The Remaking of Rome: Cosmopolitanism and Literary Modernity in Gabriele D'Annunzio's *The Child of Pleasure*

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ABSTRACT

From the early nineteenth century onwards, the city of Rome provided both an actual and novelistic setting for European debates about literary and artistic cosmopolitanism. After the Italian unification, Italian writers inherited this tradition while at the same time attempting to reclaim Rome as a setting for a modern Italian (i.e. national) literature. Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel *Il Piacere* (1889) was the only one among these attempts to achieve a truly international reputation. D'Annunzio adopted the cosmopolitan perspective on Rome used by foreign writers, imitating their techniques, in order to present modern Italian literature as part of an international economy of borrowing and exchange, a peer to the literatures of more established European nations such as France and Britain. In this process he twisted the geography and social fabric of the city to suit his artistic aims, rewriting Rome as the space for an internationally-oriented Italian modernity.

KEYWORDS

Cosmopolitanism, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Italian literature, Vernon Lee, modernization, Nationalism, *Il Piacere* (*The Child of Pleasure*), Rome, Symbolism, urban space

In 1906 the English writer Vernon Lee published a diary-like book entitled *The Spirit of Rome*, in which she recorded her changing impressions of the city over a period of nearly twenty years. Like many other foreigners resident in Italy, Lee observed the modernization of Italian cities that followed the country's unification in 1861 with a mixture of apprehension and hostility, believing that rational urban planning, industrialization, and the arrival of international capitalism would cause irreparable loss to its the artistic heritage. She was therefore perplexed by the modern buildings and the advertisement billboards that sprang up in Rome around this period. Yet, in an entry dating from 1900, she also saw the superficially incongruous modernity of *fin-de-siècle* Rome as somehow part of the natural evolution of its millennial history:

> such things, which desecrate Venice and spoil Florence, are all right in Rome; Rome, somehow, knows how to subdue them all to her eternal harmony. That all the vulgarities of all the furthest lands should all pass through Rome, like all the barbarians, the nations and centuries, seems proper and fit. […] As a matter of fact Rome has never been so much Rome, never expressed its full meaning so completely, as nowadays. This change and desecration, this inroad of modernness, merely completes its identity. Goethe has an epigram of a Chinese he met here; but a Chinese of the eighteenth century completed Rome less than an American of the nineteenth. Not only all roads in space, but all roads across Time, converge hither.[1]

Looking back to its pasts as imperial capital and spiritual centre of the Christian world, Lee sees modern Rome, much reduced as it is in size as well as geo-political importance, as

[1] Vernon Lee, *The Spirit of Rome: Leaves from a Diary* (London and New York: John Lane, 1906), pp. 99-100, 103.

characterized by a cosmopolitan identity that is constantly being 'completed' by the foreign elements that it accommodates. Groups of foreign visitors on Thomas Cook holidays, electric light, and colossal billboards that advertise its tourist sights in English are the new 'barbarians' that the city will in time be able to assimilate into its culture. Playing on the old proverb that 'all roads lead to Rome', Lee therefore argues that the modernization of Rome does not deprive it of its heritage just as its Americanization (a prophetic insight in 1900) does not rob it of its local character; rather, these processes reveal that modernity is the very 'meaning' of the city.

Implicit in Lee's reflections on Rome in 1900 is the problem of how to write about this city that had inspired so many nineteenth-century writers and therefore made it extraordinarily difficult to be original or truly subjective in depicting its identity and appeal. Already in 1819, Percy Bysshe Shelley was aware of the danger of succumbing to cliché in a city that seemed overwritten and overdetermined by the impressions of others. In a letter to fellow-poet Thomas Love Peacock he confessed of being 'afraid of stumbling upon [the tourists'] language when I enumerate what is so well known.'[2] Lee felt a similar anxiety that Rome might be impossible to write from an original point of view. As she candidly writes in her introduction ('Explanatory and Apologetic'), she found it impossible to use her notes on Rome towards a finished piece of writing that would capture the spirit of the place or focus the city 'into any definite perspective'.[3] She tried to solve this impasse by relying on the provisionality and fragmentation of the diary form.

In the quotation from *The Spirit of Rome*, Lee alludes to Goethe's poem 'Der Chinese in Rom' (1796), in which he ventriloquizes the reactions of a Chinese visitor in front of the

[2] 23 March 1819; *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), II, 85.

