

Alessandro Manzoni's Literary Penumbra between History and Horror. Undisclosed Gothic Sources in *The Betrothed* (1827, 1840)

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Abstract

Alessandro Manzoni is one of the most representative literary figures in the nineteenth-century in Italy. His novel I Promessi Sposi, translated as The Betrothed, inaugurated the popular trend of the historical novel in Italy. It also acquired resonance overseas, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, where it was successful with both Italian expats and foreign readers. Born in an affluent aristocratic family in Northern Italy, Manzoni was the grandson of Cesare Beccaria, the popular author of the enlightened text On Crimes and Punishments (1764). Manzoni was bilingual and he even spent some formation years in Paris, where his mother lived after her problematic divorce. Even though Manzoni admitted that Walter Scott, a novelist he deeply revered, had influenced I Promessi Sposi, the novel contains several influences that the author tended to keep hidden. This article intends to demonstrate how Manzoni's sources were multiple and how the early Gothic novel and Ann Radcliffe moulded some parts of his story.

Keywords: Historical Novel – Italian Historical Novel – Alessandro Manzoni – Walter Scott – Gothic Novel – Ann Radcliffe – Italian literature – English Literature – Romanticism – Risorgimento

This article analyses some unexplored sources, which were instrumental in the creation of Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed* (1827, 1840). Considered as Walter Scott's heir in Italy, he created the first historical novel in the Italian language, which presents a story set in the problematic first decades of the seventeenth century when the nation was under the Spanish rule. The renowned poet, playwright and essayist frequently highlighted the importance of his illustrious British antecedent in making him choose prose to create a work that could be popular and reach all layers of society. Before choosing the novel as his new form of expression, he had preferred lofty forms of poetry to describe the past and its inherent pathos, but he realized that, however ingenious, musical and easily remembered his lines were, he needed prose to develop a variety of contexts. In describing the past, he wanted to sensitize the public opinion and make his readers meditate about past tragic historical events. Thus, the common conscience could compare the past with an equally sad present. In an appalling social situation, and controlled by several foreign rulers, who limited the circulation of books and ideas, Italy was still far from obtaining its independence between the end of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Divided as it was in the middle by the Papal State, which crystallized the separation between the North and the South for centuries, Italy was a variegated territory not only geographically but also politically. Unlike Germany, Great Britain and France, Italy did not develop a proper romantic

wave in literature. The years of the Napoleonic conquest of the Peninsula at the turn of century after the French Revolution of 1789 and the creation of the Cisalpine Republic intended to eliminate the traces of the *Ancien Régime* in Italy. However, the pre-revolutionary status quo was reinstalled after the fall of Napoleon with the Congress of Vienna in 1821. The journeys—or grand tours—of writers, poets and painters not only exalted Italian beauty and culture but also awakened the general conscience for the bleak political situation in the country, in which both scholars and literati were more intent on trying to rebel against the yoke of foreign monarchies than on creating lyrical or sentimental poetry. Horace Walpole went on a grand tour with his friend Thomas Gray in the first half of the eighteenth century while Lord Byron and P.B. Shelley among many others travelled through Italy in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century and were in a position to observe the dramatic situation of the country. Walpole's experiences as a supposed spy in Southern Italy, unequally ruled by the Bourbon kings, were shocking. When he arrived in Calabria, nowadays a luxuriant region of Italy, part of Magna Graecia in ancient times, Walpole was so appalled by the general poverty and people's awful conditions—imputable to the corrupt Bourbonic rule—that he decided to abandon the place and return to his aristocratic circles of friends and parties in Rome and Florence.¹ When in Italy and while engaged in several romantic liaisons, Lord Byron was involved with the *Carbonari*, a secret network of aristocratic and middle class conspirators aiming to eliminate foreign powers in Italy.² Beyond traditional sources that have been at the basis of multiple critical analyses conducted on Manzoni, this study intends to unveil hidden and unexplored connections between late eighteenth-century novels and Manzoni's masterpiece.

ITALIAN LITERATURE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Italian writers were imbued with Classicism and Antiquity and were generally reluctant to absorb literary waves from abroad. The love for classical models in Italy could be ascribed to four main reasons. Latin culture was the direct source of Italian language and literature for centuries and was a spontaneous element of inspiration. The second reason can be identified in Dante and its *Divine Comedy*, which set the canons of a purified written language infused with classical moulds in the fourteenth century. The third factor resides in the tradition of Humanism (precursor of the Italian Renaissance), which started in the peninsula between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Finally, Italy, incapable of being re-united as a single nation ever since the fall of the Roman Empire, clung to its written language as a form of ideal unification, even though the different regions developed their own mainly oral dialects. Italian was mostly a written form of elegant expressions, sometimes different from the everyday language of the population.³ The Milanese movement and the circle of intellectuals that founded the cultural review *Il Caffè* (1764–1766), however, embraced ideals propagated by the French Enlightenment and admired the works by Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau and other *maîtres à penser* beyond the Alps. They understood and supported the importance of values such as freedom, independence, tolerance,

¹ Anne Williams, "Horace in Sicily: Discovering a Gothic Imagination". *Gothic Studies*, (2006), 8, 1, pages 22–34.

² David Harrison, "Sex, Seduction, and Secret Societies: Byron, the Carbonari and Freemasonry", *Acta Macionica*, (2017), 27, pages 85–95.

