paradigms, unlike Bonifazi who by contrast argues that Buzzati's narrative is characterised by 'catastrofe':

la tematica rovina o disgrazia o sciagura o frana o morte o crollo, e così via, ed è lo scioglimento della struttura narrativa [che] è al culmine dell'evento fantastico, preparato di solito da lunga tensione, quando la concatenazione o l'accelerazione, l'accrescimento o l'aumento insistente e ripetitivo, producono il *crack* inatteso e inaudito, terribile e definitivo, incredibile e mostruoso (1982: 149-150, 160).

Despite this long-winded extrapolation, Bonifazi is arguing for a paradigm-changing principle in Buzzati for which '[g]li esempi sono innumerevoli' (1982: 159). Importantly, *paradigm-changing* is not the same as irruption, and Bonifazi cites *La macchina che fermava il tempo* (1957)(Buzzati 1982: 333-337) as an example. The machine which slows time down is built by scientists, and the catastrophe occurs when it breaks down, not because the physics are considered impossible. Note also from the introduction that Bonifazi is outlining a further general normalizing principle in Buzzati. What I am arguing, by contrast, is that Buzzati *stretches* paradigms, both cultural and physical, to

⁸⁷ Reproduced in Calvino (2009).

a point where the issue becomes whether the same paradigm or rules still apply or if a new paradigm or rule is in effect, which is why ascertaining the level of factual and mechanical erasure is necessary, particularly by comparing texts in order to work out what is missing because it is through these erasures that such ambiguity arises. *Un verme in casa*, *Sette piani*, *L'inaugurazione della strada*, and *Il dolore notturno* are all examples of where cultural paradigms are stretched to the point where the situations they represent become incredible. One way in which cultural paradigms are stretched is through coincidence whereby the greater the number of coincidences, the more difficult it becomes to accept that they are not instead caused. What makes a fantastic narrative based on coincidence unstable is the difficulty in asserting where coincidence ends and cause begins. Moreover, the type of event or coincidence continually changes (such as Corte's six excuses, or Molla's requests) meaning that the manner in which cultural paradigms are stretched is hidden because there are no fixed measures by which to account for the changes.

In terms of stretching a physical paradigm, time and distance are stretched in *Il corridoio del grande albergo*, distance alone is stretched in *L'inaugurazione della strada* and *I sette messaggeri*, and the height of the skyscraper is elongated in *Ragazza che precipita*. In all these cases, this is achieved by supplementing more of the same units which feature in the narrative—more hours are added, more doors, greater distance, and more floors—these are not new or irruptive types of supplement, they are rather defined by similarity to what they extend. These are the more stable paradigms because firstly, they are not unfamiliar supplements, and secondly, they do not alter the function of that which they extend in the narrative. The manner in which the characters react to these physical changes may differ, but a longer road does not alter its purpose; a longer journey does not alter the fact that it is a journey. Cultural

paradigms are the more unstable because supplements differ and functions change. A series of coincidences in different forms becomes more probably motivated, implying design and thus different fantastic mechanics for stories like *Un verme in casa* and *Sette piani*. In short, stretching cultural paradigms operates by *different* supplements; physical paradigms by *similar* supplements, and in stretching both types, Buzzati's stories explore their dimensions and limits with particular focus on boundaries between different sets of rules. This moreover mirrors a nineteenth century structural component of the fantastic whereby the rules of positivism were extended to include the impossible. The paranormal does not imply the same subtlety with which Buzzati extends his paradigms; indeed the unbounded reach of this extended positivism is an exploratory mechanism, as opposed to Buzzati's stories which focus on questioning where the boundaries lie, and it is interesting to note the lack of irruption in both: the paranormal accommodates spirits as part of the natural world; in the case of Buzzati, the boundaries between possible and impossible or probable and improbable are blurred thus making it unclear where the outside of a paradigm is located.

Instability and stretching paradigms are not mutually exclusive. Not knowing where a particular set of rules ends and another begins can precisely lead to instability, as is the case with *Il dolore notturno*. The reverse is also true; instability can lead to a stretched paradigm such as in *Un verme in casa* or *L'inaugurazione della strada*. Therefore there is no fixed causality; one does not necessarily cause the other, but depends on the particular story.

Of the supplements in these ten stories, few are traces, indeed only the drop in *Una goccia* is a trace supplement, every other supplement is manifest: Lucina's wings, the magical jacket, the two identical yet similar paintings, and so on. In other words there is no question of whether these events took place or not; all are documented

clearly. Instead, the reason why this is important to note is because the instability in Buzzati's narrative does not arise from uncertainty of what is added to the texts, but rather from what is erased, as discussed above. The level of normalization in the narratives further demonstrates this: normalization means that those supplements are accepted and their existence confirmed. However, the more important objective is to ascertain how these supplements work and how they relate to the narrative setting—their level of mechanical integration—and it is these details which are erased and which cause instability. It should also be noted that those supplements which deal with world construction (the road, floors, doors, desert) *are* supplemented (in the sense of addition), not erased, and those stories with behavioural extremes deal with an overload (again, an addition) of certain modes of behaviours. Buzzati deals with paradigm-stretching (implying supplement), not paradigm-*erasing*, representations of the fantastic. Despite heavy erasure, therefore, Buzzati's is a fantastic of supplement.

The issue of Kafka returns with regard to the absurd tones in these stories. Kafka's characters often face 'alarmingly incomprehensible predicaments' (Baldick 1990: 1; reiterated in Cornwall 2006: 2), as do Molla, Giovanni and Carlo, because, as Sartre points out, Kafka's universe is full of incomprehensible signs (1947: 112). In other words, the relations between different narrative elements and their meanings are missing, making them incomprehensible, which in Buzzati suggests a correlation between the way in which instability is created through erasure and a Kafkaesque understanding of the absurd. Interestingly, another story which might also be considered absurd is *Sette piani*, which Camus translated into French as *Un cas intéressant* in 1955 which 'earned Buzzati a mention among the writers of the absurd' (Rawson 1984: 193) in Esslin's study (1961: 187-188). *Sette piani* is not, however, particularly absurd because the incomprehensible signs and behaviours can in fact be

explained as has been demonstrated; it is only the organisation of the hospital which is a little odd. Sartre also mentions how Camus could not be more different to Kafka (1947: 112), which Hinchliffe concisely summarises thus: '[f]or Kafka the universe is full of signs we cannot understand, whereas for Camus the human predicament stems from the absence of any such signs' (1969: 39). Yet Camus selects the Kafkaesque *Sette piani*.

Kafka's missing connections between components furthermore reflects the mechanical erasure which is present in Buzzati, in the same way that in Camus, where it is difficult to establish what is even going on, there is factual erasure. Indeed, many of Buzzati's stories, both fantastic and not, are characterised by these types of erasure—// *Deserto dei Tartari* being one example of factual erasure, a Camus absurdist narrative. The label of 'il kafka italiano' for Buzzati is not therefore entirely accurate, not because of questions of legitimacy and literary influence, but because it overlooks the presence of devices used in a *Camus-esque* absurd as well. As a signpost for a twentieth century fantastic tradition, Kafka's *Metamorphosis* lacks mechanical not factual detail, but Buzzati goes beyond merely mechanical erasure. Instead, he deploys and extends what Kafka does in structural terms by including factual as well as mechanical erasure, making Buzzati an absurdist writer in more broad terms due to the types and extremes of erasure; he is more than merely Kafka's epigone.

Toscani paraphrases Buzzati on his own work saying that 'più il soggetto è fantastico, più il racconto deve essere nudo, semplice e stringato' (Toscani 1987: 147), drawing together Buzzati's claim to write in a factual, journalistic style 'nei termini più semplici e pratici' and that 'quanto più è fantastico il tema, tanto più preciso deve essere il linguaggio' (Panafieu 1973: 168-169). Although this applies to many of Buzzati's stories outlined in the introduction, this does not account for these ten stories

in the same way. Whilst simplicity is a characteristic of the structure of stories like *I sette messaggeri*, it is an inaccurate claim to make of *Una goccia*, *Il dolore notturno* and others. The qualification of 'nude' is to varying degrees an understatement—the above stories are in fact so reduced (read: erased) in content that important details are also removed, thus undermining their simplicity—, they instead require careful study. Concise and precise are not therefore terms which accurately reflect this selection of texts either, although Buzzati's stories do have a certain mechanical precision at times. Such reduction moreover alters Buzzati's own definition of the fantastic as 'ciò che non esiste' (Panafieu 1973: 175) not because of a distinction of what constitutes impossibility but because the fantastic in the above stories concerns what *no longer exists* due to erasure, whether Mortimer's road, Molla's intentions, or the drop of water. Within the scope of Buzzati's fantastic writings, these are ten strongly 'nude' stories which refute the labels of 'semplice' and 'stringato' through extensive erasure, and are neither practical (read: straightforward) nor have precise language: ellipsis abounds. These ten stories would therefore according to Buzzati himself be among his lesser works, but in terms of stories which problematize reality, these are among his most fantastic narratives, and of those selected *Una goccia* is the most epistemologically restrictive, problematic and most fantastic story.

In conclusion, out of Buzzati's predominantly normalized fantastic narrative, these ten stories are among the most problematic, and I have argued that they are characterised firstly by a stretching not changing, of the cultural and physical paradigms represented in the texts, and secondly by instability to the point where it is difficult to even produce stable competing explanations. The way in which Buzzati creates this stretching and instability is mainly through erasure not only of mechanical facts—details of how the fantastic operates—but also of textual facts—details of what

is going on in the text—, and in terms of the above examples, it is the erasure of textual fact which has the most destabilising effect because it leads to restriction in understanding the mechanics. Where Armitt argues that realistic literature has an illusion of boundlessness (2005: 173)(see also Chapter 2, p. 48), Buzzati problematises the illusion of stability and the difficulty in delineating boundaries. What Buzzati adds to the discourse of the fantastic is a discussion of the blurring of boundaries of narrative paradigms through the use of erasure and the application of rules stretched to extremes, which in turn creates a fantastic both subtle and absurd.

6. Italo Calvino: A Watershed Fantastic

Introduction

Italo Calvino (1923-1985) is certainly the most famous twentieth century Italian author of fantastic literature both within and beyond the peninsula, a figure who is also known as a writer of neorealist, postmodern and experimental literature, as well as being a prolific essayist.⁸⁸ This is worthy of note because whilst it is reductive to label Calvino a neorealist writer without due qualification, so too is it problematic to simply call him a writer of the fantastic: his fame in other literary discourses is in fact part of the reason why Calvino stands out. Despite being hailed as one of the figureheads of neorealist literature, this young up and coming writer broke ranks and defected, writing a trilogy of fantastic stories in the 1950s, *Il visconte dimezzato* (1952), *Il barone rampante* (1957), and *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959). As well as sparking outcry from the Left, this trilogy also marks a turning point in the history of the fantastic, where a prominent literary figure brought the fantastic into critical focus, only six years after Contini's landmark anthology *Italie magique* (1946). Guidotti rightly argues that this trilogy, later entitled *I nostri antenati*, is a milestone between the first and second halves of the twentieth

⁸⁸ Given the range of literary discourses from neorealism to postmodernism and cultural moments such as the debates on structuralism, poststructuralism, as well as the Oulipo which Calvino lived through and absorbed, the bibliography on his life and works is understandably vast, and the list of titles here is far from exhaustive. This chapter will explore a sample of Calvino's fantastic output, but there are a number of works worth mentioning either for alternative approaches or for a more general context of Calvino's oeuvre, some of which are cited elsewhere in this chapter. For a discussion of the literary contexts in which Calvino was writing, see Re (1990), Bonsaver (1995) and Bolongaro (2003); Bertone (1994) focuses on the role of the writer and society; for a more philological approach looking at intertextual influences, see Illiano (1972) and McLaughlin (1998). Ricci (1989) offers a series of retrospective essays on Calvino, including one by his main translator, William Weaver. Fairytales are often the focus of allegorical readings and Woodhouse (1968) and Milanini (1990) analyse *I nostri antenati* in these terms (Woodhouse's is also one the first monographs in English on the trilogy). Two critics, Gioanola (1987) and Carter (1987), argue that the fantastic underpins all of Calvino's fantastic work, and finally for an analysis of patterns and symmetries, see Olken (1984, 1988).

century (1999: 88). There is moreover a symmetry with Ugo Tarchetti to note: in the late nineteenth century, during the upheaval surrounding the Unification, political and ethical considerations were a requirement of literature, a requirement which Tarchetti and the Scapigliati did not fulfil. Likewise, a century later Calvino was writing during a period of the social realist requirements of neorealism. In a letter to Elio Vittorini in December 1951, Calvino expressed his concern with publishing his first fantastic story *Il visconte dimezzato* because it might precisely consign his work to 'una zona minore, di «divertimento»' (2000: 332), a fate which befell the Scapigliati. Instead, the publication of *Il visconte dimezzato* led to greater interest rather than marginalisation of the fantastic.

