'Ti ubbidirò, mio suddito o mio re': sado-masochism and male victimhood in Giorgio Manganelli

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Abstract

This thesis explores the work of Giorgio Manganelli (1922-1990), a member of the 1960s Italian neo-avant-garde, through a sado-masochistic reading. The existing literature has paid little attention to the areas of gender and sexuality in Manganelli's work, with the exception of some recent studies that emphasise the hetero-aggressive, sadistic drives underpinning his writings and highlight his construction of masculinity as self-sufficient and based on the exclusion of woman. These studies, however, fail to take into account Manganelli's insistence on tropes of self-victimisation and fantasies of self-shattering - as seen in *Dall'inferno*'s (1985) emblematic image of a male body tortured by a cannibalistic doll – as well as Manganelli's radical renunciation of authorial power and his depiction of the author as a 'slave' of language. One of the goals of this thesis is to answer the question: what is the meaning of the sado-masochistic motifs and of this logic of self-victimisation in Manganelli's work? Drawing upon the theories about the cultural meaning of masochism put forward by Gilles Deleuze (1967), Kaja Silverman (1992), David Savran (1998) and Nick Mansfield (1997), this thesis delves into the ambiguity and contradictoriness of Manganelli's treatment of gender power relations. This thesis also investigates sado-masochism in Manganelli as a means of relating to both readers and medium and evaluates the impact on Manganelli of Vladimir Nabokov, one of the authors who is most frequently associated with sadism and a point of reference for literary games based on the acting-out of power structures. On the one hand, my exploration of Manganelli's construction of a 'deviant', masochistic model of authoriality and subjectivity seeks to illuminate his ever greater self-consciousness with regard to the limits of the patriarchal models of creative engagement (related to notions such as authority and language ownership) as well as his attempt to release the self from culturally imposed identifications. On the other, I show that masochism and self-victimisation also function in his work as an oblique power strategy to recuperate authority and centrality.

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Declaration of originality

I declare that the thesis does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for another degree.

I declare that the thesis represents my own work except where referenced to other.

List of abbreviations

INF   *Dall'inferno*, 2nd edn (Milan: Adelphi, 2013)

DOS   *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma o del lettore e dello scrittore considerati come dementi* (Milan: Adelphi, 2017)

ET   *Encomio del tiranno: scritto all'unico scopo di fare dei soldi* (Milan: Adelphi, 1990)

H   *Hilarotragoedia*, 7th edn(Milan: Adelphi, 2011)

UL   *Un libro,* in *Ti ucciderò mia capitale*, ed. by Salvatore Silvano Nigro (Milan: Adelphi, 2011), pp. 60-86

NC   *Nuovo commento*, 2nd edn (Milan: Adelphi, 2009)

LP   *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo*, 5th edn (Milan: Adelphi, 2012)

Introduction

In a 1957 letter sent to his friend Giovanna Sandri, the then English teacher and aspiring writer Giorgio Manganelli outlines the mechanisms lying at the core of what he calls his 'pathological' behaviour:

> Mi sono accorto che quando mi comporto non dirò male – che sarebbe un giudizio morale – ma in modo patologico, io seguo assai da vicino il comportamento di mia madre: come mia madre, io mi lamento e accuso l'universo a puro scopo istrionico, per attirare l'attenzione su di me, e faccio la vittima per torturare e infierire sugli altri, riuscendo a fare il carnefice mentre mi atteggio a vittima.[1]

Manganelli recognises here how his self-victimising mises en scène provide a histrionic means to secure a central position and to control other people's behaviours, acting simultaneously as a victim and a torturer. These private reflections, written seven years before the publication of *Hilarotragoedia* (henceforth *H*) – the work that was to earn Manganelli literary fame and establish him as one of the most prominent writers of the 1960s Italian neo-avant-garde –, are of interest for the present study, as they foreshadow themes that were to be constantly invoked in his later writings: the logic of reversibility between victim and torturer as well as the self-victimisation as a power strategy.[2] This thesis investigates the artistic transfigurations of these persistent – though critically neglected – concerns, and explores the figure of the victim and sado-masochistic dynamics as central features in Manganelli's work and as the key to his texts' construction of masculinity.

This idea comes out of observing a structural and thematic commonality in his texts, made up of monologues of a fractured male subject, making a spectacle of itself, (pleasurably) tortured by multiple selves who exchange the roles of dominator and dominated. His texts, peppered with images of absent kings (for example in *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo*, 1977), empty thrones (*Dall'inferno*, 1985), twin relationships between tyrants and slaves (*Encomio del tiranno*,

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[1] Letter to Giovanna Sandri, 30 December 1957, in Giorgio Manganelli, *Costruire ricordi. 26 lettere di Giorgio Manganelli e una memoria di Giovanna Sandri*, ed. by Graziella Pulce (Milan: Archinto, 2003), p. 107.

[2] See full list of title abbreviations on p. 6.

1990), persistently question the philosophical master-subject and patriarchal notions of masculinity, which attach characteristics such as steadiness, unity, autonomy, agency and mastery to the male subject.[3] A paradigmatic example is the story 'Un re' in *Agli dei ulteriori* (1972). A self-proclaimed sovereign ('Che io sia Re, mi pare cosa sia da non dubitare') believes he controls everything and that things exist because he thinks them.[4] However, he starts to sense an external presence, a whistle like 'breath between perforated teeth', which is something he did not think of ('io non l'ho pensato').[5] At the end of the story, the King's only desire is to submit to his 'other': 'Purchè l'ordine sia chiaro, io ubbidirò; ti ubbidirò, mio suddito o mio re'.[6] One of the obsessive desires of the speaking subject of Manganelli's work is to reduce the self to 'the marginal' (like the protagonist of 'Bosco' in *La notte*: 'sebbene io sia qui, ai margini del bosco, del tutto irrilevante'), to 'nothing' (like the protagonist of 'Destarsi': 'invisibile a chiunque, invisibile a me stesso') and to the 'non-existent' (like the *commentatore fortunato* in *Nuovo commento*, who lives 'nei sobborghi della nonesistenza, [...] palesemente escluso dagli oneri delle pubbliche dignità').[7] However, Manganelli is also interested in the power that can be reaped from this position of exile and non-being, as in *LP*, where he hypothesises that the

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[3] Henceforth *LP*, *INF*, and *ET*. The concept of patriarchy was '[o]riginally used to describe autocratic rule by a male head of the family', but it 'has been extended to describe a more general system in which power is secured in the hands of adult men'. Michelle Meagher, 'Patriarchy', in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. by George Ritzer, Ryan J. Michael (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), pp. 441-42 (p. 141). As Maud Anne Bracke exposes, the concept of patriarchy is susceptible of criticism: 'potentially ahistorical or universalistic' and simplistic in its 'privileging of one system of oppression' over others. However, Bracke agrees with Valerie Bryson's remark that patriarchy is still 'a concept too useful to lose'. Maud Anne Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political. Feminism in Italy, 1968-1983* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 11. Valerie Bryson, 'Patriarchy: A Concept Too Useful to Lose?', *Contemporary Politics*, 5. 4 (1999), 311-24.

[4] Manganelli, *Agli dei ulteriori*, 3rd edn (Milan: Adelphi, 2009), p.13.

[5] Manganelli, *Agli dei ulteriori*, pp. 31 and 30.

[6] Manganelli, *Agli dei ulteriori*, p. 36.

[7] Manganelli, *La notte*, ed. by Salvatore Silvano Nigro (Milan: Adelphi, 1996), pp. 55 and 75. Manganelli, *Nuovo commento*, p. 79 (henceforth *NC*).

absence of the King 'non solo non cancella, ma rende intollerabile potenza il luogo che al Re appartiene' (*LP*, 12).

The master/slave dialectic is also central to Manganelli's representation of his authorial self. Partly influenced by the poststructuralist rethinking of the authorial function ('the death of the author', in Roland Barthes' popular slogan), Manganelli disavows the author's power, insisting instead on its passivity and irresponsibility: the writer is 'uno schiavo, un feticista di ogni più umile effato', who submits to and obeys blindly the hegemony of language (*NC*, 48). Also in this respect, the postulate of the author's symbolic absence, disempowerment and disqualification seems in contradiction with the overflowing authorial voice through which Manganelli tyrannically asserts himself. This ambivalence is observed also in Manganelli's treatment of gender relations, which alternates violent misogyny (especially in the first phase of his work) with images of enslavement to powerful females or omnipotent mother figures.

Sado-masochism and narratives of a victimised self will be considered in this thesis as far more than a psychic condition. In the letter to Sandri, Manganelli presents what seems to be an aspect of himself as an individual who bears the scars of faulty mothering, as he suggests there and elsewhere. However, instead of reading narratives of self-victimisation as peculiar to Manganelli, I suggest framing these in a broader cross-cultural narrative of male victimhood that became increasingly central after WWII. According to a number of scholars, the figure of the 'male victim' emerged in response to the challenges posed to traditional masculinity by neo-capitalism and commodity culture as well as by women's movements arising in the aftermath of WWII. According to David Savran, victimhood and masochism have become increasingly central in men's self-representations as these allow the male subject to still reclaim an authoritative position while positing itself as a victim.[8]

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[8] David Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, *White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). For an exploration of the meaning of the imagery of male crisis in the 1970 Italian context, see the study by Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

I thus understand sado-masochism in Manganelli's work as a cultural fantasy implemented to refashion masculinity in a period 'when the understanding of what it is to be a man undergoes a radical redefinition'.[9] I will investigate how the spectacle of male self-divestiture of traditional traits of patriarchal masculinity can also function as a power strategy to recuperate authority and centrality. On the one hand, the male's embrace of the subjugated position subverts traditional power dynamics among genders. On the other, the possibility of voluntarily delegating and abdicating power presupposes (and reproduces) male privilege. In this thesis, I examine both the subversive potential and the reactionary tendencies of this 'alternative' model of identity and sexuality in Manganelli's work.

The term 'masochism' was coined in the nineteenth century by psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing using the name of writer Leopold von Sacher Masoch, whose *Venus in Furs* (1869) portrays the dynamics between a dominant woman and a wilfully submissive male subject. The behaviour characteristic of male masochism, entailing the reversal of patriarchal sexual roles, was codified as a perversion by Krafft-Ebing and then as a neurosis by Sigmund Freud. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze depathologised the phenomenon, focusing on its aesthetic and cultural meaning. His *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967) reads the texts by Sacher Masoch as providing a fantasy arena for the formation of a 'new man', an alternative masculinity that can radically oppose male dominance.[10] While engaging with Deleuze's theory, this thesis also highlights its gendered limitations. Further developments of this literary and cultural approach to masochism provide this thesis' theoretical framework: following the frame employed by Richard Fantina, Chapter 1 surveys theories of literary masochism dividing them into two gender-political camps: theories of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' masochism.[11]

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[9] Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema*, p. 1.

[10] Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. by Jean McNeil, in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), pp. 9-138 (p. 52).

[11] Richard Fantina, *Ernest Hemingway: Machismo and Masochism* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2005), p. 44.

Deleuzian theory represents the primary benchmark for this thesis also in light of its pioneering view of masochism as a literary phenomenon with specific aesthetic features, which makes it ideally suited for understanding what can be defined as 'masochistic' in a literary context. While Chapter 1 subsumes key elements of Manganelli's aesthetic project under the masochistic aesthetic categories isolated by Deleuze, the last three chapters draw on the Deleuzian notion of the masochistic contract to analyse the sexual component involved in the power exchanges between author and reader. This element is flaunted by Manganelli starting from his literary debut, when he hails the reader as 'onesto masochista' (*H*, 61), and also thereafter, for example in *NC*, where Manganelli refers to his literary expedients as 'diletta crux per filologi masochisti' (*NC*, 107).

Literature on Manganelli has variably addressed the subject's divided self and its relentless flirtation with ideas of victimisation, (self)destruction, suicide and death. Scholars have highlighted the auto- and hetero-aggressive drives underpinning the author's writing: notably, while Arianna Marelli has engaged with the idea of the 'desire of death' in *H*, Mario Cianfoni has tackled the question of sadism and violence against woman, confining the investigation within the perimeter of Manganelli's earliest poetic experiences.[12] Despite some passing mentions of a masochistic tendency in Manganelli, no research to date has acknowledged the centrality of sado-masochism in his work, nor has

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[12] Arianna Marelli, 'La "volontà discenditiva" di Giorgio Manganelli: il desiderio di morte in *Hilarotragoedia*', *Between*, 3.5 (2013), http://ojs.unica.it/index.php/between/article/view/907 [accessed 28 October 2020]. Mario Cianfoni, '"Nel cafarnao delle carni": Il corpo tra sadismo e caducità nelle poesie di Giorgio Manganelli', in *Scritture del corpo: Atti del XVIII Convegno Internazionale della MOD 22-24 giugno 2016*, ed. by Marina Paino, Maria Rizzarelli, Antonio Sichera (Pisa: ETS, 2018), pp. 261-68.

provided insight into the meaning, scope and implications of the term.[13] To fill this gap, the present study will systematically apply this category to cast new light on the essential concerns of some of the most important and enigmatic texts by the author.