³ For the social and linguistic identity of Italy and its language: Lorenzo Tomasini. *Italiano. Storia di una parola*. (2011), Roma: Carocci; Ernesto Galli della Loggia. *L'identità italiana*. (1998), Bologna: il Mulino.

cosmopolitanism and the appreciation of foreign models of culture. An international sensation, Madame De Stael's novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807)—a passionate love story between an Italian woman and a Scottish man—had a remarkable resonance in France before it was censored by Napoleon for exalting women's need of self-determination. When it was published in London in 1813, it became a literary phenomenon in Europe and promoted a further wave of Interest in Italy, following the one introduced by the early Gothic novels. It was especially Madame de Stael, with her frequent stays in various parts of Italy, her novels and articles, who created awareness in Italian scholars of different literary modes. The French novelist, essayist and intellectual socialite invited Italian literati to try new creative forms. Her essays on cultural matters exhorted the Italian intelligentsia, stubbornly attached to classical or neoclassical positions, to open up to cultural influences and literary waves from other nations. It was in particular her essay "Sulla maniera e l'utilità delle traduzioni" ("On the Manner and Utility of Translations"), appeared in the recently founded journal *Biblioteca Italiana* (Italian Library 1816–1840), which invited Italian literati to experiment new forms of literature and to discover the cultural novelties of other European countries.⁴ Poets, essayists, historians and philosophers examined new literary trends, but only partially abandoned their classical mindset. A contemporary of Madame de Stael, a Swiss eminent intellectual moved to Italy, where he created a farm to carry out agricultural experiments and at the same time analyse the rich medieval past of the country. The renowned economist and historian Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi created a farm in Tuscany that he managed successfully. He also wrote a sixteen-volume collection, *Histoire des républiques italiennes au moyen âge* (1807–1826), on the history of Italian Republics during the Middle Ages. His books were the first in-depth studies to introduce a division of historical periods. Sismondi created a new conscience concerning the medieval history of Italy that he particularly appreciated for the organizational characteristics of the multiple city-states, scattered especially in the North and was influential in forming the new wave of historicism in Italy.

The Italian literary atmosphere could be considered *démodé* and peninsular. However, it is true that some authors created important texts, which were the result of the active Italian enlightenment in Milan. Cesare Beccaria's *Dei Delitti e delle Pene*—*An Essay on Crimes and Punishments*—published in 1764 and originally attributed to the French philosopher Voltaire, was a literary phenomenon in Europe. The English translator was probably the journalist and liberal politician John Wilkes, who completed the translation in 1767 and explained in his introduction that the book was a universal success.⁵ It is equally important to remember that poets such as Ugo Foscolo, first, and Alessandro Manzoni, a few years later, were deeply impressed by foreign authors that clearly influenced their works, thanks also to their journeys outside Italy and their mastery of foreign languages. Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) were influential in the creation of Foscolo's *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1802). Foscolo imitated some romantic aspects of the German masterpiece and borrowed ideas of the French author's sentimentality, but he originally inserted the Italian context of political frustration, which is the most important factor leading to the main character's tragedy. The historiographical and historical preoccupation is a leitmotiv in most writers and artists of the first half of the nineteenth century, a preoccupation that continued until the

⁴ Claudio Ferroni, *Storia della Letteratura Italiana. Dall'Ottocento al Novecento*. (1991), Torino: Einaudi.

⁵ Annamaria Loretelli, "The First English Translation of Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishments*. Uncovering the Editorial and Political Contexts". (2011), Open Access: Università degli Studi di Firenze. Web.

unification of the country in 1861 and even beyond. The Risorgimento, which represented the “rebirth” or “rising” of the Italian conscience and the desire for national unity, was a movement that concerned several layers of societies and involved patriots in every region of the peninsula, ready to fight and die for freedom and independence. Not only writers, poets and philosophers but also painters and musicians expressed their chagrin about the destiny of the nation through their artistic forms. Giuseppe Verdi created majestic operas with strong political meanings, always connected to the contempt for foreign powers imposing their despotical presence on the Italian soil. His arias frequently became the anthem for patriotic actions. Scholars have defined this Italian characteristic as Italian historical romanticism, which can be synthesized in the paintings by Francesco Hayez and the works by Manzoni and Ippolito Nievo, among others.⁶

Foreign literature in Italy was mostly French (which dominated over other influences from abroad) or translated from French. “Mary Ambrose clarifies that in translating Scott the French headed the Italians by several years and Scott cult in Italy was well established by the 1820s thanks to French translations of his works. A French librettist had discovered Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake* and passed it to Gioachino Rossini. Influenced by Scott, the Italian musician composed *La Donna del Lago*, a great success that premiered in 1819”.⁷ Walter Scott became a household name in Italy once his novels were translated into Italian, after being filtered by French translators, who were more advanced than Italians in their knowledge of English literature. Scott’s *Waverly Novels* were extremely popular. However, it was Gaetano Barbieri’s translation of *Ivanhoe* (1819) in 1822 to create general appreciation of Scott and a sort of cult for the British author. Italian readers avidly devoured the story, which officially started a mania for the historical novel. The socio-historical predicament in Italy, in which the *Carboneria* was a secret society of aristocrats, bourgeois and intellectuals, ready to fight for the freedom of their country, justified the love for adventurous stories featuring injustice, redemption and restored freedom.