I nostri antenati was not Calvino's only work on the fantastic; he also gathered and edited a collection of Italian fairytales, entitled *Fiabe italiane* (1956), the importance of which can be shown by the label Serra gives Calvino: 'Il Grimm italiano' (2006: 93). During the next decade, he wrote *Le Cosmicomiche* (1965), *Ti con zero* (1967) and *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche* (1968), three collections of stories thematically closer to science fiction. These two strands—the fairytale and science fiction—distinguish Calvino's fantastic both from his twentieth century Italian predecessors and the nineteenth century traditions of Europe and North America. The terror evoked at the intrusion of the impossible into the everyday world, a central feature of these past traditions, is notably absent in Calvino.

This chapter will analyse a selection of Calvino's fantastic stories, which can be divided into four types. *L'ultimo canale* (1984), a tale of a television addict who is considered mad, is first because madness denotes the smallest departure from consensus reality. Furthermore, this particular story is worth consideration because it mirrors Tarchetti's *La lettera U*, thus bridging a century of fantastic literature. Secondly,

departing further from the phenomenal world, the next two stories come from Calvino's 1950s trilogy. *Il barone rampante* does not feature here; compared to the mechanics of *Il visconte dimezzato* and *Il cavaliere inesistente*, Cosimo's adventures are unremarkable, and in the story more focus is given to those whom he meets rather than the circumstances of his existence, which is conversely a central feature of the protagonists of the other two stories. Thirdly, stories from Calvino's *Cosmicomiche* take the departure from reality into space. Many of the cosmicomic stories are unified in a way unique to the other collections of fantastic stories by Italian writers because of the ever-present narrator Qfwfq, a witness to various moments in the universe's history and events, both real and fictitious. As a result, a central theme of these stories is narrative world construction, which will inform much of the analysis below. In particular, some of these new worlds can be classed as World II, a thus far rarely used category. Fourthly, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1969) closes the chapter, but not for its worth as a series of fantastic stories; rather, the combinatorial possibilities of the tarot cards metaphorically represent the analytical approach undertaken in this thesis, and raises new questions of the methodology. While this chapter mirrors the same structure as those on Tarchetti, Papini and Buzzati, much of the analysis is found in the final part rather than in the story-specific sections.

I am going to argue that Calvino's is an entirely normalized fantastic, one characterized by extremes of scale, erasure and an absence of irruption. Thematically, Calvino also takes immortality, invulnerability and even existence to great lengths, but always with the limits of the particular narrative paradigm of reality. In many cases, narrative expectations and assumptions are reversed. I will show that there is continuity between cosmicomic stories but which is also coupled with a level of alternative realities: cosmicomic stories operate both sequentially and in parallel, and I will also

argue that Qfwfq does not change form or metamorphose, but rather that his particle form, present from the Big Bang onwards, makes up different animate and inanimate objects over the course of the history of the universe.

L'ultimo canale

L'ultimo canale (1984) is neither one of Calvino's best-known stories which can be classed as fantastic, nor is it particularly problematic. However, its central theme of madness has featured throughout the thesis as a counterbalance to impossible mechanics, and as a useful signpost for a departure from reality. From a historical point of view, *L'ultimo canale* echoes a similar plot from the beginnings of the fantastic in Italy by Tarchetti, *La lettera U* (1869). Not only, therefore, do these stories have comparable mechanics, but they also link the two historical moments of post-unification and the postmodern.

The story tells of a television addict who tries to use his remote control to change the reality around him as he would the channel. These actions are taken as a sign of aggression both at his wedding and outside a world leaders summit meeting, for which he is incarcerated in an asylum. In his own defence, the addict claims that he merely wishes to find the channel which describes his reality by a process of deduction, eliminating all other possible realities in the process: 'c'è una stazione sconosciuta che sta trasmettendo una storia che mi riguarda, la *mia* storia, l'unica storia che può spiegarmi chi sono, da dove vengo e dove sto andando' (Calvino 1994: 307; original emphasis). Alienated from the worlds represented on screen, the narrator look for meaning in the external reality (the real world) which creates the various television realities, but he fails to realise the limited possibility of such an exercise where the

construction of the real world cannot be altered at the push of a button, and moreover demonstrates a self-centred feeling of grandeur by assuming that changing the external world only affects him. Regardless of the impossibility of success, it is because the police and his doctors consider the narrator a danger to a reality which rather contains many people that the addict is removed from society to an asylum.

The fantasy thread which Carter (1987) and Gioanola (1987: 259) claim permeates much of Calvino's work is here represented through the remote control, replacing the magic wand with a mechanical object of limited power, and the madman substitutes the figure of the wizard. However, the absurdity of the narrator's attempt to change reality is tempered because he does not assume his plan will work: he is not a wizard performing a spell, he is merely attempting to see if he *can* discover his elusive channel after having looked through the channels available on television. His approach is almost scientific in method by attempting to eliminate all other alternative realities in order to positively identify the correct one, yet fails to effect any change: he is the delusional scientist rather than the inept wizard.

Between Calvino's madman and Tarchetti's, there is a structural difference to note. In Tarchetti, the narrator's pathological fear and hatred of the letter u leads him to remove its presence wherever possible: on the blackboard, in speech and even from his lovers' names. His is an attempt to erase an abundant and recurrent element from his narrative world, whereas Calvino's narrator wishes to merely *rearrange* the components of his reality by changing the channel. Both characters fail in their attempts because neither the letter u nor the construction of external reality exists in quantifiable and tangible forms which can be manipulated. The letter u can be written down and spoken ad infinitum, making its erasure all but impossible, and the reality Calvino's narrator wishes to change is both constantly changing and unlimited, it is not

delimited to a program which exists only on television. In both cases, it is the absence of limits of their respective tasks which makes them impossible to complete.

The difference is that in trying to change the channel, Calvino's narrator is attempting to supplement (in the sense of replace) the current reality with a new one, rather than Tarchetti's narrator who attempts to erase it.⁸⁹ However, nothing impossible takes place; the continual search for the right channel unfolds within the boundaries of a paradigm of reality of everyday norms, and such postmodern possibility comprising a multiplicity of different layers and constructions of reality contrasts with the binary worldview of Tarchetti's narrator who only sees two realities, one with the letter u and other without.

Yet both protagonists are viewed as dangerous by the societies which incarcerate them, and the value of what they claim is discredited by the label of insanity.⁹⁰ In the case of Tarchetti's narrator, he attempts to kill his wife Ulrica because she refuses to change her name as it contains a u; in Calvino, the narrator points his remote control at his fiancée Volumnia just to see some of the alternative possibilities of his future married life (this action and her name no doubt a pun on 'changing the volume'). Dissatisfied with television, the narrator looks for the ideal reality and not simply an alternative or the only reality. Ulrica's importance is reduced to a single letter; and an ideal Volumnia is only a click of a button away: in Calvino and Tarchetti, the women are both the cause and victims of the actions of the male protagonists, but instead of being signposts for the abnormal or fantastic element in the narrative, as Richter (1984: 35) contends is the case with the likes of Poe, Villiers, Gautier and Maupassant, these two women embody the measures of rationality set by their

⁸⁹ Interestingly, Calvino also writes about a character who wishes to erase and not simply supplement the world around them in the embedded story *Quale storia laggiù attende la fine?* in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (Calvino 1992: 854-862).

⁹⁰ As are the insane in Papini's *Il Congresso dei Pazzi* in chapter 4 (pp. 120-123).

respective societies to which both male protagonists fall short. Both Tarchetti and Calvino hence stand out by reversing the topos of an abnormal feminine component, a trait which can also be found in Pamela from *Il visconte dimezzato*, the female characters in *Il cavaliere inesistente* (McLaughlin 1998: 45), and in the female characters of *Le Cosmicomiche* where 'l'elemento femminile identifica nello stesso tempo la realtà e l'ordine, appare legata da un vincolo indissolubile ai valori della stabilità' (Bernardini Napoletano 1977: 81).

Il visconte dimezzato

As the first of Calvino's forays into non-realistic literature, *Il visconte dimezzato* (1952) received a great deal of criticism when it was first published because it departed from the currents of social realism and commitment which dominated the literature of the time. Vittorini's assessment of the novel as having 'un senso di realismo a carica fiabesca, sia [...] un senso di fiaba a carica realistica' (Sapegno 1988: 18), both attempted to appease the outcry, but also identified a binary component of realism and the fairytale (or non-realistic components) which was to remain true of some of Calvino's later work, particularly the rest of the trilogy and *Le Cosmicomiche* (1965). Apart from a single fantastic event, Bonsaver confirms that 'la trama rimane sostanzialmente nei limiti di una logica verosimile' (1995: 45), within the limits of a realistic paradigm; the fairytale dimension simply incorporates the fantastic into the norms of the narrative world. Vittorini's definition of *Il visconte dimezzato* is moreover significant for another reason: in looking at the mechanics of the novel, the realistic aspects legitimate the kind of scepticism which reading fairytales does away with, such as the presence of the impossible (i.e. magic) as part of the natural makeup of that

narrative world, as well as its historical and geographical dislocation. In other words, rather than simply accepting the presence of the impossible typically found in fairytales, the realistic aspects allow for the same scrutiny of the mechanics as would be applied to a more located, real-world fantastic narratives. This balance between realistic and impossible elements furthermore mirrors a distinction the Scapigliati and in particular Tarchetti applied in the late nineteenth century.⁹¹

Split in two by a cannon ball, the two halves of the viscount Medardo—one good, the other evil⁹²—return to Terralba where each half interacts with a series of characters such as Dr Trelawney, the Huguenots, as well as the narrator himself (who is Medardo's eight-year-old nephew), with differing results. Both halves fall for a woman called Pamela, and decide to duel during which both are injured and then surgically rejoined, after which a morally and physically whole Medardo marries Pamela; Chubb is however sceptical as to any improvement, '[t]he two halves have not come together to produce a superior whole' (1997: 7).

Although the two sides of Medardo adhere to typical fairytale characteristics, what Thomas calls '[t]he fairy tale's fondness for extreme contrasts' (1989: 53) because characters have 'exaggerated features that, at least to some degree, set them apart from reality [...] [for example being] very wicked or very good' (Kamenetsky 1992: 82), the different responses which each half evokes with the same secondary characters reveals their flaws, contradictions and hence more realistic depth. These secondary characters are realistic, not Medardo, but it requires the two halves of the viscount to demonstrate this. It is important to note that Medardo's impossible separation is the *only* impossible mechanic. When the evil half takes to cutting animals and plants in half, for example, 'metà d'un pipistrello e metà d'una medusa' (Calvino 1991: 406) or

⁹¹ See the chapter 3 on Tarchetti.

⁹² As McLaughlin (1998: 36) notes, the bad half is the right hand side, not the left hand side, hence upsetting a binary pairing of the Latin 'sinister' meaning left.

‘un mezzo scoiattolo’ (408), they all die: no other animal or person survives such a separation. Even Medardo nearly dies after being hit: the doctors state that ‘[s]e non moriva nel frattempo, potevano provare anche a salvarlo’ (375). Therefore it is the access to medical attention which saves Medardo, something unavailable for the mutilated animals. In other words, it is the doctors who save the viscount, not a magical *deus ex machina*.

Magic is notably absent from the story: no incantation, practitioner or wands are responsible for the existence of the two halves. Rather, both the separation and the joining operations are described precisely in naturalistic medical terms, as Carter also notes (1987: 25), and the cannon ball itself is a mechanical not magical object: the figure of the doctor not the wizard is responsible. There is, of course, a supplementary rule which creates the fantastic, a suspension of certain laws which allows Medardo’s otherwise fatal injuries to heal, but it is hidden behind the veneer of medicine and not magic.