Before embarking on the main body of the analysis, let us take a step back turning to the traditional view on Manganelli and then to more recent studies that have laid the foundation for my understanding of his work. Manganelli distinguishes himself in the Italian literary landscape for his impudent paradoxes, rhetorical excesses and baroque style. Perhaps unparalleled among his contemporaries, Manganelli's fascination with semantic ambiguity and nonsense often situates his texts on the brink of illegibility.[14] Starting from the conception of language as 'sempre organizzazione. Di niente. Organizzazione di se stesso', Manganelli's fundamental literary tenet is that literature has nothing to say.[15] His theory of 'letteratura come menzogna' shows off the rhetorical status of literature and refutes the idea of a describable 'reality'. Manganelli has always provocatively and programmatically attempted to purge his texts of any concrete extra-textual reference, any 'idea', 'message' and obligation to bear social relevance, strenuously defending his right to talk about nothing. For this

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[13] Rebecca Falkoff mentions the term 'masochism' to describe the sexuality 'characterised by helplessness, resignation and frustration' emerging in *H*. See her 'Giorgio Manganelli and the Illegible Obscene', *Italian Studies*, 70.1 (2015), 131-47 (p. 146), http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1179/0075163414Z.00000000091, [accessed 29 December 2020]. Marco Belpoliti talks about the writer's 'perfetto masochismo' to capture the undercurrents of Manganelli's *corsivi*, where Manganelli's satirical whip strokes, apparently directed against the Italian mores, are ultimately turned against the self. See his 'Mamma mammifero' in Manganelli, *Mammifero italiano*, ed. by Belpoliti (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), pp. 131-47. Alessandro Gazzoli identifies in Manganelli's writings a masochistic '*delectatio amorosa* nella sofferenza' that connects the author to Leopardi and Pavese. See 'Auto Da Fé. Rileggere Giorgio Manganelli', unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, p. 74.

[14] For example, Rebecca West regards Manganelli's texts as 'both completely readable and totally unreadable, if by "reading" we mean both a surrender to language's hegemony and a battle to wrestle meaning'. See her 'Review: *La letteratura come menzogna*, *Dall'inferno*, *Laboriose inezie*, *Tutti gli errori*', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 4 (1986), 307-12 (p. 308).

[15] Quoted in Maria Corti, *Il viaggio testuale: Le ideologie e le strutture semiotiche* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), p. 151.

reason, the traditional view of Manganelli – encouraged by Manganelli himself – was to read his work as a bizarre formalist experiment and as pure exercises in style. However, more recent literature on Manganelli has found this reading unsatisfactory.

Linguistic experimentalism and the rejection of the neo-realistic aesthetics and models of socio-political commitment constitute the common ground between Manganelli and the other members of the literary movement known as 'Gruppo 63'. Given their understanding of language as 'fundamentally ideological' and reproducing power structures, the ambition of the neo-avant-garde intellectuals was that of demystifying language in order to bring social change.[16] Manganelli contributed to this problematisation of language but was less enthusiastic about the Gruppo's ambition to promote social progress. Rather, he took charge of promoting the neo-avant-garde's own self-critique. More than an 'outsider' to the group's dynamics, Manganelli was, as Maurizio De Benedictis puts it, 'una mina innescata nel covo stesso dei cospiratori': an oppositional force inside the oppositional group.[17] As Florian Mussgnug illustrates, if the purpose of the neo-avant-garde was unmasking the ideological falsifications of everyday language, Manganelli's position consisted in a challenge to 'every possible set of linguistic conventions', even those formed within the Gruppo 63 itself.[18] For Manganelli, literature must destabilise every attained state of affairs:

> La letteratura è per sua natura refrattaria a qualsivoglia
> coonestazione ideologica. […] nella sede dei possibili discorsi umani, è
> la frattura, lo scandalo.[19]

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[16] Lucia Re, 'Language, Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde', *MLN*, 119.1 (2004), 135-73 (p. 144), https://www.jstor.org/stable/3251726 [last accessed 24 December 2020).

[17] Maurizio De Benedictis, *Manganelli e la finzione* (Rome: Lithos, 1998), p. 55.

[18] Florian Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts: Giorgio Manganelli and the Afterlife of the Avant-Garde* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 27.

[19] Giorgio Manganelli, *Il rumore sottile dellla prosa*, ed. by Paola Italia (Milan: Adelphi, 1994), p. 77.

Despite Manganelli's adamant avowal of literary *disimpegno*, a growing body of literature has recognised various layers of cultural engagement in his work.[20] '[L]o scrittore che negli anni Sessanta ha teorizzato il disimpegno è in realtà un impegnato': this comment by Marco Belpoliti testifies to this critical revaluation of Manganelli's work.[21] It also seems to provide a definitive answer to the question that Giorgio Agamben dared to ask in 1999: 'Manganelli scrittore politico, dunque?'.[22] Agamben's hints at concepts of power and resistance, 'servilismo' and 'sedizione' are taken up in this thesis through the category of masochism, given its function as a an instrument of power based on manipulative and defiant submissiveness.[23] The present study seeks to contribute to this line of research by looking at the link between power and sexuality, focusing on how the sado-masochistic subjectivity that emerges in Manganelli's texts addresses the existing configuration of gender power relations.

Few studies have investigated Manganelli's treatment of gender and sexuality. Rebecca West supplies a key insight for this thesis by showing that in Manganelli's work 'desire reigns supreme', a desire that is fundamentally 'perverse', as his writings turn aside from any narrative end and from

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[20] For example, Marco Paolone has analysed Manganelli's engagement with psychoanalytic models, while Mussgnug with philosophical ones. Matteo di Gesù surveyed the relationship between Manganelli and Foucault and Federico Francucci has interrogated the theme of 'sovereignty' in Manganelli's work. See Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts*; Paolone, *Il cavaliere immaginale: Saggi su Giorgio Manganelli* (Rome: Carrocci, 2002); Matteo di Gesù, *La Tradizione del Postmoderno: Studi di Letteratura Italiana* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), pp. 80-87. Francucci, 'I libri non esistono: ma esiste il nostro farsi carne anche di loro. Giorgio Manganelli con una nota di Federico Francucci', *alfabeta2* (2015), https://www.alfabeta2.it/2015/05/16/i-libri-non-esistono-ma-esiste-il-nostro-farsi-carne-anche-di-loro/, [last accessed 23 April 2018].

[21] Belpoliti, 'Mamma mammifero', pp. 138 and 146.

[22] Giorgio Agamben, 'Introduzione' in Manganelli, *Contributo critico allo studio delle dottrine politiche del '600 italiano* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1999), pp. 7-18 (p. 17).

[23] Agamben, 'Introduzione', p. 12.

signification.[24] My analysis will show that the suspension of meaning and pleasure - and their replacement with a perpetual state of desire - represents the chief characteristic of the masochistic aesthetic and sexuality. As Deleuze shows, indeed, the masochistic experience consists in an endless postponement of narrative climax and sexual discharge.

Rebecca Falkoff provides another interpretation of Manganelli's illegibility, disengagement and *menzogna*: the refusal to establish a relationship with the reader and the text's infecundity in terms of meaning are related to a masturbatory sexuality based on the autarchic dream of male self-containment.[25] The autarchic model of subjectivity and masturbatory sexuality in Manganelli's writing is seen as the result of an 'indirect but enduring legacy of Italian fascism' and its autarchic economic policy.[26] Falkoff shows evidence of the persistent influence of the fascist autarchic discourse in Manganelli's texts by highlighting his 'interest in hoarding and squandering, the thematisation of parthenogenesis and masturbation, and theories of a language that bears no relationship to reality'.[27] Given the impossibility of language and literature's complete self-sufficiency, Falkoff resolves this contradiction arguing that Manganelli – despite his intentions – actually does relate to the reader, by forging a masculine alliance based on the exclusion of woman, which is cemented

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[24] Rebecca West, 'Desire, Displacement, Digression: Rhetorical Ramification in Giorgio Manganelli's *Amore* and *Tutti gli errori*', in *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and its Afterlife. Essays in Honor of John Freccero*, ed. by Dana E. Stewart and Alison Cornish, Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 317-328.

[25] Rebecca Falkoff, 'After Autarchy: Male Subjectivity from Carlo Emilio Gadda to the Gruppo 63', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

[26] Falkoff, 'After Autarchy', p. 1.

[27] Falkoff, 'After Autarchy', p. 2.

through the deployment of misogynist topoi and verbal aggression against the female body.[28]

However, rather than framing Manganelli's representations of masculinity as the remains of Italy's fascist past, my analysis looks at the intersection of new cultural forces in changing circumstances. I argue that Manganelli's masculine representations and aesthetic formations accommodated new anxieties and desires specific to the post-war period, when the fascist ideals of virility were culturally challenged and the meaning of masculinity went through a radical rethinking. I will highlight the influence on Manganelli of narratives of masculine victimhood and counter-cultural discourses critiquing the authority of patriarchal values of masculinity. Although Falkoff never explicitly uses the term 'sadism', I think that, similarly to Cianfoni, she illuminates aspects of the sadistic drive in Manganelli. Indeed, violence, the desire for self-sufficiency, the negation of the mother can be aligned with sadism.[29] The sadistic framework however fails to take into account when Manganelli posits himself as a self-destructing victim, as well as his radical renunciation of authorial mastery and power. Furthermore, both Falkoff and Cianfoni focus only on the first phase of Manganelli's *oeuvre*. By contrast, the present study also looks at more mature works, accounting for the shift in legibility that according to many scholars characterises Manganelli's works from the 1970s. I argue that this corresponds to a shift in the model of relationality and in his treatment of gender relations.

Giorgio Biferali shares Falkoff's interest in analysing Manganelli's relationship with women, although a completely different picture emerges from the two analyses of similar matter.[30] He argues that the main thematic concern of Manganelli's texts – *nulla*, lack of being – is another word for love. Biferali

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[28] Falkoff's view is supported by Bellassai's remark according to which the representation of bonds among men as 'the highest possible level of human relations' was a constant motif in fascist rhetoric. This representation was 'laden with an exasperated misogyny' and autarchic fantasies: 'real men do not need women'. Sandro Bellassai, 'The masculine mystique: antimodernism and virility in fascist Italy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10.3 (2007), 314-35 (p. 323).

[29] For Deleuze, the Sadean founding fantasy is the negation of the mother (*Coldness*, p. 60).

[30] Giorgio Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli: Amore, controfigura del nulla* (Rome: Artemide, 2014).

underlines how for Manganelli love is absence, waiting, and a form of torture: a 'privato strumento di tortura', as Manganelli writes in *Amore*.[31] In the same way as love, also writing is a torture: the author is a 'vittima sacrificale delle proprie parole' and plays a passive role in the writing process.[32] By contrast, Falkoff's study on the elisions operated by Manganelli in the drafts of *H* in order to make his text impenetrable suggests a hyper-controlled use of language. Whereas Biferali highlights Manganelli's surrender to language and to the unconscious and a lack of control over his words, Falkoff demystifies Manganelli's techniques to retain power over his texts and underlines his violent use of language. While Biferali's stress is on the self-loss in the Other, Falkoff stresses the denial of otherness.

I suggest that both interpretations capture only one moment of a more ambivalent and complex dynamic. Although both authors recognise this ambivalence, nevertheless their interpretations revolve around one of the two facets – Falkoff the hetero-aggressive, sadistic position and Biferali the auto-aggressive, masochistic position.[33] It must be noted that also Marco Paolone emphasises textual moments when Manganelli assumes the role of the self-sacrificing victim, reading this aspect alongside René Girard's notion of the 'scapegoat mechanism'. For Paolone, Manganelli assumes the Girardian 'signs for the selection of victims' – clowning, theriomorphic forms, abnormality, melancholy, death – and refuses to project aggression outwards, onto a 'bersaglio esterno'.[34] This leaves unproblematised the violence against woman underlined by Falkoff and Cianfoni. The two aspects (aggression and self-

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[31] Giorgio Manganelli, *Amore* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1981), p. 59.

[32] Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 14.

[33] For example, Biferali analyses the figure of the 'autodistruttore', making a comparison between Manganelli and Cesare Pavese. Pavese describes this figure as characterised by features that are typical of the masochist: the enjoyment of self-degradation, utilitarianism, theatricality and self-control: 'L'autodistruttore è un tipo, insieme disperato e utilitario. L'autodistruttore si sforza di scoprire entro di sé ogni magagna, ogni viltà […] ricercandole, inebriandosene, godendole […] L'autodistruttore è soprattutto un commediante e un padrone di sé'. Cesare Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere*, quoted in Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 82.