MANZONI AND HIS BACKGROUND

Manzoni grew up in an intellectual background nurtured by his aristocratic and lettered mother. Because of the growing friction between his very young mother Giulia–Beccaria’s daughter and a brilliant socialite–and his very old father Pietro–a rich and pragmatic landowner–that led to their separation, a saddened and traumatised young Alessandro was sent to religious boarding schools, which moved to Switzerland during the Napoleonic invasion. Like many contemporary young men, he was subjugated by the figure of Napoleon that embodied heroic ideals for the youngest generations of the time. The love (or hate) for Napoleon left cultural, literary and iconographic traces in innumerable works of both contemporaries and next generations. Lord Byron himself developed a strong admiration for the French general and emperor (as long as he did not come to England). Two masterpieces witness the impact of that controversial historical figure; Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830), and Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1867). Napoleon’s portraits by French, Italian and English painters have contributed to

⁶ Umberto Eco (ed.), “L’Ottocento. Arti Visive”, EncycloMedia, Web; and Aberto del Giudice, “Il Romanticismo Storico in Italia”, in Umberto Eco (ed.) *Storia della Civiltà Europea*. (2014), Enciclopedia Treccani. Web.

⁷ Maria Teresa Marnieri. *Delightful Horrors. Early Gothic Novels. 1864–1809*. (2021), Kindle Amazon Editions, page 281. For the French and Italian reception of Scott, see Mary Ambrose, “*La Donna del Lago*: The First Italian Translations of Scott”. *The Modern Language Review* (1972), 67.1: 74–82, page 74.

the reinforcement of his myth. Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1901) stands as one of Napoleon's most emblematic and idealized representations. Manzoni was precocious in his love for literature and started composing verses in his adolescent years. He could master French perfectly and, like his grandfather Cesare, he was an avid reader of French philosophers. He joined his mother in Paris where she had eloped with her lover that Alessandro honoured with a poetic eulogy ("In morte di Carlo Imbonati", "On the Death of Carlo Imbonati") when he passed away. His political ideals were Jacobin in nature during his formative years and he declared himself an atheist as a reaction against his father's bigotry and the strict traditional teachings he received in the boarding schools. Thanks to cultural exchanges with famous literati, he progressively modified his ideals. During his long stay in Paris with his mother, Manzoni became part of an intellectual coterie and was able to absorb the influence of other literatures through innumerable French translations of British and European works. Manzoni met *Les Idéologues*, a group of Parisian thinkers, who analysed possible future developments of the Enlightenment. He became friend with Claude Fauriel, Sophie de Condorcet's companion after revolutionaries guillotined her husband. They remained in contact for all their lives, constantly exchanging cultural and literary ideas, visiting each other in their respective countries whenever it was possible.

At twenty-two, he married a sixteen-year-old girl. She was a devout Calvinist, but later converted to Roman Catholicism. His wife's deep religious belief had a strong impact on his mind and progressively erased his agnostic ideals. Her deep faith promoted his conversion, which was to play a fundamental role in the themes of his future works. After his classical beginnings, he started considering the values proposed by European romanticism that he adapted to his artistic needs. He was not interested in lyrical or subjective poetic forms. He was focussed on historical events, their meaning and consequences for the destinies of people. Historicism and ethics were essential in interpreting his poems and plays, which described tragic figures in dramatic contexts in the past either from the Middle Ages or the early Renaissance. He found inspirations for his stories in the volumes of Italian history by Simone de Sismondi. His play *Il Conte di Carmagnola* (*The Count of Carmagnola* 1820) about a condottiero living in the fifteenth century recounts a courageous knight's heroic and victorious battles for the Duchy of Milan. As a condottiero, or independent warrior, Carmagnola is not attached to an army or a region. Disappointed in the Duke of Milan's snub and his humiliation, the knight accepts a rich offer from the Republic of Venice to fight against Milan. Despite his military success, he cannot imprison his enemies, as they were once his allies. His moral and ethical ideals do not allow him to carry out the Doge's violent orders and death sentences. He therefore shows pity and frees prisoners, provoking the Venetians' rage. Considered a traitor, he is condemned to death. The tragic clash between individual moral aspects and social or political impositions become a relevant aspect of Manzoni's literary production. Carmagnola might be considered a romantic figure, but his moral stance turns the drama into an ethical meditation on human choices, which involve a deeper consideration of inevitable historical contexts forging the destiny of humankind. The unresolvable division between historical events and private contexts becomes evident in the tragedy *Adelchi* (1822) about the heroic son of the last Langobard king Desiderius, who fights for freedom and for peace, but he is betrayed by all those, who support Charlemagne and prefer to kneel to his cruel power. Whereas Manzoni used the chorus, thus following the classical Greek structure in plays, he considered the Aristotelian dramatic rules as an impediment to the development of the plots, in agreement with European intellectuals, following the

dramatic impulse originated by Shakespeare. Popular French poets Alfred De Musset, Alfred De Vigny and Victor Hugo among others embraced Manzoni's original ideas about historical drama in the following decades.

THE GENESIS OF *THE BETROTHED*

Once back to Italy after his Parisian experience, Manzoni could dedicate himself to writing full time thanks to his mother's wealth and vast inheritances of both his father and his ideal "stepfather" Imbonati. He was mostly a poet, a playwright and an essayist. He wrote several poetic compositions, many of them epic in style with a constant focus on real events and history. One of his most famous poems was "Il Cinque Maggio", written after Napoleon's death on May 5th 1821. He celebrated the glorious rise and dramatic fall of the French general leading to a sad meditation upon the ephemeral aspects of human life vis-à-vis history. At the beginning of the 1820s, he started thinking about the creation of a historical novella that was to cover a difficult time in Italian history. He concentrated on the first decades of the 17th century, which was not only particularly unfortunate for political reasons but also shattered by social and epochal misfortunes, such as the corrupt Spanish rule, the Thirty Years' War, the appalling effects of the Counter Reformation, and the bubonic plague. He consulted innumerable documents about the Spanish dominion in Italy and, specifically, in the Lombardy region. He needed the story to be in the past in order to avoid the Austrian and the Papal State's censorship and their extended network of dangerous spies and pitiless police. Manzoni chose a relatively recent past, which could have relevant analogies with the sombre Italian present he was witnessing. He completed the first edition of his novel in 1823, entitled *Fermo e Lucia*, from the names of the two young protagonists. Unsatisfied with his work, he extensively modified and adapted the story before printing it in 1827 with the title of *I Promessi Sposi*, which was quite different from the previous version, unprinted and abandoned. Unconvinced about the result of his novel, especially from a linguistic point of view, he decided that the language he had used still betrayed regionalisms and found it necessary to purify his prose. After a difficult period following his first wife's premature death in her thirties when his creativity seemed to have vanished, he moved to Florence with his new wife and thoroughly studied the Florentine language. He asked two Florentine literati to analyse and correct every expression not complying with Florentine linguistic rules concerning grammar, lexicon and idioms. After their revision, Manzoni started correcting the novel and published the final version in 1840, even though other corrected versions appeared in the following decade.

Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* belongs to the tradition of the historical novel. It was directly influenced by Walter Scott, as the author himself frequently stated in his correspondence. He admitted his cultural debt to Scott himself when he visited him in Milan.⁸ Manzoni's novel was the first example of this literary genre in Italian, even though, contrary to the general idea, it was not the first Italian novel. A seventeenth century author was the first creator of a novel in Italy, *Il Calloandro Fedele* (1652), a fine example of Baroque language and imagery written by Giovanni Ambrosio Marini

⁸ "[...] In Italy Scott found a successor who, though in a single, isolated work, nevertheless broadened his tendencies with superb originality, in some respect surpassing him. We refer [to Manzoni's *The Betrothed*]. Scott himself recognized Manzoni's greatness. When in Milan Manzoni told him that he was his pupil, Scott replied that in that case Manzoni's was his best work." Georg Lukács. *The Historical Novel* (trans. from the German, Hannah and Stanley Mitchell). (1963). Beacon Press. Boston, page 69.

portraying a passionate love story, based on marvellous events, which can survive in spite of its protagonists' perilous vicissitudes and misfortunes. Some thirty years later, another Genoese writer, Giovanni Paolo Marana, was the author of the *Letters Written by a Turkish Spy* (*L'esploratore turco* 1684), translated into French in 1686 and rendered in English by William Bradshaw (1687). Marana was the first to start the Oriental tale in Europe, featuring "one of the most familiar 'Oriental' voices for readers in eighteenth century prose, [...] the male 'reverse' or pseudo-traveller, a fictional correspondent who travels from East to West and writes of his experiences".⁹ Marana's popular stories and his deistic approach were also appreciated by Daniel Defoe, who wrote the *Continuation of Letters written by a Turkish Spy at Paris* (1718), extending the time of the story until 1693. Adventure and imagination are the basic ingredients of the first Italian novels. While adventure is present in *The Betrothed*, history is essential in the development of the novel, but Manzoni added some specific elements connected to his deep religiosity, sense of fate and ethical ideals, which mark the main points of difference with Scott. History intermingles with destiny and providence. Providence, in particular, has an ultimate role in the untangling of the events. Driven by perfectionism Manzoni aimed at creating a complex story, in which real and fictional characters constellate the narrative universe. It might be defined a choral novel if it weren't for the constant presence of an omniscient narrator, who not only provides his point of view but also tends to direct the reader's opinion towards his moral values and perspective. The novel features picaresque moments if we consider the different adventures of the male protagonist, Renzo, the fiancé whose imminent marriage has been prohibited by the powerful and ruthless Don Rodrigo, mesmerized by Lucia, Renzo's beautiful fiancée. However, the novel cannot be considered genuinely picaresque, as the multiple difficulties the betrothed encounter force them to escape to different places against their will. Events are dramatic and dangerous, and a sense of impending death hovers on all characters. Some situations are ironic, but never light-hearted or comedic. Despite the title, which may convey the idea of a romantic and passionate story, *The Betrothed* was "a novel without an idyll", as scholar Ezio Raimondi wrote in an acclaimed essay on *I Promessi Sposi*.¹⁰ The term idyll has various meanings. The most important meaning is the "idyll" as a literary imagery recreating a peaceful and romantic setting. It also represents a poetic composition reproducing an ideal atmosphere. Another meaning, more easily found in the Italian language, is the one denoting "romance" and "love". *The Betrothed* is a love story, which surprisingly represents neither love nor passion. The missing romance is not exclusively due to powerful people's cruelty and it is not the consequence of the sad context, in which the protagonists move. The novel's unusual feature provoked a series of twenty-century re-writings in terms of latent erotic visions, which the author supposedly repressed, but could not completely hide. Manzoni's undertones and understatements concerning feelings, passions and emotions remain enigmatic.¹¹

⁹ Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient. Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785*. (2005), OUP, pages 41–45.

¹⁰ Ezio Raimondi. *Il romanzo senza idillio*. (1974). Torino: Einaudi.

¹¹ Luciano Parisi, "Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*: A Chaste Novel and an Erotic Palimpsest", *The Modern Language Review*, (April 2008), Vol.103, 2, pages 424–437. The literary critic Vigorelli carried out an analysis on love in *The Betrothed* and highlighted that this important feeling is "silent" in the novel, as true emotions do not need clamour or superfluous expressions. Giancarlo Vigorelli. *Il Manzoni e il silenzio dell'amore*. (1954). Macchia: Roma. However, the question of Manzoni's reluctance to describe whatever forms of affection between Renzo and Lucia is ambiguous.