As separate entities, the two halves take up the same physical space in the narrative world as before, but in separating, they double Medardo’s consciousness: each half has the same memories, the same desires (both court Pamela) and both remember how to speak, ride a horse and fight with a sword.⁹³ Each half applies a moral code of a simple good/evil opposition, but is not deficient elsewhere in terms of mental processes. Each Medardo half does not lose any cognitive capacities—although the moral code ascribed to each dominates the actions taken—but operates with half a body: there is therefore a supplementary mental process to the extent that a second mind is added to the narrative. Twice the pre-cloven mental capacity operates at two separate points in space simultaneously. Chubb concurs, each half is not

⁹³ Although during the duel, the half with Medardo’s original sword hand should have won against the half without as much practice.

incomplete, 'each has its own, very full existence which is in no way seriously devalued or subordinated by its physical loss' (1997: 4). However, it is unclear whether this mind is erased when the two halves rejoin, because whilst the two sets of morals complete Medardo, what of the new, separate memories each half has created? At the end, the good half does not vanquish the evil half, both sides demonstrate they cannot survive indefinitely and independently in an otherwise realistic world: the evil half fears for his life and the good half is dangerously naïve. The narrative therefore balances its fantastic elements: the two impossible halves are reconnected to reform the previous individual, and as Hume notes, in the larger scheme of Calvino's works, such happy endings are rare (1992: 94).⁹⁴

Il cavaliere inesistente

The third of Calvino's trilogy of the 50s, *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959), begins Calvino's postmodern turn, and indeed the degree to which the novel separates itself from *Il visconte dimezzato* and *Il barone rampante* disrupts the notion of a trilogy (McLaughlin 1998: 46). The question of metatextual levels of narration undermines the unity and balance associated with fairytales, in the same way that Calvino also subverts and reverses typical fairytale topoi such as the quest and saving the damsel in distress, for Agilulfo's is not a quest to find a damsel in distress, but rather a quest to save himself by finding a damsel. However, it is the paradoxical existence of the protagonist Agilulfo, which, like *Il visconte dimezzato*, forms the central component to an investigation into the mechanics; and unlike in *Il visconte dimezzato*, the impossible is met with a certain bewilderment, rather than unquestioning acceptance.

⁹⁴ For another highly balanced narrative, see Tarchetti's *Il lago delle tre lamprede* in chapter 3 (pp. 87-89).

As per the title, Agilulfo is a knight who does not exist. An apparently empty white suit of armour, he adheres to chivalric codes absolutely, and when his honour is challenged, he is forced to find the virgin he rescued fifteen years previously. Believing that he no longer merits his title, Agilulfo leaves his armour piled up in a heap.

Critics often analyse Agilulfo alongside Gurdulù the squire because these two characters form an inverse relationship, 'the *nonexistent* but *conscious* individual, and on the other hand, the *existent* but *unconscious* Gurdulù' (Weiss 1993: 57; original emphasis). Serra attributes an 'eccesso di coscienza' to Agilulfo (2006: 186) who is accompanied by the 'all-existent squire' (Bolongaro 2003: 137) who 'might be said to 'over-exist'' by comparison to Agilulfo (Chubb 1997: 2), but this kind of binary comparison over-reaches—how can a character exist 'too much'? Gurdulù is certainly an abnormal character, but Agilulfo, like Medardo, is the only impossible element in the narrative, and as such will be considered without reference to his squire.

The paradox, as Chubb (1997: 2) also points out, is that Agilulfo claims not to exist yet demonstrates he exists by this assertion, and is able to carry out his duties by willpower alone, '[c]on la forza di volontà' (Calvino 1991: 958). His willpower therefore exists, but Agilulfo does not exist physically. He is not an invisible man, but rather absent, as the wind whistles through his empty armour 'era attraversato a ogni fessura dagli sbuffi del vento' (1991: 963). Without a physical body, Agilulfo is able to move his armour as an existent knight would because the space where it should be has been supplemented (in the sense of replaced) with an unexplained mechanism which moves the armour according to Agilulfo's will.

The difficulty with unpicking the mechanics of Agilulfo's existence rests on the assumption of a human measure—comprising corporeality, characters flaws, desires etc—to which Agilulfo falls short. Ageing is moreover absent. Agilulfo rescues Sofronia

in the same suit of armour, '[p]rima d'imbattersi in Sofronia aggredita [...] egli era un semplice guerriero senza nome in un armatura bianca [...]. O meglio (come presto si era saputo) era una bianca armatura vuota, senza guerriero dentro' (1015); he is a static entity surrounded by human characters who are constantly (if slowly) changing, making it to all intents and purposes impossible to know his age. Agilulfo does not live up to the expectations of a human, yet excels in living up to the abstract measure of chivalric rules. Indeed, without a body, his non-existence is an advantage on the battlefield as there is no body to wound. As a knight—and by the role implied by the title—Agilulfo certainly makes his presence known. He might be less human, but he is more knightly as a result. In other words, the signifier 'cavaliere inesistente' is incorrect because there is ostensibly a knight acting in a perfect manner, he is a 'cavaliere perfetto', carrying out the same duties as an existent knight, without hesitation or fault.

In order to better understand Agilulfo a yardstick of non-existence rather than a yardstick of existence needs to be applied. With this perspective, Agilulfo is not a 'cavaliere inesistente' but 'inesistenza cavalleresca' or 'knightly non-existence' whereby at the end of the story, he simply ceases to be knightly. When Agilulfo believes his title has been invalidated, he no longer considers himself a knight and so he abandons the role he used to perform. Charlemagne precisely asks 'com'è che fate *a prestar servizio*, se non ci siete?' (958; my emphasis); he does not ask how Agilulfo does not exist, he asks how he can *perform his duties*, to which Agilulfo replies '[c]on la forza di volontà [...] e la fede nella nostra santa causa' (958). Therefore once Agilulfo no longer wishes to fight for this cause because he no longer fits within the chivalric system as a knight, he stops performing his duties. When the armour is found in a heap, I would argue that Agilulfo has not died, but has instead becomes more authentically non-existent, because rather than being a knight with a characteristic of non-existence, Agilulfo is a

supernatural entity defined by what the other knights and characters would call non-existence, and merely has a temporary characteristic of existence, in the form of his knightly duties and actions. Indeed it is problematic to label Agilulfo's disappearance as suicide because he was not alive to begin with, as Chubb also notes (1997: 82).

Agilulfo therefore also falls short of a measure of non-existence because he is contaminated with existence: he is not a human who is deficient of markers of existence—he is not an erased character—, but rather a non-existent creature who has an *additional* supplement of existence which is eventually cancelled out. Agilulfo is a non-existent supernatural being who has entered the ninth century world of Charlemagne because of a trace of existence: Agilulfo is therefore an irruption into the narrative world, not a natural part of it, which explains the bewilderment by the characters. Their reaction is however tempered; there are no cries of terror when confronted with the impossible, they are rather confused by the paradox of his existence/non-existence. After all, the narrative is set in a pre-Enlightenment era featuring a quest for the Holy Grail. The supernatural is accepted, even if, besides Agilulfo, it is not overtly present.

In the same way that Calvino reverses the binary opposition associating the good half of Medardo with the right side, so too is the assumption of a perfect knight as a measure reversed; the gleaming white armour is rather a *contamination*. Although Agilulfo is still a perfect knight according to a human measure, he falls short of the norm of non-existence while a knight, and draws closer to that measure when he leaves the existent world. That said, Agilulfo's paradox remains whether he is considered a human to begin with or not; in either case he both exists and does not exist simultaneously, a paradox which also features in *Tutto in un punto*. It is only when he disappears that the change of measure becomes necessary.

La distanza della Luna

The cosmicomic stories of the 1960s constitute the majority of Calvino's work on the fantastic. The vein of science-fiction which permeates these stories proposes a literature of the impossible of a different structural order to the likes of Tarchetti, Papini or Buzzati because Calvino's narratives are explained in more credible terms whilst at the same time being unrealisable in the present real world, a characteristic of science fiction which Suvin has called 'cognitive estrangement' (1979: 4). However, on the one hand, the cosmicomic stories do not fit neatly alongside more canonical science fiction literature—Calvino's stories reconstruct the past rather than suggest future possibilities (Weiss 1993: 96-97)—and on the other, they are more characterised by clarity than by the ambiguity and instability more commonly associated with fantastic literature. Barenghi even includes Qfwfq's adventures in his discussion of the fairytale in Calvino (1988: 30). The cosmicomic stories therefore fit between two poles.

A recurrent characteristic of the *Cosmicomiche* is that before each story, Calvino provides an epigraph containing a scientific claim upon which the main narrative is based, and each epigraph delimits the boundaries of each narrative paradigm. Some of the hypotheses are still valid, others have been disproven by contemporary science, and the interplay between theory and tale raises questions of the validity of received scientific knowledge and the credibility of the story logic.

As the title both of the collections and the individual stories suggest, world mechanics and rules of the cosmicomic universe are a central feature. In the first story, *La distanza della Luna* (1965), the Moon's orbit is so close that people pass between planets by simply jumping. All of a sudden the Moon's orbit begins to lengthen, trapping

la signora Vhd Vhd, who is unable to break free as the Moon takes up the orbit it currently holds.

The mechanics of *La distanza della Luna* comprise an alteration of a law of nature, in that gravity is a variable force and has localised changes in strength;⁹⁵ all the while, the Moon is on an entirely different orbital path. When Qfwfq and his friends are perched on the edge of a ladder and grab hold of protruding Moon rock, the Moon's gravity counters and surpasses that of the Earth, drawing them up. Returning to Earth, the same mechanism is applied: as they jump to escape the pull of the Moon, the Earth pulls them back. In the case of the twelve-year old Xlthlx, she does not jump hard enough, leaving her suspended between planets, caught between two competing forces of gravity. From the perspective of either planet, this is a convincing mechanic of flying. As Xlthlx lacks the mass to be returned to Earth—'le mancava qualche oncia di peso perché la gravità la riportasse sulla Terra' (Calvino 1992: 86)—, she eats sea creatures which are likewise suspended between planets, thus attracting more fish to her in a grotesque⁹⁶ and surreal manner until she falls back to Earth.

Coralli teneri le avvolgevano il capo, e dai capelli ogni colpo di pettine faceva piovere acciughe e gamberetti; gli occhi erano sigillati da gusci di patelle che aderivano alle palpebre con le loro ventose; tentacoli si seppia erano avvolti attorno alle braccia ed al collo; e la vestina pareva ormai intessuta solo d'alghie e di spugne (87).

The effect of gravity therefore localises and increases in strength by a significant order of magnitude; indeed, Qfwfq refers to Xlthlx as 'calamitato' (87), as the extremes to which Calvino extends the forces of attraction here are more magnetic than gravitational. In such proximity to the Earth, the Moon attracts all manner of small objects, like those surrounding Xlthlx, creating an ocean without water in between

⁹⁵ Similar mechanics of variable gravity appear, as we have seen, in Buzzati's *Ragazza che precipita* (chapter 5, pp. 187-189).

⁹⁶ The combination of the comic and the unpleasant embodies the 'disharmony' which Thomson defines as grotesque (1972: 20).

planets. Fish are dislocated from the sea, suspended between, and/or relocated on the Moon, which in turn is a convincing process to explain how Qfwfq and his friends find Moon cheese—‘una specie di ricotta’ (84)—because all the necessary ingredients have been drawn from Earth, ‘diversi corpi e sostanze di provenienza terrestre’ (84). The Moon is not made of cheese nor is the ricotta perfectly produced; rather it needs to be collected and refined like mining ore back on Earth.

Qfwfq is not entirely human—although he appears to be in this story—but exists as a whole range of animate and inanimate objects throughout the *Cosmicomiche*. His eyewitness account of how the Moon used to be much closer is not, however, located historically. Elsewhere Qfwfq is present both at the Big Bang and at the end of the universe, and so the qualification of ‘il vecchio Qfwfq’ (81) combined with modern objects (in human terms) like ‘chiodi [...], cocci di stoviglie, ami da pesca, certe volte anche un pettine’ (84) prevent identification of the date; instead, the story takes place near enough to the present day for these objects to exist, but on the assumption that Qfwfq is human and that he inhabits the same phenomenal world as the reader. Physical dislocation also takes place: the Moon moves and now orbits on a different path, and the new, further orbit is a dislocation of its former, closer path. In other words, the Moon in the sky today is the abnormal position, not the closer orbit. The located and dislocated positions reverse, which the story’s epigraph confirms: ‘Una volta, secondo Sir George H. Darwin, la Luna era molto vicina alla Terra’ (81). Indeed, Darwin’s name could be replaced by Qfwfq’s to the same comical effect. The second part of the epigraph—‘[f]urono le maree che a poco a poco la spinsero lontano: le maree che lei Luna provoca nelle acque terrestri e in cui la Terra perde lentamente energia’ (81)—is even less convincing than the story which follows it: the proximity of the Moon drawing smaller objects to it, the focused effect of the gravities of the two

planets and the movement between them are explained in credible terms according to the logic of the story. Surreal, but explained. Claiming that the very water which the Moon attracts then pushes it away, even within the story logic, is unconvincing because water suddenly takes on a mechanically inconsistent repelling force. In the same way that Calvino reverses the normal position of the Moon, the scientific epigraph, which attempts to lend scientific credibility to the mechanics, is more ludicrous than the story created around it.