[3] Ibid., p. 10. Many of Lee's travel writings were concerned with the notion of the genius loci.

ancient ruins in order to speculate on what Rome might look like from a radically foreign perspective.[4] Almost one hundred years later, Lee conjures an American as providing a similarly alien gaze. These imaginary figures from different continents – an exaggerated version of Shelley's generic tourists – enable the European writers to claim Rome as part of a shared heritage and, by contrast, erase or at least lessen their own sense of foreignness to the Italian city. The paradox of Rome as a cosmopolitan city or, as Shelley would have it, 'yet the Capital of the World',[5] is that everybody can in one sense be at home there while, at the same time, Rome is no one's real home, not even the Italians' who live there. Madame de Staël captured this impression in *Corinne* (1807), noting that 'Dans le vaste caravansérail de Rome, tout est étranger, même les Romains qui semblent habiter là, non comme des possesseurs, *mais comme des pèlerins qui se reposent auprès des ruines*.'[6] This de-nationalized Rome became, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the gathering point for international communities of artists, intellectuals, and grand tourists who elected the city as their temporary homeland. Devoid of any real political let alone economic power, administered by a papal government that was increasingly anachronistic in the era of nation states, and endowed with a uniquely rich artistic heritage, nineteenth-century Rome enabled these foreign residents, such as Goethe and Shelley, to assume new temporary identities based on shared universal cultural values rather than nationality.

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[4] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Der Chinese in Rom', in *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. Erich Trunz, 14 vols (Munich: Beck, 1981), I, 206.

[5] Shelley, *Letters*, II, 87.

[6] Madame de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 46. 'In Rome, that vast caravansary, everything is foreign, even the Romans, who seem to live there not like owners, *but like pilgrims resting beside the ruins*.' Italics in the original. English translation from *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. Sylvia Raphael (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1998), p. 20. In her notes to the novel, de Staël claims to have taken this thought from one of Wilhelm von Humboldt's letters.

De Staël was the first to exploit the peculiarities of this situation for a novelistic setting. In *Corinne* Rome is a microcosm of the world (Rome 'n'est pas simplement un assemblage d'habitations, c'est l'histoire du monde'[7]) – or at least of Europe – with characters from different nationalities crossing paths there, the city providing a stage for a debate on the cosmopolitan ideal. In the course of the nineteenth century, due to the phenomenal international success of *Corinne*, its model was followed by a number of novels, from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* (1860) and Henry James's *Roderick Hudson* (1875) to Paul Bourget's *Cosmopolis* (1892), which in a sense bookends, together with *Corinne*, the golden age of modern Rome as a setting for the international novel. At the end of the century, the anti-dreyfusard Bourget denounces the cosmopolitan ideal as being bound up with escapism, superficial interpersonal relations, and moral corruption, proclaiming in its stead the 'permanence de la race':[8] Bourget revisits the Rome of *Corinne* and Romantic cosmopolitanism in order to give readers a moral tale in defence of essentialism.

But how was Rome's cosmopolitanism, which physically and emotionally drew so many foreigners to the city, perceived from the domestic perspective, i.e. from the point of view of Italian literature? How did Italian writers interact with the rich heritage that the city left on nineteenth-century European literature? It is perhaps surprising to notice how marginal a location Rome is within canonical nineteenth-century Italian literature, with the notable exception of Giuseppe Gioachino Belli's dialect poetry, written mostly in the 1830s – a distinctly un-cosmopolitan genre that, mostly due to the difficulties of translation, did not reach international fame but nonetheless managed to capture the spirit of the place sought after by Vernon Lee, at least for Italian readers. With the Risorgimento – the last stage of which was, in fact, the struggle for the expropriation of Rome from the Papacy and its

[7] *Corinne*, p. 136. Rome 'is not simply a collection of dwellings; it is the history of the world' (p. 82).