A COMPLEX NOVEL BETWEEN MULTIPLE INFLUENCES AND HIDDEN SOURCES

The Betrothed is not a simple story. Whereas the historical element is essential in the genesis of the plot, a variety of themes has emerged and scholars have incessantly studied the novel underlining its different and complex features. Relevant studies on Manzoni include, among others, his oscillation between real events and authorial inventions, and his moral and ethical views. Other aspects concern his psychological depiction of characters, his social criticism, religion and its ambiguities (good representatives of the church vs examples of corruption and cowardice), linguistic choices and the importance of the text for the Italian language, his ideal of a national identity, status improvement, and pessimism concerning corrupt forms of power. The story develops between 1628 and 1630 in the areas of Lake Como, Milan and Bergamo. Two hard-working silk-spinners, Renzo and Lucia, are going to get married, but the overbearing nobleman Rodrigo's violent thugs threaten the priest who should celebrate their wedding. Being extremely pavid, Don Abbondio postpones the marriage and avoids explanations. Friar Cristoforo intervenes to help the couple, but to no avail. Don Rodrigo has important connections with the bribable Spanish government ruling most parts of Lombardy and orders that the pious clergyman be moved to a distant village in another region. Therefore, the young couple is forced to flee Lake Como and separate. They face innumerable dangerous situations. Renzo is almost sent to prison because of his imprudent behaviour in a Milanese riot organized by a starving population oppressed by corrupt and indifferent Spanish rulers, and during the devastating plague when he narrowly avoids a death sentence for being considered a "spreader". During the bubonic plague of 1630, a form of dangerous superstition emerged among the populace, as they believed the pestilence was spread by people (*gli untori*, the spreaders) using a poisonous oil, which they apparently smeared on main doors. Manzoni was deeply influenced by the chronicles of the bubonic plague, posthumously published in Latin in 1641 by a priest and historian, Giuseppe Ripamonti (1573–1643), who had been a direct observer of the facts that he narrated.

On the other hand, Lucia finds apparent peace in a convent, but is betrayed by the cruel mother superior, who has her kidnapped by a murderous nobleman (l'Innominato, the Unnamed), friend of Don Rodrigo, who still intends to rape her and make her his lover. L'Innominato (the Unnamed) is a complex figure of a brutal man who has spent his life committing heinous crimes, remorselessly enjoying his superior status and wealth. He suddenly becomes conscious of his moral shame when the "*bravi*" (Spanish thugs) bring Lucia to his house after kidnapping her. He dramatically acquires awareness of his own malicious essence after talking to the pious girl. He is tormented by terrible nightmares during the night. He cannot allow the *bravi* to take the adolescent girl to her destiny in the hands of his friend Don Rodrigo. This is the first pivotal eschatological moment in the novel. A sense of metaphysical horror pervades the soul of a callous sinner, who changes his life forever in search of redemption. During the tragic night, which affects l'Innominato and Lucia as well, both characters change deeply, each one with their own despair and dilemmas. When the bubonic plague strikes, it creates a sort of general blind terror involving all people, whether young or old, rich or poor, honest or dishonest, good or evil. Manzoni powerfully described "*la peste*" (the plague) and his descriptions are masterful for their linguistic strength and their historical value. An emaciated mother carrying the body of her little girl to give her to the "*monatti*" is one of the most impacting scenes of the

entire novel.¹² Manzoni published an appendix to the novel, entitled *La Colonna Infame* (*The Shameful Column*, translated as the *Pillar of Shame*) for the 1840 edition. It described the unjust trial that innocent people had to face when wrongly accused of being spreaders of the deadly disease. Mindful of his grandfather's teachings, Manzoni insisted in describing the frightening trial and the horrors of torture forcing innocent people to confess crimes they had never committed. He also highlighted the cruelty of trials managed by the Inquisition.

HISTORY, MANUSCRIPTS AND THE SECRET GOTHIC MOULD

The careful examination of real manuscripts that he owned led Scott to conceive a historical novel, *Waverly* (1814), which was the first of its kind in literature.¹³ After creating successful poetical works, he turned to prose to describe facts in the recent British history, i.e. the dramatic confrontation between England and Scotland during the Jacobite rising in the mid-eighteenth century. He waited almost fifteen years before admitting he was the author, such was the prejudice against novels and prose, a prejudice that Scott himself had contributed to increase together with Coleridge, Wordsworth and other poets and writers of the Romantic period, intent, as they were, to increase their halo of grandeur at detriment of contemporary novelists, especially Gothic authors. Unlike Scott, Manzoni did not publish *The Betrothed* anonymously, and had his name written on the cover and the frontispiece from the very beginning. Like Scott, he perused manuscripts and historical documents. However, he created the stratagem of the "real" manuscript that becomes part of his text. Manzoni inserted an intriguing form of pseudepigraphy in the introduction to his story. He mentioned two manuscripts, the former from a seventeenth-century chronicle, while the latter was supposed to be a re-writing of the original text with a "modernised" eighteenth-century language. Manzoni's great originality is that he introduced passages from one of the manuscripts, which in reality he completely invented imitating the prose style of the two previous centuries in a sort of Joycian anticipation. He also interrupts the narration mid-way ironically imagining that his readers might have got bored from reading the original document and explains that he will start narrating the story in his own contemporary style. It is possible to recognize the humour of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) in Manzoni's introductory passages and in various parts of the story. The irony that can be found in the first lines of Scott's *Waverly* becomes deeper and more complex in Manzoni. The manuscripts are a sort of folding screen for the author that helps him acquire credibility and somehow saves him from the narrative responsibility that he entrusts to the old documents. Manzoni is in this case secretly imitating Horace Walpole's double manuscripts mentioned in the Prefaces to *The Castle*

¹² The *Monatti* were people immune to the plague, after recovering from it, who had the task to carry dead bodies to mass graves to be covered in ashes and earth.