La Luna come un fungo

The second story with an epigraph by George Darwin, *La Luna come un fungo* (1968) not only proposes changes to the construction of the narrative world, like in *La distanza della Luna*, but also the creation of a world itself: it is the story of how the Moon was formed. If the protagonist Qfwfq is assumed to be the same as in the previous story, then *La Luna come un fungo* precedes *La distanza della Luna* chronologically but again, the precise date cannot be ascertained because of a lack of markers. Qfwfq recounts how the surface of the Earth used to be completely covered in water. When the Sun pulls a huge mass of granite from the depths into orbit, the water level lowers, forming the continents, and the granite mass becomes the Moon.

Whereas in *La distanza della Luna*, the particularly high tide explains how the Moon does not scrape mountains as its orbit passes close to Earth (whereas this type of collision takes place in another story from the same collection, *Le figlie della Luna*, 1968), in *La Luna come un fungo* there is an inconsistency.

A quel tempo la superficie del globo era tutta ricoperta dalle acque, senza terre che emergessero. Ogni cosa al mondo era appiattita e senza rilievo, il mare era

un'acquetta bassa e dolce, e noi, su dei canotti, andavamo alla pesca delle sogliole (Calvino 1992: 1184),

yet Qfwfq's society is waterborne without any surrounding land, raising the issue of the existence of the materials used for L'Ispettore Oo's observatory, as well as the boats and tools used by the population. To this extent there are two worlds to consider: firstly, the world without any land, significantly different from an Unlocated or Dislocated World I because real-world population exist on land, not the sea (were this narrative world instead completely covered in land, the change would not be as structurally significant); it is also a world without a Moon—and therefore no tides—; secondly, a second new world which is not a mass of rock caught by the Earth's gravity, but is itself a part of that planet. Paradoxically, therefore, what classifies the Moon as a World II is not its difference to the Earth, but precisely its similarity, a reversal of expectation. The real Moon is not composed of Earth rock; here, it is different to real-world norms because it *is* like the Earth, precisely a part of it.

The Moon is not only an irruption into the narrative world where it did not exist beforehand but also an eruption from within it. These changes to the paradigm are however tempered because the result is the recognisable world, even though the process of world creation is fantastic. In other words, irruptive changes take place during the construction of the paradigm, and the result is the norm, not an irruption. Moreover, since the Moon originates from within and not without the Earth, the irruption is also subverted because there is no outside from which to irrupt.

The first demonstration of the Sun's gravity is mostly ignored; rather, when Qfwfq is caught on the Moon as it begins to rise slowly out of the water, the fishermen around him accuse him of theft since the rising Moon also beaches fish from their fishing grounds. The first glimpse of dry land (the rising Moon) not the mention the

speed at which it is rising, passes by unnoticed. Qfwfq at least pays attention, but reports events in factual, dispassionate, almost blasé terms:

un macigno di grandezza smisurata — nella parte superiore dilavato e poroso, e sotto ancora intriso come del muco delle viscere terrestri, striato di fluidi minerali e lava, barbuto di colonie di lombrichi — si librò nel cielo, leggero come una foglia. Nel crepaccio lasciato aperto precipitavano a cascate le acque del globo, lasciando affiorare più in là isole e penisole e altipiani (1191).

The apocalyptic scene⁹⁷ unfolding before Qfwfq of a granite mass a few thousand miles in diameter and depth, dripping water and lava (furthering the image of an ‘erupting’ Moon), rising slowly into the air, and leaving a crater of similar proportions into which the sea rushes, evokes little emotive reaction. Although in this story Qfwfq is partly human, in that his actions are recognisably so, for the Qfwfq of other stories who has seen the beginning of the universe itself, the creation of the Moon, whilst spectacular, is an ordinary occurrence for a being for whom such events are normal. Once again, the narrative unfolds within the norms of a paradigm in the process of forming. It is interesting to note that events in *La distanza della Luna* take place at night, when the Moon is closest to the Earth, whereas the events of *La Luna come un fungo* take place under the light in the Sun, during the day. In both cases, the Moon leaves the Earth’s atmosphere unexpectedly, yet changes to the orbital path cause greater panic than the emergence and formation of the Moon itself.

In *La distanza della Luna*, the Moon’s gravity pulls small objects up when the Moon itself is within a few meters of the surface of the Earth; in *La Luna come un fungo*, this supplementary rule of localised gravity is amplified to huge extremes where the Sun extracts the Moon from the ocean depths from millions of miles away, but which leaves unanswered questions such as the inconsistency where the amplified rule

⁹⁷ In the sense of being both destructive and, as per its etymology, an ‘un-covering’ of the continents below. Accordingly, by making the continents visible, this scene is also etymologically ‘fantastic’ in that the Greek root word phantazein means ‘to make visible’.

does not account for why smaller objects are not first drawn up into orbit, not to mention why the sun does not draw the characters up (this mechanic is more consistent in *La distanza della Luna*). Such questions may appear pedantic, or over-reaching, but each cosmicomic story is structured around a scientific theory, or as Weiss problematically argues ‘an *accepted* scientific principle’ (1993: 97; my emphasis), and the inconsistencies of these two stories question and subvert the claims made by George Darwin in their epigraphs. Instead, as Hume notes, the ‘validity of science as prime narrative for explaining reality suffers from [...] miscalculation’ (1992: 68). The inconsistencies in the stories highlight the problems with the theories upon which they are based.

Sul far del giorno

Taking a step back in time from the development first of a new lunar orbit then of the Moon itself, *Sul far del giorno* (1965) depicts the nebula which formed the solar system. Three aspects make this story worthy of note: an accelerated timeframe, the expanded space in which events unfold, and a protagonist of a different non-human order, although the human terms in which these three components are represented tempers the dimensions of such paradigm-creation.

In the middle of a cloud of nebulous gas, Qfwfq and his family begin to feel their surroundings harden as the planets are formed; unfortunately, the sister G’d(w)ⁿ is trapped in the Earth’s core and does not emerge until billions of years later in Canberra.

Qfwfq’s form thus far has been recognisably human, or at least human enough to witness events which also predate humans on the Earth (in this way, his humanity is

an anachronism or an alternative reality); here it is necessarily abstract because Qfwfq does not have clear physical dimensions and he is small enough to be irritated by passing particles, ‘ma tutto questo vorticare di particelle non aveva altro effetto che un prurito fastidioso’ (Calvino 1992, 97-98). I would argue that Qfwfq is a particle himself,⁹⁸ and like others in his group, is used in different animate and inanimate objects over time, for example ‘il signor Hnw, quello che poi diventò un cavallo’ (97), and his sister who first becomes part of the Earth’s core, then a human being. These cosmic beings—in the real sense that make up the solar system—are not metamorphic; rather, they pass through and form part of different objects over time: they are component particles. G’d(w)ⁿ forms part of the core, then is ingested or otherwise taken up by a woman in 1912 Canberra. The rule of metamorphosis is reversed: metamorphosis denotes the change of one object into another or many; here, one particle forms part of many objects. What is taking place at a molecular level in *Sul far del giorno* is not therefore abnormal.

The human traits—references to aunts, uncles, sleeping, dreaming, emotions, dialogue, and so on—mask both the passage of time and the size of the nebula. Qfwfq hints that ‘preferivamo lasciar scorrere i secoli come fossero minuti’ (97), and so the formation of the planets appear to occur in real time. The mother ‘da alcune ore aveva preso a rigirarsi’ (98); in other words, over the course of millennia, she cannot sleep because she can feel something forming hundreds of miles beneath her, ‘le pareva di sentire là sotto come tanti granuli o ispessimenti o bozzi; che poi magari erano sepolti centinaia di chilometri più in giù e premevano attraverso tutti quegli strati di pulviscolo tenero’ (98-99), a fairytale gloss which recalls Hans Christian Andersen’s story *The Princess and the Pea* (1835)(1985: 20-21). The real distance between family members

⁹⁸ Although as Andrews rightly points out, ‘[w]hat kind of being Qfwfq was, during some of these escapades, is far from clear’ (1984: 268).

and the speed at which they travel prevents Qfwfq from saving G'd(w)ⁿ; over the time it takes for the Earth's crust to harden—'la superficie terrestre ormai si rapprendeva sempre di più in un guscio poroso' (Calvino 1992: 106)—they are too slow and too far away to rescue her. However, G'd(w)ⁿ's cries for help demonstrate how, whilst they cannot travel quickly, the particles can at least locate each other, even in a different form—Qfwfq recognises G'd(w)ⁿ as part of a woman years later—over enormous distances and periods of time.

To the family, the formation of matter itself is a new, world-creating event. Qfwfq's brother Rwzfs finds nickel in a form 'meno gassosa' (99) which is a novelty in itself, '[c]apite? Era la prima volta. Cose con cui giocare non ce n'erano mai state' (99). When G'd(w)ⁿ plays with the new matter and builds something, she furthers their concept of dimension and depth by calling it '[u]n fuori con dentro un dentro' (102). Even light is unfamiliar; indeed they only name it later on, 'quella che poi avremmo chiamato una sorgente di luce' (105). Starting from a gaseous state, as the nebula forms the solar system, the paradigm is continually changing, rendering change as opposed to stability the norm. This change occurs in terrestrial time for the family, but in reality passes in geological time frames. As time is speeded up, the ongoing development of the nebula highlights how the concept of static paradigms is fallacious; even if the changes require eons to take effect, the question in fantastic literature is rather one of ascertaining the *type* of change instead of confirming that change is taking place; the stretching of time frames and space undermines the stability of physical norms of reality, something already seen in Buzzati's narratives. On the other hand, *La forma dello spazio* attempts to describe a static paradigm, and like in *Sul far del giorno*, requires human and terrestrial images to frame such a concept.

The signifiers 'Qfwfq', 'Rwzfs', 'Hnw' and 'G'd(w)ⁿ' could be considered random and unpronounceable precisely to demonstrate the arbitrary relations between signifiers and signifieds, but in *Sul far del giorno*, the family titles—brother, sister, grandmother—rather demonstrate relations between particles. The combination of letters, numbers and punctuation marks mirror how chemical compounds, elements and particles carry information which denote relations between them. The letter w for example occurs in Qfwfq, his brother Rwzfs and sister G'd(w)ⁿ, characters are linked in the cosmicomic universe through their chemical similarities, their names, and through family ties. These are not arbitrary signifiers unrelated to each other: Calvino's cosmicomic universe is not as random as might first appear. In the same way that Qfwfq and other characters take many forms, so too do the names denote that the characters to which they are associated are *made up* of different forms: Qfwfq are the others are neither irreducible nor singular in form.

De Lauretis complements this notion of structural relation between characters by arguing that the names 'visually suggest the qualities of their referents', such as Pber^t Pber^d which suggests 'gossipy narrow-mindedness', Hnw sounds like the horse he becomes and De XuaenauX 'simply has to be a Frenchman' (1975: 417). Aside from using clichéd national stereotypes, De Lauretis attributes real-world human characteristics to names in the cosmicomic universe (in the same way I argue for chemical characteristics), although Chubb sceptically (but correctly) remarks that the case made by De Lauretis 'is not easy to sustain as a general rule' (1997: 24).

Tutto in un punto

Moving further back in time, *Tutto in un punto* (1965) regresses to the origin of the universe, and the time antecedent to the Big Bang (although as noted by Qfwfq in this story, such a concept is paradoxical). Indeed, many of the problematic components of this story are based on the paradoxical mechanics and concepts of existing before existence. As such, this is an example of a World II, one different from the phenomenal world because it has no time and place coordinates—in this way it also interestingly shares some of the characteristics of an Unlocated World I—, and operates simultaneously, in that everything occupies the same (non-existent) space; most significantly, it differs from the real world by not existing. Existence instead begins at the end of the story with the explosion of the Big Bang itself.

Acknowledging that figurative language is necessary to explain a world without form—or more exactly, a world before form—, Qfwfq describes an environment in which his family and nearby beings interact as they would in the real world but with the restriction of occupying the same, infinitely small space. As with other cosmicomic stories, Qfwfq has a love interest, a boyhood crush on Signora Ph(i)Nk₀, who along with everyone else, is hurled across the universe when the Big Bang takes place in a story which Markey calls a ‘delightful postmodern parody’ (1999: 92).