[8] Paul Bourget, *Cosmopolis* (Pars: Lemerre, 1894), p. iii.

annexation to the new Italian Kingdom – there was a widespread desire among Italian intellectuals that Italian arts and literature should be resurrected on the international stage, after centuries of perceived provincialism and backwardness in relation to foreign traditions. Rome occupied an especially important symbolic status in this process of modernization. After the capital was moved there from Florence in 1871, triggering the controversial radical projects of urban renewal that Lee and others witnessed with apprehension, the city became home to influential literary journals such as the *Fanfulla della Domenica* (established in 1879), *Cronaca Bizantina* (1881-86), and the lavishly-produced *Il Convito* (1895-1907), which became the main mouthpiece of the Italian Decadent Movement. The verses by Giosuè Carducci reproduced in the title page of *Cronaca Bizantina* encapsulate well the attitude of many Italian intellectuals towards the new capital: 'Impronta Italia domandava Roma, / Bisanzio essi le han dato.[9] With its dazzling but daunting cultural heritage and cosmopolitan history Rome was difficult to fit into the dimension of the nineteenth-century nation state: it was simultaneously something more but also something less than a modern capital.

In a characteristic article published in *Cronaca Bizantina* in 1882, critic Giulio Salvadori laments the lack of a modern Italian literature about Rome, unfavourably contrasting recent domestic novelistic offerings set in the new capital by Raffaello Giovagnoli (*Passeggiate Romane*, 1879), Giovanni Faldella (*Viaggio a Roma senza vedere il Papa*, 1880), and Carlo del Balzo (*Roma*, 1882) with enduring literary masterpieces by Goethe and Hippolyte Taine.[10] Implicit in Salvadori's assessment of the Italian writers' blindness to

[9] 'Unprepared Italy demanded Rome,/ Byzantium she was given.' From 'Per Vincenzo Caldesi, otto mesi dopo la sua morte' (1871). These lines are usually read as Carducci's commentary on political corruption in the new capital. Giosuè Carducci, *Tutte le Poesie* (Milan: Bietti, 1968), pp. 462-3.

[10] Giulio Salvadori, 'Roma', *Cronaca Bizantina* (1 June 1882); reproduced in Enrico Ghidetti, ed., *Roma Bizantina* (Milano: Longanesi, 1979), pp. 71-6.

Rome's 'universal art'[11] was a plea that the reunited nation should now seek to reassert its presence in the international literary space that, in *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova has described as operating according to a system of competition and exchange akin to global capitalism.[12] While Salvadori and other nineteenth-century Italian intellectuals might have felt that their literature belonged to what Casanova calls 'the great national literary spaces' by virtue of its age – indeed in Medieval and Renaissance Europe Italy had led the way internationally in the arts as well as sciences (and in fact Salvadori points out the centrality of Rome to Italian intellectual culture in these periods) – they were also undeniably conscious of the fact that Italy had now become peripheral in the new map of world literature that had been drawn in the course of the nineteenth century.[13] Like other non-independent nations, fragmented nineteenth-century Italy tended to follow the foreign powers under whose influence it operated, notably Austro-Hungary and France, in matters of culture as well as politics. Within this scenario Rome, depressed by centuries of Church censorship as well as economic backwardness, could not yet aspire to the status of other nineteenth-century literary capitals such as Paris, Vienna, and London, which commanded strong domestic literary traditions.

Salvadori's plea for a nineteenth-century Italian novel about Rome was shortly to be answered by a young writer who also gravitated around *Cronaca Bizantina*: Gabriele D'Annunzio's debut novel *Il Piacere* (1889) was published when the author was only twenty-

[11] Ibid., p. 72 ('arte universale').

[12] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. De Bevoise (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. pp. 9-17.

[13] Casanova, p. 83. It is interesting in this context to note that Casanova tends to date the onset of international literary modernity to the eighteenth century, i.e. to a period of strong global dominance of French culture, thus providing a somewhat circular justification for her claims that France is both international source and model for literary modernity.

six, before he became a celebrity dandy and controversial public figure.[14] *Il Piacere* inaugurated a series of Decadent novels (*L'Innocente* (1892), *Il Trionfo della Morte* (1894), *Le Vergini delle Rocce* (1895), and *Il Fuoco* (1900)), as a result of which he became an international phenomenon: D'Annunzio, who suffered a critical backlash in the second half of the twentieth century due to his involvement with Fascist totalitarianism, became the most internationally famous living Italian writer in the years around the turn of the century, attracting considerable attention in the foreign press, notably in France.[15] *Il Piacere* was the real turning point of his career. The novel soon achieved national and then international fame: it was translated into French by George Hérelle and serialised in the *Revue de Paris* in 1894-95, exactly one year before Zola's *Rome*; it then came out in English in 1898, in a bowdlerized translation by Georgina Harding (to which Arthur Symons contributed the translations of the original interpolated poems) entitled *The Child of Pleasure*, which adapted the evocative French title of Hérelle's translation, *L'Enfant de Volupté*.[16]

The Child of Pleasure is one of the most original Roman novels of the nineteenth century, both because it is written from an Italian perspective and because it views the modern city through the prism of a Symbolist aesthetics with which D'Annunzio was familiar thanks to his extensive knowledge of modern French literature. Within the Italian tradition, it functioned as a manifesto for art for art's sake and promoted a Decadent sensibility that was

[14] D'Annunzio's extravagant rise to fame has been captured in a number of biographies. For English examples see John Woodhouse, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Defiant Archangel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *The Pike: Gabriele D'Annunzio, Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013).