[34] Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, p. 52.

aggression) cannot be looked at separately, and their coexistence can be appreciated through a sado-masochistic perspective.

Finally, Gilda Policastro addresses the centrality of the mother figure in Manganelli's writing by looking at the influence of Manganelli's psychoanalyst Ernst Bernhard and his theories on the archetype of the 'Great Mediterranean Mother'.[35] Bernhard saw in the Italian prototype of motherhood a source of symbolic power and oppression responsible for the deficiencies in the 'Italian character'. Policastro identifies three strategies implemented by Manganelli in his works to free himself from the complex of the Great Mother: repression, matricide and appropriation of maternal prerogatives. Also Belpoliti shows that this maternal complex lies at the core of Manganelli's analysis of the Italian national character in his journalistic pieces.[36] Both Belpoliti and Policastro fail to provide a critique of Bernhard's essentialist set of assumptions on gender, which remain by and large unchallenged. This thesis on the other hand frames the construction of the Great Mediterranean Mother figure in the wider context of the *mammismo* discourse that in the post-war years blamed motherhood for the emasculation of men. I will argue that Bernhard's idea of a weak masculine principle related to pernicious mothering is the main channel through which notions of victimised masculinity will find expression in Manganelli.

An analysis of Manganelli's negotiation of male subjectivity through a sado-masochistic perspective allows us to take into account Manganelli's irreducible contradictoriness. On the one hand, in Manganelli's universe, woman is threatening and has to be excluded because inevitably associated with the traumatic relationship he had with his mother. His texts display the need to exclude woman and protect the self from a sphere that he associates with

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[35] Gilda Policastro , 'Madri/Inferni', in *Giorgio Manganelli*, *Riga* 25, ed. by Belpoliti and Cortellessa (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 2006), pp. 378-94. Ernst Bernhard, 'Il complesso della Grande Madre. Problemi e possibilità della psicologia analitica in Italia', in *Mitobiografia* , trans. by Gabriella Bemporad (Milan: Adelphi, 1969), pp. 168-79.

[36] Belpoliti, 'Mamma mammifero'.

feminininity which he perceives as menacing.[37] On the other hand, his work shows evidence of the opposite need to free the self from culturally imposed identifications. These include constraining gender categories which Manganelli frequently manipulates, reverses and hybridises. I will interrogate Manganelli's understanding of literature as a space of de-subjectification that can oppose the 'ideological abuse' hidden in normative identities.[38] The question is: if literature is 'per sua natura refrattaria a qualsivoglia coonestazione ideologica', does this critique of dominant ideologies also extend to gender categories and phallogocentrism?[39]

Given the ambiguity of Manganelli's treatment of gender, the overarching question that weaves a fil rouge through the various chapters of this thesis is whether Manganelli's masochistic disavowal of power was a tactic deployed for subverting the patriarchal ideology of masculine power and privilege, or for securing it. What kind of 'new man', what model of reconstituted masculinity emerges from Manganelli's obsequious embrace of victimisation and submission? Far from portraying Manganelli as a conscious champion of progressive views on gender, this thesis rather understands sado-masochism in Manganelli primarily as

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[37] Femininity and masculinity are socially constructed categories whose meanings are not fixed, but vary depending on historical period, culture, social class, ethnicity. These are disentangled from biological sex but masculinity is traditionally ascribed to man and femininity to woman. When I write about the feminine in Manganelli, I refer to a set of stereotypes conforming to patriarchal constructions of femininity that he often attaches to the female figures in his texts. As it will be discussed later on in this thesis, these stereotypes include sexist notions associating women with infidelity (e.g. the *donna infedele* in *H*), death, lack (e.g. the *Madre-strega* bringer of death in *LP*), otherness, abject (e.g. the *genitali di femmina* in *Un libro*, both source of attraction and horror).

[38] I borrow Barthes' use of the term 'ideological abuse' to indicate the way in which the assumptions of Western mythologies are passed off as universally true. See his *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday, 1991).

[39] This question was first posed with regard to the neo-avant-garde members by Re. Although she does not consider the specific case of Manganelli, she makes the general argument that the neo-avant-garde missed the opportunity to extend its ideological critique of the bourgeois and neo-capitalist discourses to the question of gender: they 'seemed to want to rethink and undermine all traditional polarities except that of gender'. See her 'Language, Gender and Sexuality', p. 154.

a tortuous tactic to reaffirm male power. However, it also argues that we can still appreciate moments when texts by Manganelli deform and exceed gendered binaries.

In the first part of the thesis, I focus on two works by Manganelli – *Un libro* (1953-1955) and *Dall'inferno* (1985) – chosen as these help single out two different forms in which the male victim logic is implemented in Manganelli's texts: the 'sacrificial' paradigm and the structure of the masochistic 'total subject'. In the first model the feeling of a threatened masculine identity triggers rejection and abjection of what is perceived as other (woman). In the second model, in line with the theories of Nick Mansfield (1997), the male victim subscribes to the seemingly opposite logic of identification and incorporation of all its others within the self.

In the second part of the thesis, I analyse Manganelli's treatment of sadomasochism as a means of relating to the reader, who is engaged in sexual/textual sado-masochistic games organised around power and desire. I argue that Manganelli shaped artistically his anxieties regarding changes in author-reader power relations in the world of mass culture and of the culture industry. Now subjected to the law of supply and demand, the author is no longer 'autonomous' nor the 'creator' of the meaning of the text, but assumes the new function of establishing and enacting a sadomasochistic relationship with the reader. One of the objectives is to evaluate if the sado-masochistic models of relationality that Manganelli establishes with the reader can illuminate new ways in which sado-masochistic fantasies or practices can operate in a critical fashion and unsettle the kinds of exclusionary forms on which patriarchy rests.

Chapter 4 investigates the hermeneutic 'training' which led Manganelli to develop his model of author-reader sado-masochistic relationship, by evaluating the impact on Manganelli of Vladimir Nabokov, one of the authors who is most frequently associated with sadism and a point of reference for literary games based on the acting-out of power structures. In Chapter 5, I show that in *Nuovo commento*, the author rejects being the master of his speech and assumes the humiliated, subordinated position that Nabokov designs for his readers, wearing

the mask of the 'perverse reader' lost in an interpretative paranoia. Based on Susan Suleiman's work (1990), I show that Manganelli's renunciation of authorial mastery does not mean a renunciation of violence against the reader and woman. In Chapter 6, building on the idea of sado-masochistic role play, I analyse *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo*, a text that dialogues with Carlo Collodi's children's literature classic. I argue that in this text Manganelli tried – in part successfully - to find a way out of the solipsistic, closed horizon that the male victim logic so often entails.

Chapter 1   Manganelli and Theories of Male Masochism

In *Dall'inferno* (1985), an otherwise unspecified but identifiably male 'I' realises that he is probably dead and possibly in hell.[1] The peculiarity of his infernal condition is that he is pregnant with a female doll:

> Avverto nel mio addome la bambola che si accomoda [...]. Apro gli occhi, la bambola è sempre nel mio corpo. Ridendo mi sussurro: sono gravido. (*INF*, 23)

This *bambola* is characterised as a cannibalistic intruder who, feeding on the male character's entrails and then defecating them, transforms his abdomen into her 'cibo e latrina' (*INF*, 23). Despite the tortures inflicted by the doll, the narrator ultimately acknowledges his attachment to her tyranny: 'tirannia che non oserei contrastare, che anzi mi è cara' (*INF*, 110). Indeed, he realises: 'il supplizio che mi infliggono i suoi denti [...] ora [è] la forma della mia vita' (*INF*, 103). He would not tolerate being deprived of the shape and order this *supplizio* provides, to the point that he starts to wonder if he is in love with her ('forse l'amo') and ponders the feasibility of marrying her (*INF*, 103).

A masochistic economy of desire characterises this 'perverso e inverso e introverso coniugio' (note that *coniugio* can also mean 'marriage', *INF*, 25). Indeed, this fantasy seemingly satisfies the ultimate desire of the masochist, who, according to Gilles Deleuze, through the contract with a dominant figure seeks to reproduce the wholeness and plenitude of the relation with the mother

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[1] The narrator uses the masculine endings to refer to himself, like in the example 'sono gravido'.

experienced during the oral phase.[2] On the one hand, in this assemblage, the fantasy goal of fusion with the mother is accomplished in a literal way. On the other, while the doll is an internalised representative of the tyrannising oral mother, Deleuze's model is complicated as the maternal role is appropriated by the male character. Thus Manganelli creates an impossible, labyrinthine situation where the subject is both mother and son. Rather than a symbiosis founded in any law sanctioned by nature, it is an irrational symbiosis *de facto*:

> così la chiamai, simbiosi di fatto, intendendo, con tal formula, sottolineare come essa fosse priva di basi biologiche, ed anzi fisiologicamente infondata. (*INF*, 25)

Their peculiar concubinage infringes the taboo of incest: 'probabilmente noi eravamo […] un incesto, […] il nostro convivere andava dalla violazione dell'ordine teologico della natura al deforme vizio' (*INF*, 28). 'Probabilmente' echoes the idea that the symbiosis is 'de facto': Manganelli is flagging up that the relation is off the cultural map. This fantasy also fulfils the masochistic desire to be powerless and produce the self as an object: by presiding over his body, the doll turns the male narrator into a puppet, a 'burattino manovrato dall'interno' (*INF*, 134).[3] The desire for submission and obedience is emphasised throughout the text: 'Dammi un ordine. […] Ubbidisco. Da gran tempo desideravo un ordine; desideravo sperimentare l'ubbidienza' (*INF*, 67-68).

A number of elements point strongly to the possibility of interpreting the exchanges between the two characters as governed by the masochistic contract

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[2] Deleuze argues that 'the specific element of masochism is the oral mother'. See his *Coldness*, p. 55. As Gaylyn Studlar explains in her discussion of Deleuze's construct of masochism, in Deleuze's view, at the oral stage the mother is an ambivalent figure: given the helplessness and impotence of the child, the mother is not only a source of comfort, but also a tyrannising figure holding absolute power and authority. Gaylyn Studlar, 'Masochism and the perverse pleasures of the cinema', *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 9.4 (1984), 267-82 (p. 269), https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208409361219 [last accessed 26 April 2018]. It is possible that in order to recreate the blissful union with the mother, the masochist recreates the condition of complete dependence and subjugation in which s/he experienced it.

[3] According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the masochist attempts to produce itself as an object: 'I refuse to be anything more than an object. I rest upon the Other'. See *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Haxel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 491-93.

outlined by Deleuze, which entails not only the victim's consent to submission but also the victim's educative and persuasive function: 'we are dealing [...] with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade, and conclude an alliance with the torturer'.[4] The male victim of *INF* cannot think about himself outside his victim role:

> [La bambola] mi ha totalmente divorato dall'interno. E tuttavia non negherò che in qualche modo mi riesca difficile pensare a me stesso senza includere nella definizione di me stesso anche questa tortura. (*INF*, 105)

He is willing to confer on her this power over himself and be complicit in his enslavement: 'io non solo non mi rifiuto, ma collaboro al mio volto di vittima'(*INF*, 105). The male subject, ruminating on the meaning of his victimhood, concludes:

> Supponiamo che io mi conosca come vittima [...] In tal caso io dovrò andare in cerca del carnefice, e se lo incontrerò dovrò supplicarlo di esercitare su di me le sue arti, e gli consiglierò di essere non già giustiziere, dalla mano rapida e pietosa, ma torturatore, lento, metodico e paziente. (*INF*, 104-05)

The subject here is portrayed as the 'victim in search of a torturer' who has to instruct the dominator about the way in which it wants to be tortured. As often remarked, the paradox of masochism is that, since the victim confers the power to the master, ultimately it is the victim who holds real power. The master proves to be a mere facilitator of the victim's desire for submission and objectification.[5] For this reason, Carol Siegel notes that, if read within the Deleuzian paradigm, the male masochist is in actual fact the 'puppet master', while the powerful female is reduced to a 'doll-like torturer' (a simile that resonates with the imagery in *INF*).[6]

INF is not the only text by Manganelli where we can find the paradigmatic narrative of the (willed) subjection of a male protagonist to a female

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[4] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 20.

[5] Nick Mansfield, *Masochism: The Art of Power* (London and Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), p. 17.