¹³ Every critical generalization brings about latent clichés that may be treacherous. Historical narrations have always existed in various forms. Epic poems like the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Beowulf* turned history into heroic enterprises mixed with magic. Latin and medieval historians wrote annals and chronicles. In the Renaissance, Niccolò Machiavelli (*Il Principe*, 1513) and his friend Francesco Guicciardini (*Storia d'Italia*, 1540) wrote historical documents, each of them promoting a personal analysis and interpretation of history. Shakespeare exploited drama to investigate tragic historical events. The study of history acquired even more importance in the eighteenth century thanks to new philosophical insights, as in Giambattista Vico's theories about recurring historical cycles. The French Enlightenment introduced historicism and political science with Montesquieu's analysis of different forms of government along the centuries. Britain contributed with the creation of historical compendia in the volumes published by David Hume and Edward Gibbon. The scrutiny of real past events mixed with individual occurrences in a fictional context was the novelty introduced by Scott and Manzoni in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

of *Otranto* (1764). "Afraid of negative opinions, Walpole decided to publish anonymously. He used a device to give credibility to the story by presenting the novel as a translation of an Italian text—originally a manuscript, written by "Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto" between 1095 and 1243. The manuscript is then reproduced in the elegant Italian incunabula, published in Naples in 1529 and translated into English by "William Marshal". It was later found in the library of an aristocratic family in Northern England. William Marshal is also the apparent author of the "preface", providing some clues about the manuscripts and the story". Walpole's stratagem provided a distinguished aura to his novel.¹⁴ Walpole's unique story, which was coincidentally published in the same year as *Of Crimes and Punishments* conceived by Manzoni's grandfather Beccaria, marked the beginning of the Gothic trend in Great Britain. What is strange is that, even if Manzoni admitted reading myriad texts in his vast correspondence, he never mentioned Walpole, who had been a cultural sensation, however controversial, all over Europe by creating a lasting trend in Great Britain and overseas, especially in France and Germany, whose literatures Manzoni scrupulously read. It is interesting to note that Manzoni was always quite careful not to mention Walpole and his consequential romance, a mix of historical events and supernatural occurrences, which had been translated into French in the 1760s. His constant and almost fastidious insistence in mentioning Scott in hundreds of letters and commentaries becomes at this point extremely suspicious. Apart from the fact that Scott was also a literary critic and had published several volumes on British authors and their works. He had commented Walpole's novel and praised his sense of history and his mastery of horror. One justification for his obstinate silence may be that Manzoni considered realism a basic pillar of narration and he did not accept supernaturalism or Gothic excesses. However, no author, except Walpole, had used the *escamotage* of a double manuscript, each written in a different linguistic form in separate historical periods, passing on a tragic story to posterity. It is possible to infer that Manzoni relentlessly aspired to be part of the literary mainstream, which only included the recognised cultural elite, whereas Walpole, however remarkable, was a risky figure to imitate, and admitting the connection might have damaged Manzoni's illustrious figure in his own opinion. Interestingly, one of Ann Radcliffe's best accomplishments, *The Italian* (1797), is based on a manuscript given by a Capuchin father to an Englishman visiting a church in Naples, who becomes the interpreter of the document and the narrator of the strange events. Two Gothic novels respectively provided Manzoni with material for his masterpiece, but he never acknowledged them. Various episodes in *The Betrothed* seem to have been heavily influenced by the successful writer, who was a sensation in the 1790s in Britain and in Europe. Exalted for her imaginative and adventurous stories, Radcliffe was generally acclaimed, but also harshly criticized by vocal male literati and female bluestockings alike. The very same Scott apparently praised Radcliffe while minimising her narrative style and disparaging her novels, a contradictory stance that did not prevent him from imitating her repeatedly in his novels. A number of critical voices were extremely negative and they inevitably contributed to belittle Radcliffe's importance. Maria Edgeworth and Anna Seward wrote scathing remarks about Radcliffe, while Richard Polworth tried to destroy Radcliffe's and other female writers' literary reputation with his satirical composition *The Unsex'd Females* (1798). Jane Austen denigrated Radcliffe in *Emma*

¹⁴ Maria Teresa Marnieri. *Delightful Horrors*, page 15. See also Horace Walpole. *The Castle of Otranto*. (1989). OUP, pages 1–2.

(1815) and *Northanger Abbey* (1817). Wordsworth and Coleridge mocked and attacked her works. Her fame dimmed and she remained mysteriously silent without apparently writing a single word until the end of her life, with the exception of some journal entries and a posthumous novel, which was strange and atypical.¹⁵ Deeply romantic in spirit and constantly worried about cultural rules and propriety, she had the merit of describing original adventures in picturesque and sublime settings, which influenced romantic poets of both generations in Great Britain, and abroad. Her Gothic novels were translated in France and avidly read by her continental followers. François Soules rendered *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) in French in 1794. The first translation of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) in 1795 was incomplete, as it discarded passages, descriptions and poems. Victorine de Chastenay translated the complete novel in 1797. André Morellet (also known as Abbé Morellet) and Mary Gay Allart rendered *The Italian* in French in 1797, the same year of its publication in England. These instant translations denote the popularity that Radcliffe enjoyed in France in the period when Manzoni was staying in Paris. Interestingly, André Morellet—an economist, writer and translator still very active on the cultural scene at the turn of the century—had also translated the masterpiece of Manzoni's grandfather, Beccaria.¹⁶ Despite all evidence of some sort of awareness about her works, Manzoni was forever silent about Radcliffe. Indifferent to the huge number of Radcliffe's readers, cognoscenti found faults in her creations. Inserting mystery and the supernatural and choosing independent female characters for her stories were considered negative traits. However, her biggest fault was to be a notable and prosperous woman writer, who was much more successful than her contemporaries, and endowed with unlimited imagination. Some of Radcliffe's novels provide striking analogies with passages and situations in *The Betrothed*, strategically masked and adapted by Manzoni in order to be less recognizable.