This World II is characterised by erasure: an erasure of time and spatial coordinates, an erasure of space between objects, and as a corollary, an erasure of difference between things (although this is not an absolute rule, there are inconsistencies). Such a World II is notably different from the real world, but within it, *similarity* is a more dominant characteristic than difference. Qfwfq is unable to count how many others there are, but ‘[p]er contarsi, ci si deve staccare almeno un pochino

uno dall'altro, invece occupavamo tutti quello stesso punto' (Calvino 1992: 118) because '[o]gni punto d'ognuno di noi coincideva con ogni punto di ognuno degli altri in un punto unico che era quello in cui stavamo tutti' (118). Moreover, this absence of space is a fixed constant, nothing escapes or enters the singularity, 'dentro un punto non può entrarci neanche un granello di polvere' (119). Likewise, Qfwfq points out the contradiction and prejudice, 'the irrationality of xenophobia' (Pilz 2005: 34) with calling the Z'zu family immigrants, given nothing was there 'first' nor is there an 'outside' from which to enter: 'non esisteva né un prima né un dopo né un altrove da cui immigrare, ma c'era chi sosteneva che il concetto di «immigrato» poteva esser inteso allo stato puro, cioè indipendentemente dallo spazio e dal tempo' (Calvino 1992: 119-120). The absence of space also means that everyone shares the experience of others. Qfwfq does not feel jealous of Ph(i)Nk₀'s amorous adventures with De XuaeauX because he, and everyone else, also goes to bed with her:

in un punto se c'è un letto, occupa tutto il punto, quindi non si tratta di *andare* a letto ma di *esserci*, perché chiunque è nel punto è anche nel letto. Di conseguenza, era inevitabile che lei fosse a letto anche con ognuno di noi (121; original emphasis).

Qfwfq's is not a vicarious but the *same* experience as De XuaeauX's. In this space where such human desire are impossibly present, as Hume puts it, Calvino 'humanizes the inconceivable' (1992: 67).

Despite existing in the same place, characters are different with different signifiers and different characteristics: Pber^t Pber^d is not Qfwfq, who is not Ph(i)Nk₀, and so on. I would also argue that characters are particles in the same way that they are in *Sul far del giorno*: they eventually make up physical objects—Qfwfq recognises Pber^t Pber^d later on in Pavia—, they do not undergo metamorphosis, but instead pass through different objects over a series of life cycles. What is conceptually more

problematic is the chance meeting of two particles Qfwfq and Pber^t Pber^d, billions of years later in a continually expanding universe, and moreover recognising each other in a different form. Likewise in *Sul far del giorno*, Qfwfq meets his sister G'd(w)ⁿ billions of years later; whilst the distances and time periods are different, the chances are to all intents and purposes equally improbable. Yet, within the singularity, another problematic mechanic is how Qfwfq can identify specific friends, with all the matter in the universe also occupying the same point. There is both the improbability of identifying particles over vast spaces as well as identifying them through an impossibly dense crowd.

In describing the singularity before existence, Qfwfq paradoxically demonstrates that he exists, and with no space or time before the Big Bang, it is not possible to tell for how long Qfwfq has been able to speak of this singularity. In this story Qfwfq and Agilulfo share similar mechanics: for both, age is interminable, neither exists—in Qfwfq's case, he does not exist *yet*—, and the point of departure for analysing both is a measure of non-existence. The narrative proposes a World II which exists before time and space, but which also exists (or more precisely 'does not') within the same space as the universe which will come into being with the Big Bang, all of which appears normal to Qfwfq. There is no irruption into this world, as demonstrated by the impossibility of having immigrants, and because every process is stated without a surprised reaction. It is therefore a normalized fantastic *universe* in the fullest sense implied by such dimensions, which transitions progressively from a World II to the World I of the recognisable phenomenal world, except with the additional supplementary consciousness of particles.

Twenty years later, Calvino returned to Qfwfq and the Big Bang with a story entitled *Il niente e il poco* first published in *La Repubblica* then in *La memoria del*

mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche (both 1984). It is a narrative worth mentioning because Qfwfq does not remember existing before the Big Bang. Instead, he recognises that he was there, as all matter was, but he was not aware of his existence then, but only *after* time began.

Intendiamoci: non che mi ricordassi di com'ero al tempo del niente, perché allora non c'era il tempo e non c'ero io; ma adesso mi rendevo conto che, anche se non sapevo d'esserci, un posto dove avrei potuto essere ce l'avevo, cioè l'universo; mentre prima, anche volendo, *non avrei saputo dove mettermi*, e questa faceva già una bella differenza [...] tra il prima e il poi che io ricordavo (Calvino 1992: 1259; my emphasis).

Qfwfq's earlier claim in *Tutto in un punto* recalling existence before the Big Bang, demonstrates a lack of continuity between stories—*Il niente e il poco* does not have this supplementary pre-universe consciousness—, although both Qfwfqs acknowledge the impossibility of being elsewhere, outside the universe, something which *La forma dello spazio* challenges. Moreover, the Qfwfq of *Il niente e il poco* is a more reflective and disillusioned character. In this regard, Hume notes that Calvino himself was expressing his own 'sardonic dissatisfaction with society' in these final stories, compared to the earlier, more 'ludic and cheerful' cosmicomic stories (1989: 97). To the later Qfwfq, the universe after the Big Bang is boring 'in molti casi soluzioni monotone, ripetitive' (Calvino 1992: 1265) and Qfwfq yearns for the void, 'il grande regno del non essere, vi riconoscevo l'unica mia vera patria' (1265): he desires a universe of erasure. The two Qfwfqs—one optimistic who remembers a time before the universe, the other disenchanted who aspires to a state of nothingness of which he has no experience—firstly show how Qfwfq has matured (*L'implosione* (1984) is another example of a more adult, philosophical Qfwfq), and secondly show how this mature Qfwfq is not the same character of the earlier *Cosmicomiche*. Rather, these are two alternative realities for Qfwfq, one where he remembers the Big Bang, the other where he does not. In *La*

distanza della Luna and *La Luna come un fungo*, Qfwfq inhabits a parallel universe which allows for human existence in a world where the Moon is of terrestrial origin and where humans remember when the Moon was close enough to touch. Calvino's cosmicomic universe is not therefore an entirely monolithic, coherent whole, but composed of fragments of realities with similar characters but which do not necessarily follow sequentially. In the same way that Qfwfq exists in a plurality of forms, he also exists in more than one reality.⁹⁹

La forma dello spazio

A rare story without Qfwfq as a named narrator, *La forma dello spazio* (1965) is recounted in real time rather than as a past event, while the protagonist, Ursula H'x and il Tenente Fenimore fall through the void of space. Although Qfwfq is not mentioned, the love interest and the capacity of the all protagonists to exist while falling endlessly through space at least set up similar assumptions of the characters. Two narrative developments should be noted in this story. Firstly, there is a movement towards plurality—Carter rightly notes that *La forma dello spazio* is 'a reflection upon the infinite possibilities of space' (1987: 79)—, and secondly, and a corollary of the former, an expansion beyond the limits of previous stories of the cosmicomic universe.

In a way similar to *Tutto in un punto*, *La forma dello spazio* is characterised by erasure during a time 'quando non c'era sotto nessuna terra né nient'altro di solido, neppure un corpo celeste in lontananza capace d'attirarti' (Calvino 1992: 182), where there is nothing to measure distance, speed or time, '[s]i cadeva così, indefinitamente, per un tempo indefinito' (182). Indeed, precisely for these lack of markers, the narrator

⁹⁹ See Albertazzi's theory of the fantastic in Chapter 2 (p. 49).

doubts whether he is even falling and is not simply motionless, 'non c'erano prove nemmeno che stessi veramente cadendo: magari ero sempre rimasto immobile nello stesso posto, o mi muovevo in senso ascendente' (182). There are no time or spatial coordinates to locate the three characters, no 'where' or 'when' of their fall. In the singularity of the Big Bang, Qfwfq and his family exist in the same space yet can also distinguish themselves; here, the characters are both falling and not falling. In both cases the paradox is due to an absence of space, that is, without the dimensions of space by which to measure depth, speed and volume.

The Unlocated 'vuoto' through which the three characters fall is also a paradox. On the one hand, it is defined by erasure because there is nothing by which to take measurements. It is also a space in between universes, but these are so far distant, the narrator doubts what he has seen.

Un paio di volte riuscii ad avvistare un universo, ma era lontano a si vedeva piccolo piccolo [...] ma non si capiva se erano tanti universi seminati per lo spazio o se era sempre lo stesso universo che continuavamo a incrociare ruotando in una misteriosa traiettoria, o se invece non c'era nessun universo e quello che credevamo di vedere era il miraggio d'un universo che forse era esistito una volta (185-186).

The plurality of universes denotes the largest space of all the cosmicomic stories; and even confirming that they saw one universe would still mean that the three characters were outside of it, taking the mechanics of *Tutto in un punto* one step further: whereas Qfwfq exists in all places at once as the universe is compressed into a singularity, the three characters of *La forma dello spazio* exist beyond these boundaries. Qfwfq exists in a delimited space; the three characters here exist in a space without conceivable limits, given that they appear to pass by entire universes. The narrator even tries to attract Ursula's attention by showing the size of the universe he saw, as if it were a fish he had caught, '[u]n universo! Grosso così! L'ho visto!' (186). On the other hand, the

paradox of the void is undermined because the three characters who are falling through it precisely give it form. Like in *Tutto in un punto*, the rules governing the mechanics are contradictory.

Considered either a void or a universe, the three characters are still 'outside' or beyond whatever it is that they see. Thus, *La forma dello spazio* is both the cosmicomic universe's most World II narrative and its largest, encompassing at least two universes, but the narrator's uncertainty as to his surroundings distinguishes him from Qfwfq for whom the events transpiring around him are never in doubt. Uniquely here, there are limits of perception and certainty.

Il castello dei destini incrociati

One of the most structuralist projects Calvino embarked up on was the two-part *Il castello dei destini incrociati* and *La taverna dei destini incrociati* which were first published together in 1973. Although difficult to label fantastic, and not even problematically so, these collections feature here because the stories figuratively represent much of the intentions and assumptions upon which this thesis on the fantastic is based, such as the combinatorial possibility of different supplementary and erased components. In other words, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* serves to look at the approach of Different Mimetics in an alternative light, by drawing attention to some of the potential shortcomings of the methodology, and to questions of adaptability to new types of fantastic text.

Both sets of stories begin with a similar structure. In the first, lost in dark wood '[i]n mezzo a un fitto bosco' (Calvino 1992: 503),¹⁰⁰ the narrator enters a castle for the

¹⁰⁰ Carter (1987: 100) and Hume (1992: 128) note the Dantean beginning to *Inferno I*.

night, and dines with fellow travellers, but discovers he has lost the power of speech. A tarot card deck is brought out and the guests tell their stories through the particular arrangement of selected cards. Likewise, in the second collection, a tavern hosts a similar evening of storytelling where cards are selected to tell the stories of travellers who have been inexplicably struck dumb.

The combinatorial nature of the cards mirrors Propp's model (1968)¹⁰¹ of character and function, and the cards represent the totality of stories which can be recounted, but only in terms of the signs on the cards, not their combinations or interpretations. One limiting factor is that the cards cannot provide much information other than a basic trope, nor is the information unambiguous. As Bernardini Napoletano notes, '[o]gni storia si può infatti rivolgere verso diverse soluzioni a seconda della lettura di ogni carta' (1977: 120).¹⁰²

Two corollary points arise. Firstly, the selection or non-selection of cards mirrors one of the basic processes by which the fantastic arises in a narrative, by the addition and subtraction of narrative elements. On the level of *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, the reader/narrator can only know the additions (who knows which cards the travellers have decided not to put forward), and the objective for fantastic literature more generally is to ascertain both what has been added *and* taken away. Secondly, what if the cards had not been sufficient to tell the story of the one of the travellers? To what extent could these cards have told the story of Agilulfo or even any of Qfwfq's adventures?

This raises two issues: firstly, the question of what other supplements and erasures exist in fantastic literature more broadly (i.e. different tarot cards), and

¹⁰¹ See also Carter (1987: 103) and Markey (1999: 98). Carter furthermore mentions Stith Thompson's study on folktales.