[6] Carol Siegel, *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 111.

dominatrix. This can be identified also in the power dynamic between Pinocchio and the Fairy as it is shaped by Manganelli in *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo* (1977) (the similarity between the figures of the doll and the Fairy has also been highlighted by Graziella Pulce).[7] While the Fairy is depicted as a 'madre Strega' cruelly abusing her educational role on Pinocchio, all the tortures the puppet endures are 'sevizie che egli stesso si è propiziato' (*LP*, 52). Manganelli's Pinocchio fits the model of the victim in search of persecutors, propelled as he is by his 'totale vocazione alla sofferenza' (*LP*, 52). More in general, in Manganelli, the feminine and maternal power is often portrayed as a deity to offer oneself as sacrifice.[8] For example, in *Catatonia notturna*, written in 1965, the narrator is subjected to a process of 'cottura': 'Notte' is a nocturnal and feminine divinity who (like the doll in *INF*) tortures, squashes, burns and dismembers the passive subject in order to make him 'mangiabile'.[9]

Another example can be seen in the short story 'Il caso del commentatore fortunato' in *Nuovo commento* (1969), where a *commentatore* orchestrates his own murder at the hands of the three women he is surrounded by: his wife, stepdaughter and the sister of his wife's previous husband.[10] This reading is supported by the earlier drafts of 'Il caso del commentatore fortunato' available at the 'Centro Manoscritti' in Pavia. In the first draft, the wife is characterised by a 'violenza predatoria, tenero cannibalismo' to which the commentator

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[7] Graziella Pulce, 'Manganelli e i classici: incontro con l'enigma' in *Le foglie messaggere: Scritti in onore di Giorgio Manganelli*, ed. by Viola Papetti (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2000), pp. 58-71 (pp. 62-63).

[8] The theme of the mother as Goddess is informed by the archetype of the 'Great Mediterranean Mother' developed by Manganelli's psychoanalyst Enrst Bernhard, to which I will return later on in this chapter.

[9] Graziella Pulce, 'Mangiare la Notte', *Alfabeta2* (2015), https://www.alfabeta2.it/2015/05/16/mangiare-la-notte/, [accessed 28 January 2018].

[10] The *commentatore fortunato*, intrigued by the three adjectives ('affranta', 'in lacrime', 'costernata') written in the death notice of the deceased sculptor Federico H. by his wife, stepdaughter and sister, decides to write a commentary about Federico's death. In his research, the commentatore goes as far as stealing the identity of Federico by marring his wife and living with the three women. At the point of death, he realises that what he was writing was actually a commentary upon his own death.

happily surrenders. When the *commentatore* realises that he had been poisoned by his wife, he is filled with 'una grande felicità. Ho mangiato come non mai di buon appetito'. In the third draft, he exchanges with his wife a glance of complicity ('credo di aver guardato Anna con allegria, forse maliziosa complicità').[11]

Though less explicitly, various passages of the published version evoke the original construction of the cruel, controllling, woman: 'le tre donne insieme disegnavano una macchinazione minutamente meditata' consisting in the 'rituale che adorna l'abolizione dell'uomo' (*NC*, 80 and 89). The male passivity and impotence still feature prominently in the published version: in his itinerary, the commentator '[n]on sa più se venga sospinto di spalle, allettato d'innanzi, se la terra si acceleri sotto i suoi passi' which correlates with the fact that his commentary proceeds '[c]on autonoma proliferazione' (*NC*, 89).[12] However, rather than being under the domination of the three women or of fate, the commentator is actively seeking his own destruction: as Italo Calvino notes, the commentator 'scopre di cercare nient'altro che la propria morte'.[13] The fact that Federico H. (whose identity is appropriated by the *commentatore*) is a sculptor of statues of female goddesses might be read as epitomising the idea that the male protagonist is the real fabricator, the moulder of the three women's actions and of his destiny, thus that he is a manipulator rather than a victim.

INF's multi-layered image encapsulates this contradictory set of forces and can thus be taken as a point of reference for this doctoral thesis, whose aim is to investigate the sado-masochistic dynamics in Manganelli's oeuvre, focusing on

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[11] Giorgio Manganelli, *Nuovo Commento*, typewritten drafts at Pavia, Fondo Manoscritti, PV_CM_MAN (O), MAN-01-0058 and MAN-01-0062.

[12] Valentina Cajani observes how the subjugation to the three women in the earlier versions is progressively replaced by the emphasis on being at the mercy of fate. For Cajani, in the last versions, fate becomes the real protagonist of the story, giving an additional nuance of meaning to 'caso' in the title ('case' and 'fate'). Valentina Cajani, *Per Giorgio Manganelli. 'Nuovo commento': indagine filologica, stilistica e retorica* (unpublished undergraduate thesis, University of Pavia, 1997-1998).

[13] Italo Calvino, 'Lettera a Manganelli di Italo Calvino' in Manganelli, *Nuovo commento*, p. 151.

the relations between sado-masochism and the question of gender. Indeed, '[m]anipulating gender categories is one of [masochism's] most important types of play'.[14] For this reason, according to many theorists, masochism is a cultural fantasy as well as a political strategy that has the potential to unsettle patriarchy. However, this project starts instead from a more nuanced and ambiguous view of masochism as offering 'contradictory opportunities'.[15] This view is shared by Michael Uebel who cautions that 'like any tool for change, masochism can be put to both progressive and regressive uses, deployed as a political tactic for utopian change and, conversely, for cultural entrenchment and even gender violence'.[16] Siegel echoes this remark when she notes, referring to Deleuze's theory of masochism, that it 'can attract a feminist reader because he envisions the body of the male masochist as the site of *both* the subversion of patriarchal law and its confirmation'.[17]

The example from *INF* can illustrate the double bind between the smashing of gendered binarisms and their substantial reproduction. At a first glance, in the pregnant male-doll assemblage sexual and gender categories are subverted: not only does the male character appropriate the female sexual prerogative of pregnancy, but also the gendered binaries subtending patriarchal thought seem to be subverted. Indeed, the patriarchal alignment of maleness with activity, dominance and wholeness versus that of femaleness with passivity, submission and lack is unsettled. However, one might observe how the male character, through the tortured mise-en-scène of his victimisation and abasement, actually remains the narrating core and never questions his centredness . According to Nick Mansfield, 'contrary to the post-structuralist logic of dispersal of the

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[14] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. xii.

[15] Torkild Thanem and Louise Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud and Deleuze: toward a queer theory of masochism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2.1 (2010), 1-10 (p. 8), https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v2i0.4642, [accessed 29 October 2020].

[16] Michael Uebel, 'Masochism in America', in *American Literary History*, 14.2 (2002), 389-411 (p. 397), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3054576 [accessed 26 July 2019].

[17] Siegel, *Male Masochism*, p. 111 (emphasis in original).

subject, the masochist never decenters himself without simultaneously centering and strengthening himself'.[18]

1.1 Deleuze's model of masochism and Manganelli's formal strategies

Manganelli's creative engagement can be located in a cross-cultural discussion focused on both the articulation and dissenting critique of constructions of normativity and deviance. In 1967, Deleuze's ground-breaking study on masochism *Coldness and Cruelty* relocates masochism from the pathological to the aesthetic realm. For the first time, masochism is understood as an artistic form, with a whole new language having the potential to disrupt dominant cultural forms. These subversions include gender norms, as the male masochist willing to confer power to the female subverts 'the expected patriarchal position of power/powerlessness, master/slave'.[19]

Deleuze's model of masochism has to be understood as part of a precise political project, aimed at identifying in non-conventional practices opportunities to subvert the bourgeois system and male dominance. Although Deleuze draws on psychoanalysis, he does not consider masochism a psychological condition. As Mansfield stresses, for Deleuze 'culture comes first'.[20] Deleuze locates the etiology of masochism during the oral phase, before the Oedipal one, in order to stress the role of the mother as the primary source of authority and influence for the child. Since masochism entails the alliance with an authoritative and powerful female image, Deleuze uses it to construct a mythology that can radically oppose male dominance. Deleuze constitutes masochism as the female dominion par excellence where 'femininity is posited as lacking nothing'.[21] This challenges the structure of the patriarchal symbolic order that, as Kent Brintnall

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[18] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 10.

[19] Studlar, 'Masochism', p. 268.

[20] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 70.

[21] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 68.

explains, 'repudiates the notion of lack for the male subject by displacing it onto the female subject'.[22]

Deleuze's aim was to produce a 'reversal, if not a parody, of the Freudian project'.[23] He opposed classical psychoanalytic discourses that perpetuated patriarchal structurations of male wholeness against female lack. Indeed, for Freud, the female signifies castration because she lacks a penis. Similarly, Lacan's notion of 'Phallus', a reworking of the Freudian account of castration, can be still regarded as an 'attempt to secure a privileged function for paternal authority'.[24] To make masochism fit into his Oedipal theories of female lack and male plenitude, Freud maintained that the female figure beating the submissive male in the masochistic fantasy actually represented a father-surrogate. Deleuze dismantles the Freudian construction of masochism, showing that in the masochistic universe, the phallic[25] power of the father is expelled and the oral mother becomes an alternative source of authority.[26]

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[22] Kent Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 69.

[23] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 70.

[24] Unlike Freud, for Lacan, the penis is not the Phallus. Shoini Chaudhuri describes the Phallus as 'the emblem of positive values within the Symbolic order; in patriarchal cultures those values are identified with male power'. The Phallus symbolises the wholeness that is unattainable for both women and men. Indeed, for Lacan, symbolic castration is universal and is at the heart of every subjectivity. Castration derives from the access to language, which exists before us and masters all of us: 'we forgo any possibility of wholeness when we become subordinated to a discursive order that precedes us and speaks for us'. Despite the universality of castration, 'masculinity is formed through an imaginary or illusory identification with the Phallus'. See Shoini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 49 and 107. As Kent Brintnall explains, Lacan's interpretation of castration still 'reveals a longing for the father to rescue the subject from the chaos and alienation generated by the (m)Other's desire' (*Ecce Homo*, p. 95). Brintnall explains that in Lacan, the maternal is always already deprived of the Phallus, thus associated with the idea of lack, whereas the paternal 'represents an always-deferred promise of fulfillment', and thus is associated with an idea of plenitude. (*Ecce Homo*, p. 97).

[25] 'Phallic' involves 'narcissistic fantasies of oneness, of ecstatic plenitude, of unlimited power and authority'. Anthony Elliott, *Subject to Ourselves: An Introduction to Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Postmodernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 17.

As Gaylyn Studlar points out, in the Deleuzean masochistic dyad, the female – as representative of the powerful oral mother – is not defined by lack of penis, but by the possession of what man lacks: the womb and breasts are the sources of her power.[27] For Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, the discrimination against women, rather than being – as Freud argues – a 'natural' consequence of the 'horror' at the discovery of mother's castration, is related to the 'dependence on the omnipotent mother' and to this 'terrifying maternal image' maintained in the unconscious.[28] In sum, more than because she is castrated, woman is terrifying as a castrator. Chasseguet-Smirgel underlines that acknowledging the infantile dependence and maternal cathexis is essential to opposing the patriarchal system, because it also means acknowledging an authoritative and powerful female image radically opposed to that proposed by patriarchal thought.

Deleuze insisted that masochism is a technique of political resistance. He underlined that in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus and Furs* (1870), masochism is linked to 'the place of ethnic minorities in society and the role of women in those minorities: masochism becomes an act of resistance'.[29] This resistance is manifested in the form of 'masochist humour': a 'militantly explosive derision' of symbolic forms of authority, which in the patriarchal

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[26] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 70.

[27] Studlar, 'Masochism', p. 271.

[28] Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Female Sexuality. New Psychoanalytic Views* (London: Karnac Books, 1992), pp. 112-13. Chasseguet-Smirgel explains that 'the woman as she is depicted in Freud is exactly opposite of the primal maternal imago […] as she is known to the Unconscious'. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, 'Freud and Female Sexuality: The Consideration of Some Blind Spots in the Exploration of the Dark Continent', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 57 (1976), 275-86 (p. 283).

[29] Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 142.

society are incarnated in the father.[30] While femininity lacks nothing, 'the father is nothing – said Deleuze – he is deprived of all symbolic functions'.[31]

However, many scholars have noted that Deleuze's reversal of patriarchal positions remains trapped in gender binarism, with the male on the bottom and the female on top.[32] Even if Deleuze states that actually both male and female can occupy the submissive position, the top position is fixed: the dominatrix is a woman.[33] Moreover, since the top holds power only insofar as the submissive confers power over him/herself, this proves to be only a 'false masque of power'.[34] This is why Deleuze's model has been regarded as sexist. Even so, scholars like Studlar have developed further some theoretical tools implicit in Deleuze's model, convinced that these may offer a way out of the patriarchal distribution of power.

Before proceeding to examine further elaborations on the political implications of masochism, it is important to discuss Deleuze's reflections on the masochistic aesthetic in literature, which prove to be illuminating when applied to Manganelli's work. As previously stated, Deleuze professes not a clinical but a 'literary approach' to masochism, which is for him an 'essentially formal' phenomenon.[35] Indeed, masochism manifests pre-eminently in literary discourse and form. The 'discovery' of the phenomenon itself took place through the engagement of psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing with the fictional works of the author Sacher-Masoch.[36] The relationship between masochism and literature

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[30] Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Post-feminist' Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 155.