[15] See Giovanni Gullace, *Gabriele D'Annunzio in France: A Study in Cultural Relations* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1966).

[16] The English version also adopted the revised structure that D'Annunzio devised for the French translation, together with Hérelle.

new to Italy and that D'Annunzio simultaneously describes and enacts in his use of an intensely lyrical prose, studded with rare and archaic words that give it a highly self-conscious quality. The novel pays tribute to many of the foreign authors who had written about Rome, notably Goethe and Shelley, by making frequent references to their works and the Roman locations that bear their memories (one of the crucial seduction scenes takes place by Shelley's tomb in the so-called Protestant Cemetery). D'Annunzio is fascinated by foreign understandings of Italy's cultural heritage, the European perspectives functioning within the Italian text like the distant gaze of Goethe's Chinese in the German poem. Describing D'Annunzio's unique hybrid perspective on Rome, Henry James claimed that he made readers 'feel […] the golden presence of Rome, the charm that appeals to him as if he were one of the pilgrims from afar, save that he reproduces it with an authority in which […] the pilgrims from afar have mainly been deficient.'[17] In *The Child of Pleasure*, D'Annunzio sets out to reclaim Rome as a setting for modern Italian literature, while remaining international in outlook and ambition.

In another letter to Peacock, Shelley remarks that in Rome 'you see nothing of the Italians':[18] and indeed Italians tend to be entirely absent from the Roman writings of most foreign authors in the nineteenth century, or they are typically de-individualized and assimilated into a picturesque vision of the city and its environments. Even de Staël's Corinne is crucially only *half* Italian, and it is arguably that double perspective that makes her a good channel of a local sensibility for an international readership. D'Annunzio populates his novel with modern Romans who are not the home-grown, picaresque working-class subjects of Belli's dialect poetry, but are instead geographically-mobile and cultured bourgeois and

[17] Henry James, 'Gabriele D'Annunzio' [1902], in *Notes on Novelists, with some other Notes* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), pp. 245-93 (p. 256).

[18] [17 or 18] December 1818; Shelley, *Letters*, II, 59.

upper-class individuals with complex psychologies and modern international habits such as horse-racing and *mariages de convenience*; these characters are the metonymic representatives of a modern nation that has found its legitimate place alongside the leading intellectual and political powers of Europe. Going back to Casanova's understanding of the international literary field as driven by competition, we could say that D'Annunzio's overthrow of Roman provincialism – up till then the main vehicle for inscribing Rome within the Italian literary tradition – was a way to claim that post-unification Italian literature was now ready to enter the international arena as a peer to the literatures of politically-powerful European nations.

In the centre of the cosmopolitan society described in *The Child of Pleasure* stands its Decadent anti-hero, Andrea Sperelli, the 'enfant de volupté' of the French and English translations and the first in a series of charismatic, problematic male protagonists of D'Annunzio's novels. Stemming from an aristocratic family of dilettanti and art collectors, Sperelli is a fastidious egotist with an overdeveloped aesthetic sensibility, who describes himself as 'camaleontico, chimerico, incoerente, inconsistente'.[19] An artist and poet and evident alter-ego of the author, Sperelli believes that individuals should craft their own life as though it were a work of art. Above all else, though, Sperelli is a hedonist with a seemingly insatiable appetite for the material world – an attitude encapsulated by his Latin motto, 'habere non haberi' ('to have, not to be had') and enacted by his simultaneous quest for aesthetic and sexual pleasure in the Rome of the 1880s.[20] In an important early article in the *Revue des deux mondes* that helped to launch D'Annunzio's European reputation, the French critic Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé described Sperelli as the representative of a 'large culture

[19] 'Chameleon-like, chimeric, incoherent, and inconsistent'. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il Piacere* (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), p. 278. The translations are my own.