¹⁰² In a different vein, Carter also highlights the limits of the storytelling potential, '[n]ot all combinations of literary elements, obviously, make good literature' (1987: 99), a sentiment Hume echoes (1992: 116-117).

secondly, on the legitimate assumption that such elements *do* exist, whether they fit within a simple supplement/erasure opposition, along with the other frameworks such as a world location scale. Innovation in fantastic literature challenges theory because firstly, in order to account for new fantastic elements, theory must either adapt or acknowledge its limitations, and secondly, innovation adds to and changes the form of the literary category in which a new story finds itself, and which the theory analyses. In other words, a new fantastic story alters the understanding of what defines the fantastic to varying degrees, an argument Todorov advances in the form of a discussion on genres (1975: 5-7), and so the theory should be adaptable to such changes. Assuming that both the theory is incomplete and that new fantastic narratives will challenge it maintains the important complementary and ongoing relationship between theory and fiction, so that, in this case, the theory and its axioms are not seen as a mandatory and authoritative measure. For this reason, *Different Mimetics* is modal and structural in form so as to account for as many different forms of the fantastic as possible, in an attempt to be adaptable; and inclusive, in that it demonstrates links to other models which might better account for innovation where it might not be able to.

There is one further fantastic process to account for, pan-determinism. The mention of destiny in the title of each of the sub-collections, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* and *La taverna dei destini incrociati*, and as discussed regarding Ugo Tarchetti, denotes a determining feature of a narrative whereby actions are beyond the control of the characters. These characters are meant to meet, and whilst 'destino' in 'destini incrociati' is being used more broadly to mean the lives of the different characters, it also normalizes their encounters, their inexplicable silence, and, I would argue, supports the fact that the tarot cards contain suitable tropes for their stories. Whilst on the one hand, outside of the text, Calvino applied the reverse process

whereby he wrote stories from the combinations of cards he saw, on the other, within the text, a pan-determinist account of the story demonstrates that characters *whose stories could be told with these cards* were destined to meet. The reason why this is important to highlight is because by providing enough cards to tell each embedded story, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* gives the illusion that these stories are complete rather than imperfect constructions. What is omitted is clarification of whether these cards were sufficient for all the travellers' stories. In other words, a legitimating mechanism in narratives such as the presence of pan-determinism in *Il castello dei destini incrociati* as well as in Tarchetti's stories can give the illusion of completeness when we are more interested in analysing how the stories are constructed.

A Normalized Spectacle: Absence and Extremes

The stories examined in this chapter are Calvino's most problematic fantastic stories, but not by much, as there is little that is problematic about Calvino's fantastic. Determining the most fantastic story is likewise difficult, because unlike in Tarchetti, Papini or Buzzati, there is a smaller range of mechanics to choose from; there is more similarity between stories than difference. Moreover, by comparison to many problematic offerings from the fantastic in Italy since its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, Calvino's fall short. This is because of the two central tenets underpinning Calvino's stories: the fairytale and science fiction. In the case of the former, impossible mechanics are accepted as normal, whilst in the latter, they are articulated in clear and credible terms. In neither case, therefore, is hesitation or ambiguity (for example) a central feature. There is little or no conflict between, or problems in arriving at, explanations in the stories. Along with a binary division of story

type, the fantastic in Calvino can be further divided into two categories: fantastic anomalies in an apparently real-world setting, and an exploration of world mechanics, a division which also fits the fairytale/science-fiction opposition—in fact the majority of Calvino's stories which deal with world mechanics are cosmicomical.

In both *Il visconte dimezzato* and *Il cavaliere inesistente*, despite structural fairytale characteristics, there is no mention of magic. Instead, Medardo is alive by virtue of science and the capabilities of his surgeons. Clearly, there is a supplementary fantastic rule which keeps Medardo alive when he is completely severed, but it is never mentioned. Agilulfo's non-existence by willpower alone is not claimed to be magical, although neither is it justified by medicine or science; the characters simply do not question the paradox of his being there. This is unsurprising given the dislocated fairytale world of the ninth century, but at least Medardo's impossible survival is given an explanation. Both characters are incomplete: Medardo is half the man he was, both morally and physically, and Agilulfo lacks a human body, although as mentioned above, applying a human measure to Agilulfo is restrictive. This incompleteness shares similarities with *L'ultimo canale* whose narrator is looking for his ideal reality: his life, not his body, is incomplete. Whilst there is little of the fairytale to note by comparison to Medardo and Agilulfo, the narrator wields his remote control like a magic wand, but it is a piece of technology not a magical tool, and he explores the possibility of changing reality like a scientist.

Along with *L'ultimo canale* the concept of alternative realities is explored in the *Cosmicomiche*, and takes two main forms: variants of given realities, and pluralities. In the case of variants, *La distanza della Luna* and *La Luna come un fungo* present different accounts of the creation of the Moon and its previous orbital path. *La distanza della Luna* portrays merely a Dislocated World I where the Moon changes position; *La*

luna come un fungo is about its creation, a World II different from the real Moon but also a second world. The presence of human witnesses to the two lunar events undermines the possibility of these impossible events predating humans; it is rather an alternative parallel reality. Hume argues that, including *La molle Luna* (1967) and *Le figlie della Luna* (1968) these 'four versions of the moon's development are mutually exclusive' (1992: 69). *La molle Luna* and *La luna come un fungo* are certainly two different creation stories; but *La distanza della Luna* and *La Luna come un fungo* narrate two different stages in the life of the Moon, they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the Moon originating from the Earth in *La Luna come un fungo* credibly suggests (according to the story logic) how the Moon in *La distanza della luna* could have an atmosphere which would allow the characters to breathe. The other pair of alternative realities to consider differs in terms of cosmicomic and real-world logic. In *Tutto in un punto*, Qfwfq remembers the Big Bang; in *Il niente e il poco*, he cannot, although he acknowledges he was there, albeit not conscious of the experience. In terms of plurality, within *Tutto in un punto*, there are just two realities, the singularity before the Big Bang, the duration of which cannot be ascertained, and the universe itself. They contain the same components—in fact they contain *exactly* the same components—but needless to say, they are structured differently. *La forma dello spazio* takes this plurality further by suggesting any number of other universes outside the void, itself a reality, through which the three characters fall.

Calvino's fantastic stories not only contain supplementary (in the sense of additional) realities, but also supplementary lives in the form of invulnerability and immortality. Neither Medardo nor Agilulfo can die by conventional means: Medardo survives an otherwise fatal blow, and with no physical body Agilulfo cannot be wounded. Since Agilfulo's age is also indeterminable, it could well be that the period of

time which delimits his presence as a knight exceeds that of a human lifespan, but this is arguably overreaching. However, it does serve to compare immortality in human terms with immortality in cosmicomical terms. In the former, immortality is counted in the order of centuries or millennia. For example, in Tarchetti's *L'elixir dell'immortalità* (1868), Vincenzo is three hundred and twenty years old whereas Qfwfq is as old as the universe itself. In fact, he exists *before* the universe in the singularity which contains the universe before the Big Bang: he is older than the universe. This longevity of lifespan is of an entirely different order, not only because the timeframe is difficult to conceive of when compared with Vincenzo's immortality, but also because immortality implies the possibility of mortality, and the human assumptions that go with it. The Qfwfq of *La distanza della Luna* and *La Luna come un fungo* is potentially mortal simply because he is a human; but in particle form, there is no possibility of death because each family member, friend, as well as Qfwfq himself, forms part of physical objects which in turn die. In other words, particle characters do not die; their hosts die and the particles move on. When Qfwfq recognises his sister G'd(w)ⁿ in Canberra billions of years after the formation of the solar system the whole female body stands for the particle G'd(w)ⁿ. Likewise in *La distanza della Luna* and *La Luna come un fungo*, I would argue that Qfwfq is not the whole human, but instead a particle within a human body. This does not alter the mechanics of those respective stories mentioned above, nor does it make the statement 'Qfwfq is a human' any less true; instead, the focus of what 'Qfwfq' constitutes narrows. Qfwfq is a human in that he is a component part of a human, but he is not the entire human, the signifier Qfwfq is simply used to refer the human which the particle in question makes up. Consequently, there may be alternative realities to account for, but also structural continuities between stories. Qfwfq is omnipresent as a particle which composes different objects in the cosmicomic

universe; indeed he is precisely an omnipresent narrator.¹⁰³ As a particle that recurs in different forms throughout the cosmicomic universe in space and time—and not only in the stories selected here—, he is a universal constant in a constantly changing universe.

Qfwfq does not question what he is witnessing, nor does he question whether his memories have been clouded or altered, which are notably human characteristics that are bound up with the issue of narrator reliability. Qfwfq is simply an eyewitness and recounts what he saw, a ‘universal chronicler’ (Markey 1999: 92) with an ‘expanded consciousness’ (Chubb 1997: 8). Medardo’s nephew, the narrator and witness in *Il visconte dimezzato*, views the world through child eyes—as Qfwfq does in certain stories—, and along with Suor Teodora, recount events without shock or confusion. That said, Teodora’s reliability in *Il cavaliere inesistente* is undermined somewhat when she reveals herself to be a character in the story she is telling, but in both stories, the narrators’ accounts are clear. Where Calvino challenges the ability to interpret events is in *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, where the narrator is unsure of how to interpret the component parts of each story.

There are therefore two character types in Calvino: firstly, human characters with restrictions that apply to the television addict, Medardo or Agilulfo—Cosimo from *Il barone rampante* could also be included here. These characters exist in one place and as individuals. Secondly, characters in the cosmicomic universe who are unlimited, without such restrictions, and make up both animate and inanimate objects; they are transcendental beings—they break boundaries—with limitless character possibilities anywhere and at any point both during *and* before time. The infinite is their

¹⁰³ However, he is only the second most reduced of Calvino’s characters. Medardo might only be half a man twice over, but Agilulfo does not even exist. This raises an interesting point of comparison: thinking of Agilulfo’s non-existence as another form that a being like Qfwfq might take.

playground—literally—, Qfwfq acts like a child running around the nebula, plays games with the Moon and has childhood crushes. In these ludic terms, cosmicomic characters articulate in twentieth century science fiction terms the transcendental and the infinite components absent from the Italian Romanticism of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Gone is the terror of an irruption of the nineteenth century; Calvino's is a ludic and normalized fantastic.

The reason behind this is not only thematic, but also structural: there are no abnormal or impossible objects which irrupt into Calvino's stories. Everything in the cosmicomic universe is meant to be there as part of the ongoing development and formation of the universe. Within that universe-wide paradigm, the Moon might emerge from the Earth, orbit close to it (even too close, see *Le figlie della Luna*) but the presence of the Moon itself is not abnormal. Even within the singularity, irruption is acknowledged to be impossible, as no immigrant particles can enter. Falling between universes in *La forma dello spazio* does not perturb the characters as the paradigm of reality has simply expanded to encompass multiple universes. As such, the concept of 'outside' from which an irruption originates becomes redundant. In the case of Agilulfo, the only irruption in Calvino, what enters and exits the narrative world is precisely nothing, non-existence. In reality, what enters in the impossible mechanic by which Agilulfo can exist and not exist simultaneously but it is not an *object*. Likewise nothing enters or exits the narrative world of *Il visconte dimezzato*, the narrative balances the disruption of having the two severed halves rejoined; again, the fantastic takes the form of a supplementary process which prevents Medardo from dying both before and during surgery. The cosmicomic universe is replete with supplementary mechanics, such as the emergence of the Moon from the Earth, and of course, the supplementary

¹⁰⁴ Which contrasts with the limited transcendence of Papini's stories.

consciousnesses of particle characters, but consciousness is not quantifiable. Importantly, these supplements are manifest, they are confirmed; there is no ambiguity as to whether they exist or not, and this is another characteristic which distinguishes Calvino's fantastic: an absence of traces.

No irruptive objects means that the fantastic operates within the limits of the narrative paradigm; it reorders components—for example, the anachronism of humankind living on a water-covered surface of the Earth, a reordering of historical possibility—, defamiliarising norms both in the cosmic and fairytale worlds, and challenges assumptions, but always within the same paradigm, and the scientific epigraphs are an example of how Calvino subverts received knowledge and stays within the narrative boundaries set by the theory. In this way, Calvino does not alter the paradigm outlined by the scientific premise; the stories, comical and fantastic, are clearly delimited, as opposed to Buzzati, whose paradigm boundaries are blurred.