One first similarity can be found in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). The male villain, Montalt, has put his eyes on a fugitive young girl, Adeline, in pre-revolutionary France. Captivated by her beauty and grace, he orders his accomplices to capture the girl and keep her prisoner in his mansion so that he can seduce her. Like Lucia, kidnapped by l'Innominato, Adeline implores her tormentors to be spared the shame, and, like Lucia, she is able to escape from danger. A treacherous and lustful nobleman, Montalt uses his wealth and power to commit secret crimes. Another villain, Don Rodrigo's style, the Italian Montoni, unlawful owner of the eponymous castle in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), forces his acquired niece Emily, the story's main character, to move to Italy and keeps her prisoner in his castle. One aristocrat of dubious moral, belonging to Montoni's clique, ineffectively tries to abduct Emily twice. Like Lucia, Emily is separated from her fiancé Valancourt for the entire story and is reunited with him in the very last pages of the novel. Manzoni's villain, Don Rodrigo, dominates his entire story even though he moves around "like a shadow" and although readers do not frequently see him, his menacing presence can be constantly felt, as Augustus Pallotta claims in his description of the deceitful Spanish nobleman (1981, 24).¹⁷ So is Montoni's figure, oppressive and imperious, but rarely visible. *The Italian* likewise offers other striking similitudes with *The Betrothed*. Ellena de Rosalba and Vincentio di Vivaldi have fallen in love and the young nobleman proposes to marry her.

¹⁵ Maria Teresa Marnieri. *Delightful Horrors*. Pages 150–153.

¹⁶ Elisabeth Durot-Boucé, "Traducteurs et Traductrices d'Ann Radcliffe", *Palimpsestes*, (2009), 22, web, pages 101–128.

¹⁷ Augustus Pallotta, "Characterization through Understatement: A Study of Manzoni's Don Rodrigo". *Italica*, (Spring 1981), 59, 1. Pages 43–55.

However, his evil mother organizes Ellena's abduction with Schedoni, a villainous priest. Coincidentally, Ellena is forcefully taken to a convent where the Mother Superior is a cruel woman, indifferent to the girl's unjust predicaments, which are a further interesting antecedent of Lucia's anguish and terror when she is kidnapped. The Abbess torments the frightened girl, incapable of understanding the machinations against her. "The unhappy Ellena had not been left long to her own reflections when the Abbess appeared; a stately lady, apparently occupied with opinions of her own importance, and prepared to receive her guest with rigour and supercilious haughtiness. This Abbess, who was herself a woman of some distinction, believed that of all possible crimes, next of that of sacrilege, offences against persons of rank were least pardonable. It is not surprising, therefore, that, supposing Ellena, a young woman of no family, to have sought clandestinely to unite herself to the noble house of Vivaldi, she should feel for her not only disdain, but indignation, and that she should readily consent, not only to punish the offender, but at the same time, to afford means of preserving the ancient dignity of the offended".¹⁸ The grim nun of Monza is an interesting development of the *The Italian's* unethical, proud nun. Both religious figures are oppressive, authoritarian and indifferent to the criminal acts perpetrated against innocence. Radcliffe provides a short but effective characterization of the Abbess. On the other hand, Manzoni went further in his psychological insight and exploited a long flashback to describe the life of the nun of Monza, the aristocratic Gertrude, since her childhood. He emphasises the tragedy of being forced into a convent without a calling, which led Gertrude to succumb to a rogue nobleman and become her lover. Coerced by the man, she becomes an infanticide, and she murders the nun, who witnessed their crime, for fear of being discovered. She progressively turns into a proud and embittered woman full of hate and regret forever a desperate captive of her unwanted religious role. Interestingly both women intend to punish the young girls committed to them and are indifferent to their destinies. Intriguingly both nuns, while concentrated about their aristocratic entitlement and insincerely professing higher morality, accept and promote the despicable abduction of helpless, innocent girls. The unjust treatment of Vivaldi, captured and kept prisoner by the Inquisition was probably suggested to Radcliffe by Beccaria's essay and the anonymous translation of Giovanni Barberi's *Life of Giuseppe Balsamo Count of Cagliostro's* (1791), which included his final days after being captured and sentenced by the Inquisition. Manzoni certainly read the existing miscellanea on the horrors of the Inquisition, including Radcliffe, and used it to create his remarkable chapter on the plague spreaders' unfair trials in Milan during the deadly epidemic.

Manzoni was a promoter of realism and abhorred the use of the fantastic or any forms of the uncanny. However, he provided an interesting description of Don Rodrigo's menacing squat castle dominating the slopes leaning towards lake Como. When Friar Cristoforo visits it, he notices a sort of blackness surrounding not only the castle but also the little cottages below, as if a poisonous air had contaminated all living element around. After Cristoforo is invited within, he notices the gloom lingering in salons and corridors. While he is taken to Don Rodrigo's private room, he has to pass through an infinity of dark corridors, which seem to multiply unexpectedly. It is possible to find an engaging echo of the abbey in *The Romance of the Forest*—where Adeline and other fugitives have found refuge—which seems to be expanding like a protean structure.