[20] Ibid., p. 40.

cosmopolite', which synthesizes such disparate elements as German philosophy, English aestheticism, and classical culture.[21] Indeed, focalized through his perspective, modern Rome is presented as the ideal theatre for the observation of what Bourget would shortly refer to as the floating Cosmopolis ('Cosmopolis flottante') of European society – a transnational and morally volatile citizenship grafted onto the architectural and social fabric of the eternal city.[22]

The question of theatricality is important. In *Corinne*, de Stael interweaves the novelistic plot with lengthy descriptions of the city, displaying its monuments in a series of theatrical gestures that introduce a persistent spatial element into the narrative. The tableau became a staple of nineteenth-century Roman novels, which could and did double up as guide books to the city, as is testified by the fact that Tauchnitz issued unbound editions of *The Marble Faun*, clearly aimed at a tourist market, which contained blank spaces that readers could fill with their own illustrations, such as postcards or drawings.[23] Traces of this tradition survive in *The Child of Pleasure*, which is punctuated by a series of panoramic descriptions that illustrate Rome with plenty of visual detail intended to make the city appealing to readers, enumerating its monuments, and paying particular attention to the effects produced by the changes in light in different seasons and times of day. The long descriptive passages have sometimes been seen as elements of fragmentation, but in fact are key in establishing a spatial relationship between urban landscape and language, the architecture of the city becoming the

[21] Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, 'La Renaissance Latine: Gabriel D'Annunzio: poèmes et romans', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 January 1895), 187-206 (p. 200).

[22] Bourget, p. i.

[23] See Victoria Mills, 'Photography, Travel Writing and Tactile Tourism: Extra-Illustrating *The Marble Faun*', in *Travel Writing, Visual Culture, and Form, 1760-1900*, ed. Brian H. Murray, Mary Henes, and Mary Hughes (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 65-86.

architecture of the novel. This tight interaction between space, place, and literary style provides an explanation for D'Annunzio's warning to his French translator Goerges Hérelle that '[i]l successo del *Piacere* dipende della forma. È un romanzo di pura forma.'[24] D'Annunzio's emphasis on form is nowhere more visible than in the descriptions of the city, where his prose becomes especially artificial and extravagant, drawing on the generic conventions of *ekphrasis* as if the sight of the city, itself made up of a collection of art works, were mediated through further art works in which it has been represented (the novel contains allusions to a long list of artists that go from various Renaissance figures to Lawrence Alma-Tadema). As Shelley had written in 1819, it is extremely difficult to describe Rome without using hackneyed language and dead metaphors. D'Annunzio's anti-naturalist solution is to make Rome deliberately artificial: in the novel the city is always a representation of a representation. This removal from reality, typical of Decadent writing, is why Rome is often described, somewhat incongruously, as dreamlike, transfigured, or 'immaterial' in a book that is otherwise so heavily dominated by the protagonist's materialist outlook.[25]

The tableaux enact Sperelli's 'grande amore' for Rome – an element of narrative cohesion that provides a counterweight to the inconstancy of his sexual love of women.[26] Rome in *The Child of Pleasure* is a giant erotic theatre, in which illicit encounters take place on street corners, museums are used for assignations, and couples make love in carriages, riding around in the streets. This focus on exterior space makes *The Child of Pleasure* very different from Huysmans's *A Rebours* (1884), a novel with which it has often been compared

[24] 'The success *L'Enfant de Volupté* depends on its form. It is purely a novel of form' (letter of 12 November 1894), in Mario Cimini (ed.), *Carteggio D'Annunzio-Hérelle (1891-1931)* (Lanciano: Rocco Carabba, 2004), p. 251.

[25] See for instance *Il Piacere*, pp. 289 and 293.

[26] *Il Piacere*, p. 41.

because of its Decadent taste.[27] Des Eissentes' progress into the Decadent sensibility brings him to abjure Paris (and sex and eventually even food), and seek retreat in an enclosed suburban location. Sperelli's decadence, by contrast, constantly leads him outward towards Rome, its monuments and forms of sociability. The narrative tableaux in Huysmans are all domesticated, as though the author wanted deliberately to turn his gaze from a city that had saturated the nineteenth-century French novelistic tradition, from Balzac to Zola. D'Annunzio, by contrast, operates within an Italian tradition that, as we have seen, perceives itself as somewhat of a blank slate when it came to setting up a strong relationship between the urban space of its new capital and literary modernity. The French Decadent turn away from social realism, which D'Annunzio embraces, can thus coexist with a close engagement with place.