[31] Deleuze, *Coldeness*, p. 64. Deleuze argues that what is beaten and punished in the submissive is the likeness to the father, p. 60.

[32] Thanem and Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud', p. 5.

[33] Deleuze, *Coldeness*, p. 68.

[34] Thanem and Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud', p. 5.

[35] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 73.

[36] Mansfield explains that Krafft-Ebing regarded masochism as 'a version of literature': for the psychiatrist, 'the essence of masochism is not so much the enjoyment of pain as the "drama" of subjection. This subjection is experienced in a fictional form'. Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 2.

was also advocated by Freud, who commented that in masochism he saw 'the impulsion to artistic and theatrical display'.[37] Deleuze insists on the literariness of masochism, arguing that what we must consider in Masoch are first of all 'his contributions to the art of the novel'.[38] Deleuze argues that '[i]t is no exaggeration to say that Masoch was the first novelist to make use of suspense as an essential ingredient of romantic fiction'.[39] Suspense is thus for Deleuze the chief feature of the masochistic aesthetic, together with fantasy, theatricality, disavowal and what he calls 'the form of the contract'.[40]

This constellation of formal elements resonates surprisingly well with the formal patterns underlying Manganelli's texts. In particular, suspense and waiting are an essential aspect in Manganelli's work. Gino Baratta figures Manganelli's writing in terms of 'delay' and 'pause': 'Manganelli: dottissimo nei frenamenti, nei rallentamenti', and Luigi Matt argues that: 'nell'opera di Giorgio Manganelli l'orizzonte dell'attesa ha un'importanza fondamentale', more specifically the 'attesa allo stato puro' deprived of a final goal.[41] This is the essential characteristic of the masochistic experience, which consists in a constant postponement of pleasure: '[f]ormally speaking, masochism is a state of waiting; the masochist experiences waiting in its purest form'.[42] One of the most recognisable elements of Manganelli's style, his 'scrivere oscuro', based on contradictoriness and semantic ambiguity, results in a programmatic suspension

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[37] Sigmund Freud, *Five Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 44.

[38] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 53-55. On the literariness of masochism see David Sigler, '"Read Mr. Sacher-Masoch": the Literariness of Masochism in the Philosophy of Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze', *Criticism*, 53.2 (2011), 189-212 (p. 193).

[39] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 33.

[40] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 73.

[41] Gino Baratta, *Miraggi della biblioteca* (Milan: Shakespeare & Co, 1986), p. 99. Luigi Matt, 'Forme dell'attesa nella scrittura di Giorgio Manganelli', in *L'attesa: forme, retorica, interpretazioni: Atti del XLV convegno interuniversitario Bressanone 2017*, ed. by Gianfelice Peron and Fabio Sangiovanni (Padua: Esedra, 2018), pp. 309-20 (p. 310).

[42] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 71.

of the 'meaning' of the text which can be gauged against Masoch's ability to 'push [...] the language to the point of suspension'.[43]

Waiting is also explicitly thematised in the short stories of *Centuria*: in 'Sessanta', a man is waiting for the document attesting his existence; in 'Trentasette', a man feels a 'lieve, ma indubitabile piacere' because the woman he was expecting did not turn up at their appointment; 'Dieci' figures a train stop where people go to wait for their death; in 'Sei', a man is waiting for a phone call, although he does not know which one and if it will ever take place; the most representative short story is 'Trentatré', where we find an 'appassionato dell'attesa' who hates punctual people because they deprive him of the pleasure of waiting:

> Ama proporre appuntamenti in luoghi riparati, ad esempio portici, che gli consentono di camminare a lungo, di gustare qualsiasi dilazione, con il lento piacere di un padrone che attende gli ospiti, nel mezzo di un giardino. Di fatti, durante le attese, egli diventa il proprietario dell'angolo, della strada, del luogo designato all'incontro.[44]

Waiting produces pleasure because the man ultimately feels that he is in control, he can act as the 'master' of every designated meeting place.

The idea that the reader must masochistically experience waiting provides the structure for *Encomio del tiranno: Scritto all'unico scopo di fare dei soldi* (1990). The underlying mechanism of *ET* consists in the repeated fuelling of the reader's desire for narratives by hinting at a number of possible stories which are always kept suspended and never completed. Provoked by the author – 'Già sei impaziente. Già speri che a ogni girar di pagina io cominci a raccontare' –, the reader experiences a state of anticipation of a story and incessant deferral of libidinal gratification: 'no, non ti racconterò la storia' (*ET*, 76 and 68).

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[43] The concept of 'scrivere oscuro' generated a public controversy in 1976 between Manganelli and Primo Levi, after the latter's publication of an article entitled 'Dello scrivere oscuro'. Manganelli replied criticising Levi and fiercely defending literary obscurity in his 'Elogio dello scrivere oscuro', published in *Corriere della Sera*, 3 February 1977 (now in *Il rumore sottile*, pp. 36-39. Primo Levi's essay was published in *La Stampa*, 11 December 1976 (now in *Opere*, II, ed. by Marco Belpoliti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 676-81. Deleuze, *Essays Critical*, p. 53.

[44] Manganelli, *Centuria: cento piccoli romanzi fiume* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1979), pp. 71-72.

Manganelli's 'perversion' of the basic conventions of narrativity (for example the need of a story to find a closure able to provide sense and meaning) through these dynamics of blockage of speech and infinite deferral of narrative climax find an analogue in the deferral of orgasm in masochism.[45]

The mechanism, which is brought to paroxysm in *ET*, is also at work in various forms in the other texts by Manganelli. *NC*, for example, as Florian Mussgnug points out, 'presents us with beginnings that do not presuppose a meaningful end, with micronarratives that are suddenly interrupted, and with unexpected endings without final authority'.[46] The structuring principle of *LP* is also similar to that identified in *ET* although more complex. As the title suggests, the purpose of *LP* is to look for other senses that run parallel to the literal meaning of Pinocchio's fairytale, in order to discover all the 'parallel stories' that remained untold in Collodi's text. However, like in *ET*, the parallel stories are just alluded to, but never told. Indeed, in Manganelli's mind,

> una storia per essere psicologicamente tollerabile deve restare a mezz'aria, possibilmente a mezza frase, magari a metà parola. Ma, per cortesia, non fatele finire. (*ET*, 63)

In *Hilarotragoedia*, the text is literally left 'a mezz'aria': not only its smaller units (several 'Treatises', 'Introductions', 'Dossiers' and 'Notes') abruptly interrupt one another but the text as a whole is left mutilated. The last words announce the formulation of an hypothesis: 'In proposito, si potrebbe avanzare

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[45] Arianna Marelli shows that Manganelli subverts the most basic narrative and cognitive models identified by Frank Kermode in *Sense of an Ending* (1967). Marelli notes that Manganelli reverses Kermode's 'Sense' and 'Ending' in their opposites: '*Nonsense* e *Neverending*'. See her 'Giorgio Manganelli tra "opera aperta" e "opera chiusa"', *SigMa - Rivista di letterature comparate, teatro e arti dello spettacolo*, 1 (2017), 149-69 (p. 164). Florian Mussgnug shows the implications of Manganelli's play with sense and ending for the reader. By quoting Peter Brooks, he shows that the reader of Manganelli's texts 'experiences the fear – and the excitation – of the improper end, which is symmetrical to – but far more immediate and present than – the fear of endlessness'. See Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 153 and Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 109.

[46] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 153.

la seguente ipotesi:' (*H*, 143). However, the hypothesis is left untold, as the colon is followed by the empty page.

The endless proliferation of mutually exclusive hypotheses is another distinguishing feature of Manganelli's writing that can be read as a strategy of suspension of language. The hypothetical process, which for Edoardo Sanguineti embodies 'il procedimento di base della sintassi mentale del Nostro', leads neither to accepting nor rejecting the conjectures, because what matters is guesswork *per se*, as Manganelli declares presenting himself at the first meeting of the Gruppo 63: 'Signori e signore, l'importante è proporre delle ipotesi'.[47] *Rumori o voci*, a text that expands the possibilities already explored in the 'hyperhypothetical' piece presented at the Gruppo 63 founding meeting, hinges upon this mechanism: Manganelli impedes the relief of the classical narrative denouement and replaces it with a prolonged state of tension determined by an inconclusive succession of hypothesis. As Filippo Milani notes, in this text,:

> Ipotizzare su ipotesi innestate su altre ipotesi [...] [tiene] sempre elevato il livello di 'suspense' e di ambiguità che sposta in avanti l'orizzonte d'attesa del pubblico. L'ipotesi, infatti, è l'attività su cui si fondano i romanzi gialli e polizieschi, nei quali tutta la tensione si concentra sulla plausibilità di certe ipotesi fino allo scioglimento finale con lo svelamento del colpevole. Senza svelamento, invece, la tensione e l'attesa restano irrisolte.[48]

Interrupted stories and narrative freezing are visible also in Manganelli's first literary experiments, like those collected by Salvatore Silvano Nigro in *Ti ucciderò mia capitale* (2011); for example, in 'Appunti di un uomo disorientato' (written in 1960), an author wanders among different literary cues in a

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[47] Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Universo di Manga', in *Riga*, pp. 226-28 (p. 228). Manganelli, 'Hyperipotesi', foreword to Manganelli, *A e B* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975), pp. 7-11.

[48] Filippo Milani, *Retorica come dissimulazione: Il ritmo della prosa manganelliana* (doctoral thesis, Alma Mater Studiorum, Bologna, 2012), p. 164.

'disseminazione narrativa' which disrupts all the potential emerging plots.[49] The author is aware of the self-sabotaging nature of his writing operation: 'inizio e scarto, provo, e intanto mi svio'.[50] Manganelli's repudiation of fictional narrative appears to be integral to the masochistic aesthetic: according to David Sigler, 'the resistance to narrative is a crucial aspect of masochism – it is its intrinsically literary aspect'.[51]

Rhetorical devices also contribute to leaving the reader in a state of suspension. For example, the reader remains unsure whether they are reading a favourable or bad review of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* since the author is defined by Manganelli 'delizioso e irritante', 'cordiale, unghiuto', 'domestico o feroce'.[52] The oxymoron is Manganelli's privileged figure of speech because it holds two opposite terms in tension so that the 'meaning', endlessly oscillating between the two extremes, is left suspended.[53] Rebecca Falkoff has also noted Manganelli's peculiar use of metaphors, which are 'characterised by the suspension of vehicle and tenor and by their refusal to transport'.[54] In this way, Manganelli reaches the suspension between literal and figural.

Matt identifies instead in the digression and in the rhetorical device of the hyperbaton the formal elements that hypostasise the category of suspense.[55] A particular form of hyperbaton, defined by Matt as '*hyperbaton interruptus*',

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[49] See the following example: 'Vi sarebbe una storia da scrivere sul gatto bianco e sciocco di mio cugino: un gatto stupido, una cosa unica; è una storia in cui si potrebbe mettere dolore cosmico come zucchero nel caffè; e c'è la bambina che diventa cieca, al primo piano; una bambina religiosissima (…) c'è la signora innamorata del marito, e che ha anche l'amante… Una ninfomane dotata di buoni sentimenti: pensate quale stupenda tragedia…'. Manganelli, *Ti ucciderò mia capitale*, ed. by Salvatore Silvano Nigro (Milan: Adelphi, 2011), p. 94. The words 'disseminazione narrativa' are used by Baratta, *Miraggi*, p. 99.

[50] Manganelli, *Ti ucciderò*, p. 94.

[51] Sigler, '"Read Mr. Sacher-Masoch"', p. 204.

[52] Manganelli, *La letteratura come menzogna* (Milan: Adelphi, 1985), p. 63.

[53] Milani, *Retorica*, p. 87.

[54] Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 66.