Despite clear boundaries and no paradigm-changing irruptions, this is not to say that Calvino's narratives are stable. The variants and pluralities of realities mentioned above undermine definitive versions of events. Within the narratives themselves, there are inconsistencies and unanswered questions. The narrator falling through the void is unsure whether he is falling or if he is motionless; the Sun is able to pull a granite mass of enormous proportions from the ocean floor, but does not carry away all of humankind as well; even Agilulfo demonstrates human characteristics which question the idealism of a perfect indestructible knight which he embodies, for example feeling naked and cold, despite having no body, 'Agilulfo, come se tutt'a un tratto si sentisse nudo, ebbe il gesto d'incrociare le braccia e stringersi le spalle' (Calvino 1991: 958). Cosmicomic particles have set 'behaviours', that is, they obey the laws which govern them, but these clash with the individual desires and human characteristics which also

govern the behaviour of the particles. There is a conflict therefore between actions determined by physics and actions determined by desire, the former predictable, the latter, inconsistent. G'd(w)ⁿ is drawn against her will into the Earth's cooling mantle, and Qfwfq tries to save her because he does not *want* to lose her—Qfwfq determines his own movements whereas G'd(w)ⁿ does not or is not strong enough to resist.

The most significant instability in Calvino's fantastic fiction is the constantly changing nature of the narrative worlds. In *L'ultimo canale*, the narrator watches numerous continually developing realities before his eyes on screen; they are never settled nor stable. In fact, he tries to continually change the reality around him to see what alternatives and indeed ideal alternatives he can find, and likewise in the cosmicomic universe, the narrative worlds are in a state of continual change presented through the accelerated timeframes of human perspectives. The dynamics of the worlds Qfwfq inhabits are continually changing, and the purpose of each story is precisely to chronicle their development and construction. Such change rather than stability questions the degree to which a stable paradigm of physical reality should be an assumption in fantastic narrative, particularly if identifying the fantastic is based on distinguishing abnormality from a stable, normal context. This, I would argue, is an innovation which Calvino contributes to the discourse of the fantastic.

Reiterating a point mentioned before, the human dimension of the cosmicomic stories reduces the scale of the narrative worlds to make them conceivable and also familiar. This also signposts a further structural characteristic of Calvino's: erasure. For example, the television addict is accused of wanting to destroy his city; Medardo is split in two and each half lacks the other; Agilulfo does not exist; and there is almost total erasure of space, time, and difference in the singularity before the Big Bang. Buzzati's

is a fantastic of factual and mechanical erasure related primarily to epistemological access; Calvino's is a fantastic of erasure of narrative objects and worlds.

Calvino's is also a fantastic of paradox, each with a different focus, but the two main issues are existence and difference. Medardo exists as two separate persons yet each half has the same memories as the whole viscount, Agilulfo exists in non-existent terms, Qfwfq distinguishes himself from other characters, for instance by acknowledging that he is not De XuaeauX but the differences are erased by existing simultaneously with De XuaeauX and Ph(i)Nk₀ in bed. The fantastic in Calvino blurs the boundaries between, and reverses, the components parts, thus problematizing their respective definitions.

Legitimation is a central consideration of any fantastic narrative; whether set in the real world or not, there is always the question of how to make the fantastic credible. In this regard, Calvino uses one of the same devices as Tarchetti: deferral. The sources of Tarchetti's fantastic stories are never the narrators themselves, but rather passed down, told through a third party, found in a book, and so on. The cosmicomic stories which are deferred in time and space, begin with Qfwfq recalling a story that has occurred in the past, often with a qualification of Qfwfq's age, 'esclamò il vecchio Qfwfq' (Calvino 1992: 81), mirroring the historical dislocation of the fairytale beginning of 'once upon a time'. Even in *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, with one exception—*Anch'io cerco di dire la mia*—the narrator is recounting the stories of *others*. The worlds which feature in Calvino's stories are not the same as the world of the reader and rarely that of the narrator.

The scientific epigraphs perform a similar function to the introductory discussions of paranormal science in Tarchetti, but whilst the epigraphs by Hubble and Kuiper (and others) are legitimate scientific theories, those by George Darwin on the

Moon's orbit and origin are just as problematic as the justification Tarchetti gives pseudoscience. Given Tarchetti is the first to pen fantastic stories in Italy, the justificatory introductions are necessary; in Calvino's case, the epigraphs are simply points of departure, not proofs for the validity of the content of the stories which follow.

As an essayist as well as an author, Calvino also wrote critically on the fantastic. Along with the anthology *Racconti fantastici dell'Ottocento* (1983) which he edited, two essays entitled *Definizioni di territori: il fantastico* (1970) and *Il fantastico nella letteratura italiana* (1984) provide a framework through which to consider Calvino's own fantastic stories, as well as their place in fantastic literature more generally. Calvino himself did not comment on his own work, and indeed accepted that it might not even be considered fantastic, '[l]ascio ai critici il compito di situare i miei romanzi e racconti all'interno (o all'esterno) d'una classificazione del fantastico' (Calvino 1995a: 267; my emphasis). Given that the fantastic is being scrutinised here in terms of its problematic mechanics, Calvino's fiction is indeed more difficult to situate than the fiction of the other authors in this thesis.

In his anthology, Calvino distinguishes two traits of a European and North American nineteenth century tradition. Firstly, a 'fantastico visionario', defined by 'la realtà di ciò che si vede: credere o non credere ad apparizioni fantasmagoriche sorgere dietro l'apparenza quotidiana un altro mondo incantato o infernale' (Calvino 1995b: 1659). This is a fantastic of irruptions of the impossible into an everyday environment, and importantly, is characterised by ambiguity and doubt. The second type is a 'fantastico quotidiano', an interiorized fantastic, '«si sente» più di quanto non «si veda», entra a far parte d'una dimensione interiore, come stato d'animo' which can also be termed a 'fantastico «mentale», o «astratto», o «psicologico»' (1995b: 1660).

Here, the fantastic is not irruptive, but encompasses disturbing events.¹⁰⁵ Both types denote disturbances: in the case of the ‘fantastico visionario’, disturbances *to* the structure of the paradigm of reality; in the case of the ‘fantastico quotidiano’, disturbances *within* the paradigm of reality. Calvino’s fantastic fiction does not fit perfectly within these two categories, and this is both unsurprisingly and in part necessary because it demonstrates a departure from a nineteenth century fantastic measure, a step towards legitimating a twentieth century Italian fantastic tradition, rather than copying a European model. However, there is continuity to be acknowledged. Whilst there is no ambiguity of the status of the fantastic, Calvino’s fantastic is certainly visual, in the images of a split Medardo, the space where Agilulfo should be, the eyewitness accounts of Qfwfq, the visual interpretation of tarot cards, and the ‘televisual’ outlook on the world. Indeed in his essay *Visibilità* (1985), Calvino admits this to be his intention: ‘[q]uando ho cominciato a scrivere storie fantastiche [...] l’unica cosa di cui ero sicuro era che all’origine d’ogni mio racconto c’era un’immagine visuale’ (1995a: 704), all of which operates within the limits of each paradigm of reality. Calvino’s is thus both a normalized visual and ‘everyday fantastic’, and in his essay on the fantastic in Italy, he identifies a normalized Italian source of the fantastic: Leopardi.

The *Dialogo di Federico Ruysch* (1824), in which Ruysch talks to spirits about the nature of death, has no shock of an irruption; Ruysch begins the dialogue by complaining about the noise rather than the fact that it is being made by ghosts. In his 1970 essay on the fantastic, Calvino distinguishes the French use of fantastic—‘è usato soprattutto per le storie di spavento’ (1995a: 266), that is, a fantastic of the irruption of the impossible into the everyday—from its meaning in Italy, ‘in Italia, il termine «fantastico» ha un significato molto più esteso, che include il meraviglioso, il

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 4 on Papini for a different interpretation of ‘internal fantastic’.

favoloso, il mitologico' (1995b: 1677). Leopardi's story better fits within this latter definition, rather than a European nineteenth century model, as does Calvino's own fiction. Calvino's marvellous cosmic and fairytale fantastic is thus by his own reckoning Italian by definition.

Whilst hesitation is an ineffective model for Calvino, some of Todorov's categories of the marvellous *are* applicable: the 'scientific marvellous' (1975: 56) which becomes science fiction is the most obvious, but also the 'hyperbolic marvellous' (54). The cosmicomic universe is precisely one of extreme dimensions and extreme mechanics: from the infinitely small to a paradigm of reality encompassing multiple universes governed by amplified and accelerated laws of nature. If the meaning of the hyperbolic marvellous as 'phenomena [which] are supernatural only by virtue of their dimensions, which are superior to those that are familiar to us' (Todorov 1975: 54) is adjusted to include *inferior* dimensions as well, then Medardo and Agilulfo can be included as hyperbolic characters, both physically and in the extreme binary and absolutist ways in which they behave. Kamenetsky's qualification of the 'super-dimensional or diminutive terms' (1992: 82) in which folktales characters are described not only applies to these two characters, but also applies to the cosmicomic universe.

Finally, a qualification of Calvino's postmodernism. Markey (1999) discusses postmodernism and Calvino at length and to a greater depth than will be discussed here (see also Musarra-Schröder 1996, Bonsaver 1995: 56-63, and Pilz 2005: 1-23), and characteristics such as parody and fragmentation can be seen in both Calvino's fairytale and science fiction work. Importantly, Calvino himself does not translate this imported term, but rather refers to 'il postmodern' (1995a: 726), giving an indication of the complexity of applying this term to Italian letters. However, the reason why postmodernism is used in this thesis is because it signposts a particular historical

period: from a post-Unification Tarchetti, the fantastic in Italy advances over the course of its first century of existence, to a post-war postmodern period with Calvino.

In conclusion, Calvino's is not a complex fantastic; the clarity and certainty with which fantastic events are recounted is shown through the lack of traces: everything is manifest, and the narrators outline a visual fantastic, in some cases articulated through multiple and alternative realities. Calvino's is also a highly normalized and delimited fiction which combines fairytale and science fiction characteristics: the fantastic operates within a set paradigm, and whilst there might be disruption, subversion, instability, and erasure on a huge scale, the structure of the narrative paradigms of each story does not change beyond its accepted norms. Within these norms, however, Calvino pushes the fantastic to extremes, mechanically and structurally. According to his own theoretical considerations, Calvino's fantastic is thus also 'quotidiano' although by no means in a form identical to the nineteenth century, but rather in terms of operating within a paradigm of reality which is itself continually evolving. This I would argue in part explains the lack of problematic mechanics. Together with the contextual social-historical considerations of Calvino's literary output during the 1950s and 60s in Italy and beyond, and taking into account the systematic decrease in irruption from Tarchetti through Papini and Buzzati, it is this complete absence of supplementary objects and irruptions which differentiates Calvino from the nineteenth century, a tradition defined by irruptive objects, and which best defines and distinguishes Calvino's fantastic.

Conclusions

As the previous chapters have detailed, the fantastic in Italy undergoes significant changes over the course of its first century of existence, in both modal and genre form. Each new step, represented by Tarchetti, Papini, Buzzati and Calvino, is not an evolution out of the former—Papini, for example, does not evolve from Tarchetti—, but the stories told by each author develop the space of the fantastic in different ways. In this final section, I give a summary of the contributions of each author, as well as an overview of the recurrent thematic and structural components such as irruption, normalization, irony and problematic mechanics; I consider modal continuity and genre development, and I propose further directions for this thesis.

Tarchetti's more cautious stories as the first writer of the fantastic in Italy are marked by an overt coexistence with the real, both in content and in form, and for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was a more typical trait of *scapigliato* writing; secondly, he was himself undecided as to the claims of the paranormal; and thirdly, and as a corollary of the second reason, the historical moment of Tarchetti's writing was one distinguished by the early stages of pseudoscientific practices such as magnetism and spiritualism which were to become culturally central and accepted. Indeed, by comparison to Papini, Buzzati and Calvino, Tarchetti's stories are the most explicitly realistic which combine with fantastic elements, and his mechanics reflect this, where both possible and impossible elements coexist in the same space, as realistic and fantastic elements coexist in the representation of the mechanics.

When Papini begins to produce fantastic stories, the form and content change with the times. Writing as he does at the beginning of the twentieth century, he reacts to the old nineteenth century model, which he identifies in Poe, internalises the

fantastic, reverses mechanics—particularly in the case of nineteenth century themes and texts—and gives focus to the ideas and philosophy behind his stories, rather than the form in which they are represented. In this way, Papini explicitly distances himself from the coexistence with realisms which characterised his Italian nineteenth century predecessor. It is moreover significant to note that the turn of the century marks the beginning of a focus on the mind in Freudian terms, and whether by design or chance, Papini aligns himself with this more introspective mode of looking at the world. In his own words, Papini is the creator of a new literary fantastic of absurd and *unlifelike* tales (1958: 857), which is certainly true in terms of verisimilitude. However, Papini also borrows from Poe in the way he signposts climactic or important details in his fantastic narratives. Therefore, whilst his innovative stories advance the fantastic in the twentieth century, Papini does not effect as complete a departure from the nineteenth century as he would like to claim.