Speaking from the perspective of urban planning, Leonardo Benevolo has called post-1870 Rome 'an illegible hieroglyph on which it was all too easy to impose one's personal fantasies.'[28] *The Child of Pleasure* is D'Annunzio's individual reading of this hieroglyph. In this sense, his descriptions of Rome are most revealing for what they leave out, i.e. for how they distort the urban reality of the 1880s. For the Rome of the 1880s was, as we have seen, a rapidly modernising and fast-growing city that, although still small in size and old-fashioned compared to European metropolises like Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, was undergoing profound transformations both in terms of its architecture and social fabric, as well as its geopolitical

[27] Even though he does not seem to have known *A Rebours* at the time of writing *Il Piacere*, D'Annunzio himself encouraged the comparison, speaking of a 'parentela' between the two novels; see Cimini (ed.), p. 101. On the relationship between D'Annunzio and Huysmans, see Ivano Caliaro, 'Fra Trinità dei Monti e Fontenay-aux-Roses. Intorno a Sperelli e a Des Esseintes', in *Da Bisanzio a Roma: Studi su Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Verona: Fiorini, 2004), pp. 11-25.

[28] 'Il disegno di Roma era un geroglifico illegibile, su cui era anche troppo facile innestare le fantasie personali di ciascuno.' Leonardo Benevolo, *Roma dal 1870 al 1990* (Bari: Laterza, 1992), p. 97.

ambitions in relation to Europe and the wider world. *The Child of Pleasure* is set in this modernising city, where urban planners were busy on the so-called 'opere nuove', creating new public spaces for Rome's changing population, digging up archaeological areas, and altering the urban infrastructure in line with new rational and hygienic standards that would turn it into a modern European capital. Large portions of the city were, in fact, building sites, and it is estimated that around 80,000 workers in the building industry alone migrated there in those years.[29]

It is striking that in the novel there are only a couple of nods to this bustling activity, such as the casual mention, in the middle of the description of a sunset on Piazza Barberini, of 'torme d'operai tornanti dalle opere nuove. Alcuni, allacciati per le braccia, si dondolavano cantando a squarciagola una canzone impudica.'[30] There is no reference to the new apartment blocks that were just then changing the face of the city forever. D'Annunzio, who was active in the Roman periodical scene as an opponent of urban modernisation, ignores these transformations and Rome's new inhabitants – including the many migrants from the impoverished Southern regions of Italy – let alone the signs of the new commercial culture that was rapidly taking root in the city. The result is that he creates a deliberately anachronistic vision that glamorizes pre-unification Italy, with its economy of consumption rather than production,[31] underscored by Sperelii's open admiration for the heyday of the Rome of the Popes. A sense of impending destruction hovers over the novel, reinforced by the frequent allusions to death: the trees of the Villa Ludovisi, whose grounds were erased in the

[29] Alberto Caracciolo, *Roma Capitale: Dal Risorgimento alla crisi dello Stato liberale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1974), p. 176.

[30] *Il Piacere*, p. 80 ('ranks of workers who were coming back from the *opere nuove*. Some of them, linking arms, were swinging and singing a lewd song at the top of their voices').

[31] See Caracciolo, p. 30.

early 1880s to make room for the redevelopment of the area surrounding the modern Via Veneto, are said to have felt the presentiment of death even at the time that Goethe elected the Villa as one of his favourite haunts; and, in a flash of macabre insight, Sperelli has a vision of the future destruction of the city, which suddenly appears to him 'estinta, come sepolta dalla cenere d'un vulcano invisibile'.[32] In this sense there is a real tension between the novel's effort to propel a post-unification, Italian Rome into literary modernity and its nostalgia for a past that has now been obliterated by political and social change. D'Annunzio, unlike Vernon Lee, sees the forces of modernity as a threat for Rome, as well as for the precarious aristocratic, hypersensitive type to which Sperelli belongs. The increasingly liberal and bourgeois values of the new Italian state are a new wave of barbarism that undermines the individual identity of the city.