[55] Matt, 'Forme dell'attesa', pp. 315 and 317.

occurs when the subject does not find its predicate because the writer suddenly changes his mind and starts another sentence, as illustrated in the following example:

> Dunque le parole – vorrei precisare che Laocoonte rappresenta la sconfitta eccetera, ma in quanto figura è anche il segno della loro indistruttibilità. Potevo cancellare 'dunque le parole', ma le parole mi intimidiscono. Preferisco trattarle con vergognosa adulazione perché se le parole si sottraggono sono finito. [...] Dunque le parole. Chissà che cosa voleva dire, penserà il candido lettore. Macché; volevo solo dire 'pensa le parole' con un soggetto implicito, ma ho scritto 'dunque le parole'. Qui si perde tempo.[56]

In the excerpt above, it can be noted that Manganelli makes the reader self-conscious of their desire for meaning ('Chissà che cosa voleva dire') which will be held in suspension and never satisfied ('Qui si perde tempo'), just like what happens in *ET*. The fact that Manganelli's texts construct this kind of self-conscious reader implies, as Matt notes, that 'chi affronta la scrittura di Manganelli è invitato a provare piacere per l'indugio'.[57]

Manganelli does not limit himself to making allusions to the fact that the reader should experience pleasure in waiting, but, already in his literary debut, much more explicitly baptises the reader as 'onesto masochista' (*H*, 61). He thus makes very clear that his texts posit as a necessary precondition for reading a reader willing to be complicit in a masochistic exchange. The fact that the readerly response fantasised by Manganelli involves masochistic pleasure does not necessarily make him a sadist, especially if, as Richard Fantina stresses, 'we accept that sadism and masochism do not represent binary opposites'. Instead, as Fantina emphasises, 'in much fiction, an empathic relationship occurs between the work of art and the audience'.[58] Accordingly, Manganelli lures readers into accessing his linguistic universe, as he declares in an interview: 'il linguaggio è per me una tecnica di adescamento per far sì che anche altri vivano

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[56] Manganelli, *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma, o del lettore e dello scrittore considerati come dementi* (Milan: Adelphi, 2017), p. 194.

[57] Matt, 'Forme dell'attesa', p. 320.

[58] Fantina, *Ernest Hemingway*, p. 20.

nel mondo verbale in cui vivo'.[59] This 'mondo verbale', as I am trying to demonstrate here, is characterised by a masochistic aesthetic and enjoyment.

The reader's complicity in the masochistic relationship is linked to another crucial element of masochism enlisted by Deleuze to which Manganelli's texts conform: the form of the contract. Deleuze foregrounds that Sacher-Masoch himself composed elaborate contracts in which he defined his relation with his 'torturer'. I will return to this in chapter 6, where I will show that in the case of *LP* we can aptly talk about a Deleuzian masochistic contract because the author exhorts the reader to 'do violence' to the text with their arbitrary interpretations, following the way in which Masoch's Severin instigates his own enslavement to Wanda. At the same time, the author also gives the reader rules and instructions on the manner in which the text expects to be 'beaten' into submission.

My argument here is that Manganelli has a specific sado-masochistic mode of dealing with issues of authorial and readerly power and textual ownership. While professing his radical enslavement to language and thereby disavowing his authorial power, Manganelli reasserts his control over the text by forging masochistic alliances with the reader. The masochist contract replaces the contract of communicability between author and reader. Back covers are a privileged space in which Manganelli forges this masochistic complicity with the reader. As Grazia Menechella attests, Manganelli had the atypical habit of writing his own back covers and, when possible, took part in decision-making on editorial contents such as formats and illustrations.[60] This intervention on the paratextual material reveals a desire for authorial control that seems to contradict Manganelli's statements on authorial submission and passivity. Indeed, for Gérard Genette, the paratext is 'a privileged place' for exerting an

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[59] Manganelli, *La penombra mentale Interviste e conversazioni 1965-1990*, ed. by Roberto Deider (Rome: Editori riuniti, 2001), p. 181.

[60] Grazia Menechella, *Il felice vanverare: Ironia e parodia nell'opera narrativa di Giorgio Manganelli* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002), p. 217.

'influence on the public' and – here Genette quotes Philippe Lejeune – 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text'.[61]

In her survey of Manganelli's back covers, Anna Trocchi reaches the conclusion that the image of the reader emerging in the back covers is that of a 'lettore masochista'.[62] She notes that in this zone designated for the encounter between the production of the text and its reception and consumption, Manganelli's treatment of the reader is often irreverent, even diminishing. She reports various examples of ironic insults addressed to the reader, insolently apostrophised 'catatonico di provincia' in *Sconclusione* (1976) and 'illetterato' and 'analfabeta' in *Lunario dell'orfano sannita* (1973). Another example is the blurb to *Centuria,* which recommends the best way to read the book: jumping off a skyscraper with as many floors as the number of lines in the book. While the suicidal reader transits past their window, readers lined up on each floor should read in a loud voice the line assigned to each of them. The reader, thus 'insulted, ridiculed and even killed off' can either 'enter into complicity with Manganelli, or [...] turn away, knowing full well that the books inside will provide [them] with little escape or comfort'.[63] Indeed, this special treatment is not confined to the paratextual material, but extends to the texts themselves: an example is found in *NC*, where the author appeals to readers calling them 'pigra e sconcia carovana dei leggenti' (*NC*, 13).

Manganelli is able to simultaneously display his loss of authority and reassert it thanks to another element of masochism identified by Deleuze that I would like to discuss here: the masochistic disavowal. For Deleuze, behind the masochist's disavowal of his own power lies the disavowal of the father's likeness, the

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[61] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2. Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 45.

[62] Anna Trocchi, 'Le quarte di copertina e i risvolti autografi di Giorgio Manganelli', in *Le foglie messaggere*, pp. 166-83 (p. 179).

[63] Rebecca West, 'Before, Beneath, and Around the Text: The Genesis and Construction of Some Postmodern Prose Fictions' *Annali D'Italianistica*, 9 (1991), 272–92, www.jstor.org/stable/24003393 [accessed 8 January 2021].

'phallic inheritance'.[64] The expulsion of the father from the symbolic realm finds a literary analogue in Manganelli's exclusion from the symbolic realm of literature of the author as 'creator' and 'owner' of his text. Manganelli excludes the generative function of the author, who is never a point of origin of the meaning of the text:

> Si suppone che una certa parola, scelta dall'autore, come per comodità diciamo, abbia il senso che quel tal signore abbia voluto. Insensatezza più insensata non potrebbe darsi. [...] direi che le parole hanno tutti i sensi meno quell'unico che eventualmente qualcuno abbia cercato di 'mettervi'. (*LP*, 44)

Manganelli enthusiastically abnegates himself as an author, preferring instead titles such as *buffone*, 'diligente scriba' (*H*, 105), 'libellista' and 'verbiscalco', (*DOS*, 109) and euphemisms such as *scrittore di libri paralleli*. Like the protagonist of '(Pseudonimia)[2]', Manganelli questions the authoriality of his oeuvre. In this short story, a man finds out from an acquaintance that a book has been published under his name. Since the man was not aware of having written the text, he suspects that he has incurred in a case of *pseudonimia quadratica*, which 'come tutti sanno, consente di usare uno pseudonimo assolutamente identico al nome autentico'.[65] As Trocchi notes, the author – passive, irresponsible and colonised by language – can only be anonymous, or pseudonymous at most.[66]

The masochistic disavowal of one's own power is linked to another fundamental characteristic that Deleuze derives from Theodor Reik: 'the "demonstrative" or, more accurately, the persuasive feature (the particular way in which the masochist exhibits his suffering, embarrassment and humiliation)'.[67] Some passages in Manganelli display self-awareness regarding the exhibitionism that inheres one's own victimisation: this is particularly evident when the speaking

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[64] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 66. Studlar, 'Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetic', *Journal of Film and Video*, 37.2 (1985), 5-26 (p. 8).

[65] Manganelli, '(Pseudonimia)[2] in *La notte*, pp. 11-14 (p. 12).

[66] Trocchi, 'Le quarte di copertina', p. 167.

[67] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 75.

subject in *NC* defines himself as a 'chiassoso esibitore della sua stessa inaudita miseria' (*NC*, 27).

By condemning notions of authoriality related to phallic authority and ownership, and instead emphasising lack, language dispossession and passivity, Manganelli tacitly rejects the traditional standards of masculinity. At the same time, if, according to Deleuze, the element that animates the masochist is 'the abolition of the father's likeness and the consequent birth of the new man', we might ask what kind of 'new man' emerges from Manganelli's embrace of victimisation and passivity.[68] Later in this chapter, I will review some of the most influential studies on the cultural meaning of masochism. These theories can provide us with a platform from which to discuss the form that this 'reconstituted male subjectivity' assumes in Manganelli's text.[69] Is the blockage of (male) pleasure and male speech oriented toward the overcoming of male privilege or toward its reassertion?[70]

Before proceeding, it is necessary to highlight those aspects of Deleuze's model that do not entirely apply to Manganelli's work and to make some terminological clarifications. So far, my analysis has revealed that Manganelli's texts bear a strong formal and thematic resemblance to Deleuze's illustration of the masochistic aesthetic in literature. However, this approach is not convincing when it comes to Deleuze's assertion of the incompatibility of masochism and sadism. One of the main aims of Deleuze's *Coldness and Cruelty* was to argue against the view of psychoanalysis that sado-masochism is an unitary phenomenon. In Freud's early elaborations in 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes'

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[68] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 101.

[69] I borrow Kaja Silverman's phrase arguing that masochism can represent a 'model for a radically reconstituted male subjectivity'. See her *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 16.

[70] I wrote 'male pleasure' because the idea of pleasure that the masochist subverts is informed by Freud's pleasure principle, that as Sally Robinson states, has the 'focus on male heterosexual release'. Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 13.

(1915), sadism is a primal instinct, a requisite for the preservation of life,[71] while masochism is its 'passive counterpart' and the effect of sadism turned back on the subject.[72] Later on, in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924), Freud develops his idea of a 'primary masochism' which differs from 'secondary masochism' defined as the reintrojection of sadism. Although Freud rectified his early perspectives, he still found a close connection between sadism and masochism.[73] Instead, Deleuze wants to restore the image of masochism and show its progressive potential, therefore he protests against the idea that sadism and masochism are interwoven and asserts that they are completely different formations.[74]

According to Deleuze, sadism and masochism 'represent parallel worlds, each completed in itself, and is both unnecessary and impossible for either to enter the other's world'.[75] Deleuze explains the incompatibility between the two thus:

> a genuine sadist would never tolerate a masochistic victim [...] Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer. He does of course need a special "nature" in the woman torturer, but he needs to

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[71] Indeed, as Leo Bersani points out, 'to survive in any environment requires a degree of invasive intent with respect to that environment'. See his 'Foucault, Freud, Fantasy, and Power', *GLQ*, 2 (1995), 11-33 (p. 23),
https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/bersanifoucaultfreudfantasypower.pdf
[accessed 28 August 2019].

[72] Freud, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', in *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. by Margaret Ann Hanly (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 90-103 (p. 91).

[73] In 'The Economic Problem', Freud presents primary masochism as one of the organism's most fundamental drive consisting in an original fusion inside the organism of the libido and the death drive. Freud also suggests that the origin of primary masochism resides in the 'infantile physiological mechanism' of reacting with sexual excitation when something of 'considerable importance' occurs: 'in the case of a great number of internal processes sexual excitation arises as a concomitant effect, as soon as the intensity of these processes passes beyond certain quantity limits'. However, for Freud, this approach is flawed because it 'throws no light on the regular and close connection of masochism with its counterpart in instinctual life, sadism'. Freud, 'The Economic problem of Masochism' in *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. by Hanly, pp. 274-85.

[74] Fantina, *Ernest Hemingway*, p. 22.

[75] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 68.

> mould this nature, to educate and persuade it in accord with his special project, which could never be fulfilled with a sadistic woman [...] The woman torturer of masochism cannot be sadistic precisely because she is in the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy.[76]

However, as Lorrain Markotic observes, acknowledging that there is a specificity to sadism and to masochism which makes the two realms discrete does not mean that sadism and masochism are mutually exclusive as Deleuze maintains or that 'one will not find expressions of sadism [...] within the masochistic realm'.[77] Actually, for Markotic, the lines above by Deleuze show that the masochist 'ineluctably controls and constrains others': the woman in the masochistic situation is 'moulded' and used as an instrument for the realisation of the male's fantasy.[78] As Sartre has shown, indeed, while attempting to realise his desire of self-objectification, the masochist 'treats the other as an object'.[79] For this reason, Markotic concludes that a 'sadistic tendency inheres in masochism', and that what the masochist disavows is in fact this recourse to sadism.[80]

In this thesis, I will often adopt the term 'sado-masochism' instead of proposing a rigid separation of sadism and masochism as Deleuze did. This choice is not only dictated by the limitations to the Deleuzian theory emphasised above, but also by the fact that Manganelli's texts themselves often reveal a co-presence of sadism and masochism. As Mario Cianfoni's analysis confirms, the first phase of Manganelli's work exhibits a pronounced sadistic tendency, with violent language and horror for the female body.[81] This tendency persists also in later works by Manganelli, where, as I will point out in my analysis of *NC*, aggression toward the

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[76] Deleuze, *Coldness*, pp. 40-41.

[77] Lorraine Markotic, 'Deleuze's "Masochism" and the Heartbreak of *Waiting*' in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 49.4 (2016), 21-36 (p. 23).