¹⁸ Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*. (2008). OUP. Page 67.

An evident feature Manzoni has in common with Radcliffe is the heartbreaking separation of lovers, forced as they are to be itinerant during the entire stories before reuniting in the end. Renzo and Lucia are the heirs of Adeline and Theodore, Emily and Valancourt and Ellena de Rosalba and Vincentio di Vivaldi, and they all are unfortunate lovers resisting the twists of fortune. Provocatively, Radcliffe without fail preferred to give importance to assertive female main characters, an aspect that could not be accepted by Manzoni.

A passage in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* introduces a further interesting connection with Manzoni. Emily has passed a terrible, sleepless night thinking about her uncertain future, worried about separating from her fiancé and abandoning her the house where she was happy with her parents. It is now the time of her departure and she observes the beloved mountains one last time.

From a little eminence she looked back upon Tholouse, and the far-seen plains of Gascony, beyond which the broken summits of the Pyrenées appeared on the distant horizon, lighted up by a morning sun. 'Dear pleasant mountains!' said she to herself, 'how long may it be ere I see ye again, and how much may happen to make me miserable in the interval! Oh, could I now be certain, that I should ever return to ye, and find that Valancourt still lived for me, I should go in peace! He will gaze on ye, gaze when I am far away!' The trees, that impended over the high banks of the road and formed a line of perspective with the distant country, now threatened to exclude the view of them; but the blueish mountains still appeared beyond the dark foliage, and Emily continued to lean from the coach window, till at length the closing branches shut them from her sight.¹⁹

Here is the translated version of the celebrated final part of chapter 8 of *The Betrothed* when Lucia is forced to escape after the failure of her mother and Renzo's plan of a flash marriage in Don Abbondio's cottage, which turns out to a semi-serious disaster because of the priest's exaggerated reaction. However, their hazardous choice has saved Lucia from Don Rodrigo's ruffians sent to her home to abduct her. Informed by their kin, Lucia and her mother Agnese discover that notorious "*bravi*" are all over their place. It is time for them to take a boat to cross the lake and escape promptly leaving everything behind. Here follows Lucia's famous meditation full of sadness and nostalgia.

The villages and houses, even the sheds could be made out; Don Rodrigo's mansion, with squat towers, rising above the cottages huddled at the foot of the headland, seemed like a wild beast standing there in the dark amidst a group of sleepers, waiting and meditating some evil deed. Lucia saw it and shuddered; she followed the slope down to her own village, gazed fixedly at the end of it, and found her own cottage, found the thick top of the fig-tree rising above the yard wall, found the window of her own room; and as she sat in the bottom of the boat she leant her arms against its side and her head against her arm, as if to sleep, and secretly wept.

Farewell, mountains springing from the waters and rising to the sky; rugged peaks, to any man who has grown up to your mists, and impressed upon his mind as clearly as the features of his nearest and dearest; torrents whose varying tones he can pick out as easily as the voices of his family; villages scattered over the slopes, like herds of grazing sheep, farewell! (...) Farewell, house that was still not hers; house at which she had so often glanced hastily in passing, not without blush; house in which the imagination had pictured a perpetual calm, unending life of married bliss.²⁰

¹⁹ Ann Radcliffe. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (2004). Penguin: London. Pages 155–156.

²⁰ Archibald Colquhoun (translation of). *The Betrothed*. (1959). M. Dent & Sons Ltd: London. Pages 111–112. Colquhoun created one of the most complete and precise translations of *I Promessi Sposi*.

The passage has remarkable poetical qualities in Italian due to the adaptation of prosody to prose. It contains a famous catchphrase, "Addio monti sorgenti dall'acque", which Italians learn starting from primary school. Most Italian scholars consider that the passage was influenced by Friedrich Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1801), following the ideas provided by Giovanni Getto.²¹ The die-hard prejudice against Radcliffe does not allow mainstream literary criticism to overcome biases and consider the importance of this female author for the development of literature in the decades following the publication of her accomplished novels. The passage from *Udolpho* was written seven years before Schiller's drama and it contains many more analogies with Manzoni than the German poet's short nostalgic monologue. Radcliffe's words clearly reveal the symmetry between the context of the two adolescent girls forced to abandon their cherished birthplace and to be parted from their love. They both leave after a dramatic night, forced by a difficult context. The cruel Montoni forces Emily to leave for Italy abandoning her fiancé Valancourt. Her anguish is increased thinking that she may not meet him again or go back to her treasured birthplace. Emily is explicit about her nostalgia and the suffering for her love, whereas Lucia is burdened by her oppressor's castle hovering in the landscape and on her mind. She is not able to express her love candidly, as Emily does, thus confirming her emotional reluctance (mirroring Manzoni's prudishness), which becomes blatant in the metonymy of the house representing Renzo and love.

Manzoni's genius is indisputable and he still plays a notable role in the history of literature. *The Betrothed* are a one of a kind masterpiece still intriguing readers after two centuries. Despite Manzoni's great and undisputed originality, the Gothic and Radcliffe played an important role in providing useful material for his unique creation, which he wilfully and adamantly kept secret. The influxes that we unveiled demonstrate the vast unrelenting influence of Gothic elements in literature and the latent but undeniable importance of Ann Radcliffe in the literary universe.

²¹ G. Getto. *Manzoni Europeo*. (1971). Mursia: Milano. His viewpoint is still accepted by Italian scholars, as Parisi's essay (mentioned in note 11) indicates.