By contrast, the foreign elements that populate the novel revitalize Rome, because they hark back to the literary cosmopolitanism of the pre-unification city depicted by Goethe, Shelley, and de Staël. Apart from the sightings of blonde ladies carrying Baedekers and redoubtable English pre-Raphaelite beauties with sunflowers on their hats, the very fabric of the aesthetic sensibility and sociability of the *fin-de-siècle* Romans portrayed by D'Annunzio is inflected by foreign elements.[33] D'Annunzio dots the novel with foreign words – Sperelli's Roman apartment, for instance, is repeatedly referred to as his '*home*'[34] – that simultaneously reflect and construct the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city as if to portray the hospitality of

[32] *Il Piacere*, resp. pp. 89 and 315 ('extinct, as if buried by the ash of an invisible volcano').

[33] Ibid., pp. 281 and 228. Giuliana Pieri provides an excellent reconstruction of the presence of English Pre-Raphaelite culture in *fin-de-siècle* Rome and D'Annunzio's borrowings from it in *The Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Fin de Siècle Italy: Art, Beauty, and Culture* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014), pp. 64-78.

[34] *Il Piacere*, p. 42; in English in the original.

modern Rome and modern Italian letters – the two, as we have seen, intertwined in the spatial logic of the 'form' of the text – towards influences from abroad. Sentences in Latin, English, and German frequently break up, untranslated, the Italian narrative, reflecting the habits of a polyglot milieu and populating the Italian language with voices from abroad. This foreignizing practice was important to D'Annunzio, who would urge Hérelle to preserve the '*strano sapore*' of the Italian original in his French translation,[35] as if apprehensive that translation would domesticate *The Child and Pleasure*, erasing its cosmopolitan flavour. Above all, though, the cultural cosmopolitanism of the novel is reflected in D'Annunzio's heavy borrowings from modern French authors – a partial list would include Bourget, Péladan, Amiel, Zola, Flaubert, Maupassant, and the Goncourts – whom he constantly appropriates, paraphrases, and rewrites, lending to *The Child of Pleasure* a quality of textual bricolage that, like his *ekphrases* of the Roman cityscape, works to remove the narrative from the reality of the city.

In the years following the publication of *The Child of Pleasure*, the tensions inherent in D'Annunzio's ambition to produce works that would be at the same time cosmopolitan and representative of a distinctly Italian modernity would split his critical reception. On the one hand, there were critics like the English sensation novelist Ouida, who would denounce the failure of D'Annunzio's cosmopolitanism, arguing that 'his wide culture has injured his style' and that 'he would have been a greater Italian writer if he had known no language save Italian and, of course, Latin and Greek.'[36] In Italy, at the same time, his heavy borrowings from French authors were notoriously denounced as plagiarism by Enrico Thovez in a series of

[35] Letter dated 14 February 1892 in Cimini, p. 77. For an example of how social and linguistic cosmopolitanism overlap in *Cronaca Bizantina*, see 'Alcibiade', 'Il "Demi-Monde" Romano' (15 September 1881), repr. in Ghidetti, pp. 23-32.

[36] Ouida, 'The Genius of D'Annunzio', *Fortnightly Review* 61:363 (March 1897), 349-73, p. 353.

interventions in the *Gazzetta Letteraria* of Turin, in 1895, that inaugurated a tradition of dismissing D'Annunzio's cosmopolitanism as a form of inauthenticity and literary opportunism. On the other hand, André Gide, in an interview for the Florentine periodical *Il Marzocco*, would upbraid Italian critics for censuring D'Annunzio's foreign formation, arguing that this was the very foundation of his 'enorme servigio' (great contribution) to Italian literature, that is to have brought it to the attention of the rest of Europe.[37] Gide's sympathetic assessment of D'Annunzio is formulated from the mental, if not physical, vantage point of Paris: he believed that D'Annunzio was *forced* to look abroad due to the impoverished state of nineteenth-century Italian literature. D'Annunzio's cosmopolitanism was, as we have seen, neither as inevitable as Gide makes it out to be nor free from internal tensions. Redeploying the cosmopolitan literary heritage that Rome had acquired in the course of the nineteenth century through the works of foreign authors, D'Annunzio claims the city as the space for an internationally-oriented modernity that had long been a prerogative of the French capital, but in which the new Italian nation was now ready to participate.

[37] Gide quoted in Annamaria Andreoli, 'Dalla Roma Bizantina alla Roma del "Nuovo Rinascimento"', in *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Dalla Roma Bizantina alla Roma del 'Nuovo Rinascimento'* (Torino: SACS, 2001), pp. 9-36 (p. 31).