[78] Markotic, 'Deleuze's "Masochism"', p. 23.

[79] Since the other is used as an 'instrument' to fulfil the masochist's desire, 'in seeking to apprehend his own objectivity, [the masochist] finds the Other's objectivity, which in spite of himself frees his own subjectivity'. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 491-93.

[80] Markotic, 'Deleuze's "Masochism"', p. 23.

[81] Cianfoni, 'Nel cafarnao delle carni'.

female body and self-aggression are often co-implicated. It should also be highlighted that the speaking subject in *Un libro*, who explicitly defines himself: 'sono un masochista', explains the origins of his self-hatred in similar terms to that used by the early Freud: destructive impulses and hatred directed outwards cannot be suppressed but only redirected against the self (*UL*, 75). For these reasons, although the scenarios, figures, processes and aesthetic of Manganelli's texts resonate with Deleuze's constructions of masochism, Deleuze's model cannot be applied in its entirety as it seems inappropriate to rigidly separate masochism from sadism in Manganelli's work.

Another terminological clarification concerns this thesis' focus on 'male' masochism. It is necessary here to specify that masochism is not gender specific. As Mansfield puts it, '[m]asochism is not implicitly masculine or implicitly feminine, but historically, it has been dominated by men'.[82] As already mentioned, it was first isolated as a distinctive phenomenon in literature, in the novels by Sacher-Masoch, where a male character looks for a female dominatrix. The discourses on masochism produced by Krafft-Ebing and Freud forged the popular understanding of the phenomenon, and both have a gendered characterisation. These descriptions rely on the unthinking binary identification of passivity with femininity and activity with masculinity. For both Krafft-Ebing and Freud, masochism is interesting as a perversion only in men, as in their minds, submission and passivity are essential, 'natural' features of femininity. Krafft-Ebing writes that:

> In woman –– voluntary subjection to the opposite sex is a physiological phenomenon. Owing to her passive role in procreation and long-existent social conditions, ideas of subjection are, in women, normally connected with the idea of sexual relations.[83]

For Krafft-Ebing, masochism is 'a normal manifestation' in women, thus it is not worth pathologising unless these physiological features are abnormally exaggerated.[84] As previously mentioned, also Deleuze's account of masochism

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[82] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. xii.

[83] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopatia*, p. 137.

[84] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopatia*, p. 138.

proves to be sexist: although his model contains the potential for the female in the submissive position, indeed, the top position is fixed (always female) because of the link with motherhood.[85]

My analysis of 'male' masochism does not seek to suggest that masochism is a specifically male phenomenon nor that there is an essence of masculinity and femininity. On the contrary, this thesis proceeds from the assumption that, as David Savran explains:

> Gender is always an imaginary identification. It is based not on an allegedly universal sexual dimorphism but on fantasy. For as feminist biologists have demonstrated, sexual dimorphism is itself not a 'fact of nature' but a historical and social construction.[86]

As Judith Butler has famously argued, gender is 'performative'. This means that there is no 'prior and original gender': it is only because we repeatedly perform gender traits that we perceive them as 'natural' and 'normal'.[87] I argue that masochism is not a specifically male phenomenon but a cultural fantasy that, in a historical period – starting from WWII – which is characterised by a radical rethinking of what it means to be a man, has offered strategies to reimagine and redefine masculinity and construct new models of manhood. As I will show in the next section, cultural fictions depicting males as masochistic victims after WWII provided a performative space for men where anxieties about their masculinity could be handled.[88] My approach to male masochism thus rests on the notion

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[85] Amber Jamilla Musser, 'Masochism: A Queer Subjectivity', *Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies Research*, 17 (2005), [n.p.] https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wgss/17, [last accessed 20 July 2020].

[86] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 8.

[87] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 125.

[88] I am buiding here on Sergio Rigoletto's analysis, which does not focus esplicitly on masochism, but explores the meaning of the imagery of male victimhood in the 1970s in his *Masculinity and Italian Cinema*, p. 32.

that masculinities are socially and historically contingent, constantly re-configured, and stabilised via performance.[89]

1.2 The cultural meaning of masochism and the figure of the 'male victim'

One of the goals of this thesis is to attempt to answer the question: why sado-masochism? Why are sado-masochism and a logic of self-victimisation such central features in Manganelli's work? Although I will draw on some psychoanalytic concepts, I do not consider sado-masochism in Manganelli as a psychological condition whose causes are to be sought within his personal history. Rather, I read it as a socio-culturally determined fantasy, drawing in this regard on the theories about the cultural meaning of masochism put forward by Gaylyn Studlar, Kaja Silverman, David Savran, Sally Robinson and Nick Mansfield. From these cultural and ethical interrogations on masochism emerges that masochism has become a prevalent cultural fantasy around which a new model of masculinity has been socially constructed. Fantina divides these studies into two categories: those who find masochism socially progressive (which we might call the 'theories of progressive masochism') and those who see masochism as employed in the name of retrograde causes ('theories of reactionary masochism').[90]

I will briefly review the main arguments made by scholars to support the view that masochistic practices can upset male supremacy. As we have already seen, it was Deleuze who first insisted on the idea that masochism is a cultural phenomenon and a potential strategy of political resistance. After Deleuze's rethinking of masochism, theorists started to associate it with a progressive politics offering possibilities for change in social power distribution.[91] Studlar's *In the Realm of Pleasure* (1988), while focusing on the application of Deleuze's theories on the aesthetic of masochism to film studies, offers insights that go beyond the aesthetic realm. Studlar suggests that 'in masochism, the power

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[89] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, p. 106.

[90] Fantina, *Ernest Hemingway*, p. 44.

[91] Uebel, 'Masochism', pp. 394 and 406.

plays of sexuality are made explicitly theatrical and ritualised so that their naturalness is exposed as a construct'.[92] By exposing gender identities as a 'put-on', as characteristics that can be reversed and shared among subjects, masochism shows that heterosexuality, femininity and masculinity are not one's deep essence. As Brigitte Peuckerand notes, Studlar's insight 'anticipates some of Butler's arguments concerning queer sexuality'.[93]

This argument by Studlar is consistent with Leo Bersani's observation that non-normative sexual practices 'make[...] the centre visible'.[94] Making compulsory heterosexuality and the hierarchical opposition between male and female visible also means disputing their 'claim on naturalness and originality'.[95] Not only do so-called counterpleasures make patriarchy, and what Butler calls the 'heterosexual matrix', visible, but also allow a temporary retreat from it. Chasseguet-Smirgel, for example, argues that conterpleasures have a political and utopian force because they allow a suspension of the world as it is and 'give an inkling to a new world'.[96] Non-conventional fantasies can introduce ruptures and unsettle the patriarchal ideology since it is precisely fantasy that 'makes an ideological construct seem real to the subject'.[97]

Studlar also emphasises the link between masochism and the 'wish to be both sexes – to *overcome* sexual difference'.[98] She adds that the 'freedom of

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[92] Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 52.

[93] Brigitte Peucker, 'Un-Framing the Image. Theatricality and the Art World of Bitter Tears', in *A Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, ed. by Brigitte Peucker (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 352-71 (p. 367).

[94] Bersani has observed, referring to pornography, that 'the margins may be the only place where the center becomes visible' in his 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October*, 43 (1987), 197-222 (p. 215), https://www.jstor.org/stable/3397574, [accessed 25 July 2019].

[95] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 125.

[96] Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, 'Perversion and the Universal Law', *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 10 (1983), 293–301 (p. 293).

[97] Britnall, *Ecce Homo*, p. 74.

[98] Studlar, 'Masochism', p. 277 (emphasis in original).

identification' in the masochistic scenarios might be the indication of 'the wish to cross the polarised gender-role stereotypes fostered by a patriarchal society'.[99] By locating the etiology of masochism in the oral stage and by describing the masochistic desire as a wish to merge with the maternal body, Deleuze emphasises that the masochistic wish is to reconstruct the wholeness of a non-differentiated state. Indeed, the oral phase is before the access to language and before the fundamental distinction of self/Other: at this stage, the baby still does not have a fully developed bodily ego and boundaries with the maternal body are blurred. Building upon Studlar, Torkild Thanem and Louise Wallenberg conclude that the masochistic desire to become one with the mother can be read as the desire to overcome difference, to return to a pre-genital phase where sex and gender are irrelevant.[100] Thanem and Wallenberg call attention to the fact that the masochistic disavowal of sexual difference is a challenge to the whole symbolic system, as 'sexual difference, according to psychoanalytical theory, constitutes the basis of [...] the Symbolic'.[101]

Another significant cultural study on male masochism that emphasises its politically subversive potential is Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), where the scholar explores masochism as a 'model for a radically reconstituted male subjectivity'.[102] She does so by probing into Hollywood post-war films that feature 'marginal' and masochistic male subjects renouncing their privilege and power. Male masochism is for Silverman one way of exposing the fictive quality of 'phallic' or normative masculinity and countering what she names the 'dominant fiction'. This is the system of beliefs and images through which 'a society establishes consensus about its "reality"'.[103] According to Silverman, the Western dominant fiction 'depends

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[99] Studlar, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 12.

[100] Thanem and Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud', p. 8.

[101] Thanem and Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud', p. 8.

[102] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 16.

[103] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theory*, p. 119. As Chaudhuri explains, Silverman uses the term 'dominant fiction' to emphasise the fictive and 'ideologically-distorted' character of patriarchy, p. 107.

upon the preservation of two interlocking terms: the family and the phallus'.[104] The belief in the family and in the penis/phallus equation (thus the association between masculinity and wholeness and femininity with lack) allows the male subject to identify with power and privilege.[105] Silverman advocates the idea that masochism represents a challenge to patriarchy because masochistic fantasies provide narratives of manliness permeated by such characteristics as 'castration, alterity, and specularity' that the patriarchal thought excludes from its representation of masculinity.[106]

As Shohini Chaudhuri illustrates, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* represents Silverman's intervention into the area of investigation of the so-called 'crisis in traditional masculinity'. The concept of 'masculinity in crisis' refers to the 'Western' representation of white heterosexual men as 'victims' of the transformations caused by feminist and gay liberation movements and by the shift to a post-industrial economy.[107] Silverman identifies in the World War II a traumatic historical event which brought men into 'such an intimate relation with lack' that it smashed their identifications with phallic ideals.[108] In Silverman's utopian project, images of male masochism suggest that 'the typical male subject, like his female counterpart, might learn to live with lack'.[109] However, even Silverman proves to be uncertain about the success of the masochistic revolt against the patriarchal order (or 'dominant fiction') and recognises the 'double nature' of masochism: 'masochism in all of its guises is as much as a product of the existing symbolic order as a reaction against it'.[110]

The characteristics that the dominant fiction excludes from its representation of masculinity (castration, loss, alterity, etc.) are the expression of the denial in

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[104] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 48.

[105] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, p. 107.

[106] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 3.

[107] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, p. 105.

[108] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 55.

[109] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 65.

[110] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 213.

the Western culture of 'the masculine subject's share in mortality'.[111] Indeed, in *Flesh of my Flesh* (2009), Silverman argues that in the 'Western imagination', death – while being a fundamental experience shared by every subjectivity – is denied for the masculine subject by associating it with the feminine.[112] For Silverman, one of the 'ur-narratives of Western subjectivity' is the myth of Orpheus who returns to earth without Eurydice and 'attempts to rid himself of his mortality by feminizing it'.[113] Following this argument, masochism could provide a deviant model of masculinity because the male masochist embraces the dimension of death, finitude, vulnerability and uncertainty upon the denial of which traditional masculinity is predicated.

Proclaiming Manganelli 'progressive' in his views on gender appears rather far-fetched. It should be noted that Manganelli is not the kind of author to offer 'pronouncements' on feminism or changing gender roles. The only explicit 'pronouncement' on the matter is filtered by his daughter Lietta Manganelli, who portrays him as a misogynist. According to Lietta, Manganelli once said: 'essendo misogino, non posso non adorare le femministe, perché si fanno del male da sole'.[114] Despite this, the author's texts offer manifold lenses through which we can look at gender, and I will try not to smooth over the complex reality that contradictory views coexisted in Manganelli. My analysis will thus stress Manganelli's sustained probing of the 'tyrannical' nature of language and social categories, including gender ones. As we will see in detail in the next

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[111] Brintnall, *Ecce homo*, p. 97.

[112] Kaja Silverman in *Flesh of my Flesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 5. The expression 'Western imagination' is used by the author.

[113] Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, p. 5 and p. 69. According to Silverman, the feminisation of death is one of the techniques through which death has been denied in Western culture. The association of the feminine with finitude and loss is linked to the child's loss of the maternal body: the mother inevitably teaches the lesson of death. This exposes the mother to the accusation of 'betrayal' sustained by the 'tacit belief that she [mother] *could* satisfy our desire if she *really* wanted to', p. 94.