In the later decades of the first half of the twentieth century, Buzzati is an important writer of the fantastic firstly in terms of quantity of output, because his systematic commitment to the discourse gives the fantastic more legitimacy, countering a tendency of its history in Italy of being an ephemeral form mostly used as a testing ground for writers of other literary pursuits. His stories as a whole are distinctly normalized, and in the selected texts of this thesis, the degree to which Buzzati's stories are erased and necessary connecting details withheld, whether in Camus or Kafka terms, demonstrates a fantastic in structurally absurdist terms, characterised by stretched paradigms and narrative instability.

Finally, Calvino's contribution to the fantastic comes at the time when there is a resurgence of realistic modes of representation in Italy, and his earlier fantastic works reflect a coexistence of real and unreal components. However, this is no longer the

cautious fantastic of Tarchetti's, but a more overt departure from expected literary directions, and its impact is significant by having a prominent writer give the fantastic a voice in the second half of the twentieth century. Calvino's departure from social and World I norms takes on new dimensions where the creation of the universe is both accompanied, determined and delimited by scientific and pseudoscientific qualification, which leads to paradigms of enormous size within which, through paradox, reversal, and erasure, entire worlds are created.

Over the course of this first century of the fantastic in Italy, whilst there are no necessary connections between authors, there are patterns and similarities to note both thematic and structural. Firstly, underpinning the author chapters has been a focus on world location, the pattern of which reflects the historical order of the authors. Tarchetti's are the most located stories of all, and systematically so: all his stories bear some geographical or chronological coordinates of the real world, reflecting the way in which Tarchetti merges the fantastic with the real. Subsequently, Papini's stories move the space of the fantastic from an external environment to an internal mental world, one where the legitimacy of the fantastic is questioned because confirmation is often absent, but Papini proposes a fantastic which does not require such confirmation. His stories are unlocated because the mental spaces in which the fantastic predominantly operates are not given external coordinates of names or places. In this way, Papini begins to sever the links which characterise the more located stories of Tarchetti. Buzzati continues this departure from reality, by dislocation, and the way he stretches physical paradigm adds a further understanding to the way the stories distance themselves from the phenomenal world. Indeed, the dislocation is reflected in the lack of connections and signs characteristic of Buzzati. Finally, Calvino's stories begin with

dislocation, but progress towards a World II structure due to the presence of non-human characters, and a fantastic space before and outside the universe, in a clear departure from the norms and coordinates of World I narratives. There is therefore a progression to be noted, from Tarchetti (Located World I), to Papini (Unlocated World I), to Buzzati (Dislocated World I) and to Calvino (World II), which demonstrates distinguishing modal characteristics for each author, but also a continuous departure from the more located and traditional fantastic texts, ending with Calvino at the furthest point historically and spatially from nineteenth century norms, positively correlating the differences between Unlocated Worlds and World IIs with the historical moment in which they are present in these four authors.

The irruption of the impossible is principally absent, but is most present, although tempered, in Tarchetti, and its occurrence steadily decreases until Calvino when it entirely disappears. In Calvino's expanding World II universe, in which the mechanics and their processes evoke no reaction from the nonhuman protagonist Qfwfq, there is no outside from which an irruption can enter. This is another reason why Calvino is a significant figure in Italian fantastic literature: the yardstick of the irruption of the impossible by which the fantastic of the nineteenth century was measured is redundant by the time of Calvino. In a less systematic but nonetheless noticeable way, the use of erasure correspondingly increases over time: rarely found in Tarchetti, it is used to set up Unlocated worlds in Papini, create instability in Buzzati and paradox in Calvino.

A corollary point of note is the degree to which normalization is characteristic of the work of these authors. Normalization concerns the manner in which an impossible element is accepted either immediately without question or integrated gradually into the norms of a narrative. In the late nineteenth century, this meant extending the reach of

positivism to account for the impossible, and Tarchetti combines this legitimating mechanism with the fairytale components in his other stories. Buzzati likewise deploys a similar mechanic by stretching paradigms, but importantly, this is not a process under the control of his characters; they are instead victim to stretched cultural paradigms, and unable to control the extended physical paradigms, all because of the lack of connections and signs which Buzzati erases from his narratives. In Buzzati, the boundaries are blurred; in Papini, the fantastic operates internally and is often normalized by the reassuring label of insanity. Finally, Calvino's either operates in fairytale-esque worlds where anything is possible or in paradigms of universal magnitude where normal cosmic processes take place, represented through accelerated and human perspectives such that they appear incredible. In this way normalization for all four authors generally arises from the dissolution of boundaries between the possible and the impossible, and by the extension of the limits of a narrative paradigm, thereby incorporating or internalising that which would otherwise remain incompatible and impossible.

A further and more general distance from the nineteenth century comes in the form of the ludic and ironic tones which pervade the works of all four authors. Once again, historically closest to traditional fantastic stories, Tarchetti still maintains a certain gravitas, but not without a ludic current running through his narrative. Papini's fantastic is one characterised by games and puzzles, despite the italicization of more serious climactic moments taken from Poe. In the case of Buzzati, although his most problematic texts are not ludic, in his own understanding, the fantastic is a game (Panafieu 1973: 174); and not just by his titles, Calvino puts the comic into his cosmic narrative. The pattern of irruption mirrors that of ludic qualities, as might be expected, because the comic qualities undermine the terror and shock of an irruption. The comic

thus plays an increasingly important part until it becomes systematically present in Calvino in the same way that irruption is systematically absent, which is further testament to the innovation of these Italian writers from their literary predecessors. Poe, a writer of climactic irruption, plays a particularly important role for all four writers, yet his influence is harder to determine as time passes and the presence of irruption likewise diminishes. The focus on play or games, and the prevalence of irony to varying degrees in all four authors corroborates Calvino's own assessment of a twentieth century intellectual fantastic, although I would not maintain that Tarchetti is prototypical of this, but simply that he demonstrates these characteristics to a lesser degree.

Throughout this thesis, the focus has been on reducing fantastic narrative to its underlying structure in order to compare changes over time. Consequently, there are a few important examples of modal continuity coupled with genre development to note because they demonstrate the relationship between mode and genre and the way in which the opposing theoretical and historical impulses interact. The modal aspect of being and non-being or being present and not present underpins Tarchetti's ghosts in *Un osso di morto*, Papini's séance spirit, and Calvino's Agilulfo. The structure remains the same, but changes form: Federico M communicates through the narrator onto the written page, he does not appear manifest; Papini's spirit is incorporeal and invisible; and Agilulfo both exists and does not exist. What is interesting to note is the progression towards a more secular genre form. In Tarchetti, spirits are the ghosts of humans, in Papini, the spirits are not human, and in Calvino, Agilulfo is neither a ghost nor human, but instead a being defined by non-existence. The reassurance of a human presence in the netherworld and as a component of a being/non-being opposition decreases from Tarchetti to Calvino.

A second modal characteristic is simultaneous coexistence, which principally defines Tarchetti's mechanics, but also exists in Papini's *Le Anime barattate* where Uno and Altro experience both their own and the other's mind at the same time. It is an intended and controlled occurrence, which likewise applies to many cases of coexistent minds in Tarchetti; by contrast in Calvino's *Tutto in un punto*, this coexistence is taken to universal extremes, literally, where the entire universe naturally coexists with itself in the singularity before the Big Bang. From its highest concentration of occurrences in Tarchetti, coexistence is totalising in Calvino. In Tarchetti and Papini, there is a doubling of consciousness; in Calvino, the coexistence is universal. Mechanically, therefore, the same modal structures recur, but take different genre forms, which at times reflect wider cultural attitudes: the spirit who is exploring the human world instead of the reverse is indicative of Papini's tendency to react to and challenge modes of thinking; Agilulfo is a more secular representation of the ghosts of the late nineteenth century; Tarchetti's coexistence is characteristic of the historical moment of the paranormal, and Calvino's coexistence is characteristic of a modern culture more able to ask questions of the universe.

Coexistence moreover indicates a shared trait between all four authors, that of transcendence: moving beyond limits. The extended positivism of the late nineteenth century is a humanly engineered mode of transcending between worlds and minds; and Papini's fantastic is broadly speaking a muted form of this. Buzzati's stories go beyond cultural and physical norms, and Qfwfq transcends human limitations of mortality, identity and existence. To varying degrees therefore, the fantastic in Italy appropriates and articulates in both restrained and modern ways one of the characteristics which was left at the margins by its antecedents during the Romantic period.

Little can be said to be problematic about Calvino and Tarchetti; their mechanics are outlined and discussed in both scientific and pseudoscientific terms, and little factual detail is erased. Tarchetti's are arguably the most detailed mechanics of all four authors, and for reasons of representing the fantastic in the necessary credible and legitimate terms required by his historical moment. Papini problematizes narrative assumption by reversing the expected mechanics—a trait to a lesser extent present in Calvino—, and some of his stories bear problematic factual and mechanical erasure, but not on the scale of erasure evident in Buzzati. In terms of supplement, one recurrent feature for all four authors is that the only problematic additional supplements are those which are difficult either to confirm as manifest or which are to varying degrees incompatible with the narrative world such as the ghost of Mariani or Agilulfo, but the most problematic text of all which comprises problematic supplementary objects, factual and mechanical erasure which leads to high epistemologically restriction is Buzzati's *Una goccia*. Zangrandi argues that *Una goccia* is 'un racconto da molti considerato l'emblema del fantastico novecentesco non solo italiano' (2011: 198) due to its 'struttura aperta e sfaccettata' (199); in a similar manner, by the measures applied by this thesis and in comparison to the rest of the stories in the selected corpuses, *Una goccia* is a particularly good example of a problematic fantastic story, but I would not go so far as calling it emblematic because that would propose a paradigm example; moreover it is by no means the only problematic text in this thesis.

The fantastic in Italy has thus evolved mechanically from coincidence, to reversal, to instability, and to extremes of paradigm over a period during which the fantastic has systematically distanced itself from the necessity of coexistence with the real. Starting in Milan in the 1860s and ending with spaces between universes, the fantastic explores different worlds of the real, the mind, an uncontrollable and

incomprehensible world, and the universe itself, in a predominantly but ever-increasingly normalized way during the first century of its existence in Italy, from the late nineteenth to the second half of the twentieth century.

The methodology developed in this thesis, Different Mimetics, is an approach which analyses *how* assessments of the fantastic can be made. What Different Mimetics has contributed to the understanding of the fantastic is a way of exploring how the combinations of base components create convincing narratives of differing complexity, which demonstrate the plurality—rather than the singularity—of the characteristics of the fantastic. As a model of scale, it allows for a comparative approach by plotting texts alongside each other; and by focusing on the internal logic of the fantastic, it explicitly rejects the assumption of a relation to the external, real world, and the requirement of representing it. Through Different Mimetics, it has been possible to examine and define the ways in which the four selected authors bring new dimensions to the fantastic in Italy.

This thesis has investigated Tarchetti's role as a pioneer of the tradition at a time when the paranormal was accepted in society, it has looked at how Papini plays with the mind and brings innovation to a new century, how Buzzati's absurdist and spartan stories add inexplicability to narrative reality, and how Calvino pushes back against the demands of literature in developing his own hybrid of science-fiction and fable. These are among the key figures in Italy's tradition, but there is scope to widen the reach with more authors and texts both within and without the peninsula. To argue for an authentic Italian fantastic, comparing the mechanics of those foreign authors such as Poe and Hoffmann who have been greatly influential would demonstrate the degree to which innovation has taken place. A further use of Different Mimetics,

therefore, as a tool of narrative dissection, is as a means of determining the legitimacy of an authentic Italian tradition, rather than claiming it to be a tradition based on mechanical imitation.

Delayed by a century, and with no supernatural Romantic tradition, the Italian fantastic has had a minimal presence in the literature of the nineteenth century domestically—let alone abroad—but in the twentieth century it gradually begins to create an identity for itself both within and outside of its borders, such as with the French interest in Buzzati and the international interest in Calvino. The next step to take would be a study of the fantastic in other traditions of Western literature up to the early twenty-first century and reaching as far back as its roots in the late eighteenth century. Such a project would provide extraordinary comparative insight into the mechanical evolution of the fantastic in those traditions to which Italy is indebted, and would advance the discussion still further by placing Italy in the wider context out of which its own fantastic tradition emerges.

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