[114] 'Giorgio Manganelli, il teppista della letteratura. Francesco Verso intervista Lietta Manganelli dicembre 2008' in *Oblique Studio* (2009), p. 3, http://www.oblique.it/images/interviste/manganelli_intervista_19gen09, [accessed 29 September 2020].

chapters, writing is understood by Manganelli as a process of decomposition of identity. Also in this regard then, a parallel can be made with Deleuze, as for both writing is a 'technolog[y] of desubjectification'.[115] This radical critique of identity and anti-essentialist views seem to verge on Butler's notion of queer: I will show how in Manganelli's texts, gender and sexual categories are often manipulated and displaced to the point of their collapse. Thus, while making visible Manganelli's reiteration of misogynistic stereotypes, I will also investigate the hypothesis that his work is telling us something about alternative forms of femininity and masculinity, enabling 'a critique of gender itself as a category'.[116]

An attempt to apply Silverman's theories to Manganelli's work proves difficult because of his elusiveness and contradictoriness. However, it can be argued that his work unsettles both of the ideas that according to Silverman perpetuate the dominant fiction: the nuclear family and the phallic authority. We have already seen how Manganelli removes his (authorial) self from the side of discursive authority. Silverman holds that the male subject's acknowledgement of his lack, including his withdrawal from the origins of discourse, jeopardises the illusory identification of maleness with the phallus (through which normative male subjectivity is formed).[117] Julia Kristeva had already made a related set of observations when she argued that the fact that avant-garde writers put into

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[115] The expression 'technology of de-subjectification' is used by Amber Jamilla Musser in reference to the practices of reading, writing and masochism in Deleuze. See her 'Reading, Writing, and Masochism: The Arts of Becoming', *differences*, 23.1 (2012), 131-50 (p. 140), https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1533547, [accessed 4 August 2019].

[116] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 9.

[117] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, pp. 49-50.

question their mastery of language was tantamount to the deconstruction of the phallic, unitary, male subject position.[118]

Manganelli is also well-known for his 'antifamilismo' and tireless criticism of the (patriarchal) family institution and of coniugality. This surfaces not only in many short articles but also in his novels, and shows a preoccupation with the exploration of relations of power and subordination in the domestic sphere. In a 1980 article, Manganelli states that he has no reason to 'amare, venerare, rispettare la famiglia italiana', which is defined as a 'curiosa sopravvivenza della tribù patriarcale'.[119] In another article by the same year, Manganelli describes the family as grounded on sadism and on the 'piacere [di] percuotere la sposa'.[120] Interestingly and in line with Manganelli's inclination for twisting common perceptions, the author identifies instead the couple formed by Leopold and Wanda von Sacher-Masoch as an example of a perfect 'coniugio' (note that he adopts the same word for the pair formed by the *bambola* and the pregnant male): 'abbiamo l'impressione che il matrimonio di Wanda e Leopold sia stato un buon matrimonio, tanto è vero che finì con un divorzio, segno infallibile di coniugio psicologicamente produttivo'.[121] Thus, the institution of family is presented as deviant and pathological, which undermines its claim to naturalness and normativity, while the masochistic relationship between Masoch and Wanda is treated as 'productive' and psychologically fecund.

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[118] 'For at least a century, the literary avant-garde (from Mallarmè and Lautréamont to Joyce and Artaud) has been introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language … in a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a 'phallic' position. The fragmentation of language in a text calls into question the very posture of this mastery. The writing that we have been discussing confronts this phallic position either to traverse it or to deny it'. Julia Kristeva, 'Oscillation between Power and Denial', trans. by Marilyn A. August, in Elaine Marks, Isabelle De Courtivron, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), pp. 165-67 (p. 165).

[119] Manganelli, 'Famiglia I', originally published in *L'Europeo*, 2 August 1980, now in *Mammifero italiano*, pp. 47-50 (p. 47).

[120] Manganelli, 'Famiglia II', originally published in *L'Europeo*, now in *Mammifero italiano*, pp. 51-53.

[121] Quoted in the foreword to Wanda von Sacher Masoch, *Le mie confessioni*, trans. by Gisèle Bartoli (Milan: Adelphi, 1998).

In addition to the positioning outside of the patriarchal family constellation, another aspect of Manganelli's work that resonates with Silverman's writing is the research he addressed to death and to nothingness. Starting from the beginning of his literary activity, Manganelli identified in death (or non-being) the premise and the centre of every authentic literary experience.[122] The fact that death is at the centre of Manganelli's poetics can also be read against Silverman's ethical project of making room for death in Western conceptions of male subjectivity. An argument can be made that Manganelli expresses the need to reintegrate into his own subjectivity the vulnerability and finitude that patriarchal thought denies for masculinity.

In contrast with Studlar and Silverman, some influential theoreticians have located sado-masochism within a regressive sexual politics and opposed the idea that male masochism can shatter patriarchy. For these scholars, male masochistic fantasies must be distinguished from a forthright renunciation of power and privilege: masochism and the identification with the 'victim' allow the male subject to acknowledge his lack while at the same time overcoming it, to disturb normative masculinity and simultaneously reaffirm it. This concept was already implied in the critique of Gilles Deleuze's account of masochism that I have presented above: while the male masochist seems to surrender his power, he actually maintains it in another form, as he is the one who confers on the dominator the mastery over himself.[123] Deleuze himself says of the masochist that '[t]he pain he suffers is an ultimate pleasure' because 'it confirms him in his inalienable power and gives him a supreme certitude'.[124] Tania Modleski has also noted another problem in Deleuze's theory of masochism: she exposes the male masochist renunciation of power as 'the luxury

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[122] Emanuele Dattilo, 'Discorso sulla difficoltà di parlare coi vivi', *Alfabeta2* (May 2015), https://www.alfabeta2.it/2015/05/16/manganelli-inviato-speciale-nellaldila/ [accessed 15 August 2020].

[123] See Tania Modleski's critique to Deleuze's model of masochism in her *Feminism Without Women*, p. 74.

[124] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 39.

of empowered beings', since only those who hold a powerful social position have the ability to renounce it. [125]

The paradox of masochism is that the slave exercises his agency precisely in the act of surrendering it. Butler's discussion of the figure of Christ as the embodiment of self-sacrifice and 'renunciation of the self as the origins of its own actions' (because all of its acts it owes to the Father) helps us understand this point:

> The self becomes an incessant performer of renunciation, whereby the performance, as an action, contradicts the postulation of inaction that it is meant to signify. Paradoxically, performance becomes the occasion for a grand and endless action that effectively augments and individuates the self it seeks to deny. [126]

Butler calls this mechanism 'negative narcissism'. The impossibility of the self to accomplish the self-renunciation is what produces an 'intermingling of pleasure and pain', because it 'carries with it the pleasurable assertion of self'. [127] Butler has also suggested more explicitly that masochism may be used as a 'a strategy of phallic self-aggrandisement'. [128]

This position is endorsed by David Savran (*Taking It Like a Man,* 1998), who, similarly to Silverman, registers that after WWII masochism has become increasingly central in men's self-representation and that a new masochistic model of masculinity has emerged, which he calls the 'victimised white man'. [129] However, the scholar attributes a different cultural meaning to this model of masculinity as compared to Silverman: for him, 'masochism functions precisely as a kind of decoy and [...] the cultural texts constructing masochistic masculinities characteristically conclude with an almost magical restitution of

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[125] Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*, p. 149.

[126] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 49.

[127] Butler, *The Psychic Life*, pp. 49-50.

[128] Butler, 'The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler', *Artforum*, 31 (1992), 83-89 (p. 88).

[129] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 5.

phallic power'.[130] According to Savran, sado-masochism provided an antidote to the fantasised threat posed by 'the scant economic and social progress made in the United States over the past thirty years by African Americans, women, and other racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities'.[131] Savran rests upon Freud's 'reflexive sado-masochism' to argue that sado-masochism allows the white male subject to still reclaim an authoritative position while positing himself as a victim: 'the ego is ingeniously split between a sadistic (or masculinised) half and a masochistic (or feminised) half so that the subject, torturing himself, can prove himself a man'.[132]

In *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000), Sally Robinson also investigates the 'remarkable frequency of images of wounded white men' in post-sixties American narratives and highlights the 'undeniable attraction to masochism on the part of white men attempting to come to terms with the feminist critique of male power and privilege'.[133] Robinson points out the striking similarity between the psychic economy of masochism and the narrative economy of the 'crisis of masculinity'. She contends that 'an aesthetic of masochism rules representations of dominant masculinity in crisis in the post-sixties era'.[134] Indeed, she shows that the narratives of male suffering operate through the same rhetorical features on which, according to Deleuze, masochistic pleasure depends: suspense – the deferring of (sexual) discharge –, theatricality and display of loss.

The theatrical, exhibitionist factor is particularly emphasised by Robinson who explains that the male victim depends upon visibility and on an audience. The male 'victim' or 'in crisis', as Martin Fradley explains further, always locates his suffering at the centre of his narrative, 'anxiously re-cohering the world, quite

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[130] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 37.

[131] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 3.

[132] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 33.

[133] Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 11.

[134] Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 13.

literally, around [himself]'.[135] For this reason, Robinson observes that the language of crisis 'perform[s] the cultural work of *re*centering white masculinity by *de*centering it'.[136] The suspense factor is observable as the rhetoric of crisis does not tend toward a resolution of the crisis, but 'functions to defer that closure'. This 'sense of prolonged tension' is functional to the purpose of centring attention to masculinity.[137] This is why Sally Robinson cautions us: 'while it is true that crisis might signify a trembling of the edifice of the white and male power, it is also true that there is much symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive position of subject-in-crisis'.[138] Following Robinson's insights, we might conclude that Theodor Reik's formula for masochism – 'Victory through defeat' – captures also the logic underpinning narratives of male victimisation.[139] Indeed, as Mansfield would put it, both can function as tactics of power predicated upon power disavowal.[140]

Mansfield (*Masochism: The Art of Power*, 1997) puts forward a more extreme argument in reading masochism as a tool of power, linking its structure to the figures of the male victim, the 'angry white male' and the backlash against 'political correctness': masochism 'creates a way for masculine hegemonic systems to confirm their own power, and annihilate the other'.[141] Mansfield maintains that the structuring principle of masochism, a mode of power based on power's disavowal, actually represents the dominant logic of power in postmodern society: masochism 'is a model of the way in which much politics

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[135] Martin Fradley, 'Maximus Melodramaticus: Masculinity, Masochism and White Male Paranoia in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema', in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 235-51 (p. 238).

[136] 'In other words, in order for white masculinity to negotiate its position within the field of identity politics, white men must claim a symbolic disenfranchisement, must compete with various others for cultural authority bestowed upon the […] visibly wounded'. Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 12.

[137] Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 11.

[138] Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 9.

[139] Theodor Reik, *Masochism in Modern Man* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941).

[140] Mansfield, *Masochism*.

[141] Mansfield, *Masochism*, pp. 21 and 50.

operates in the postmodern era, where the powerful, from presidents to the pressure groups, always disavow their own power'.[142] According to Mansfield, although masochism upsets and combines gender categories, its fluid concept of gender reduces itself to the male masochist's appropriation of feminine prerogatives: Mansfield talks about the masochist's 'stealing of femininity from the woman' to construct himself as a victim.[143] Thus, in the scholar's view, the manipulation of gender classifications does not mean the overcoming or deconstruction of the opposition between them.

Mansfield's and Savran's approaches have been challenged by scholars like Fantina who find their political readings of masochism reductive. Fantina observes that 'masochistic artists can subvert certain patriarchal values, while upholding others'.[144] More in general, scholars have highlighted the limitations to the notion of 'crisis in masculinity'. After having enjoyed its greatest popularity among scholars in the 1990s, this concept has been considerably contested in recent years not only from a political standpoint (since, as mentioned, it can be used as a weapon to re-center masculinity) but also in terms of its analytic usefulness. Marie Louise Roberts concedes that the 'masculinity in crisis' paradigm was initially useful because it helped understand and single out key periods of transformation in the production of gender norms, but she contests the historical accounts of crisis as a cyclical phenomenon – structured by the alternation of masculinity crisis and reconstruction – as these might imply the restoration of a 'natural' gender order and reinforce the idea of masculinity as a set of essential norms.[145] On the other hand, Chaudhuri links 'crisis' to the notion that masculinity itself is, to quote Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, 'theoretically and historically troubled'.[146] Thus, the idea of

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[142] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. X.

[143] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 20.

[144] Fantina, *Ernest Hemingway*, p. 42.

[145] Mary Louise Roberts, 'Beyond "Crisis" in Understanding Gender Transformation', *Gender & History*, 28.2 (August 2016), 358-66 (p. 360).

[146] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, p. 105. Chaudhuri uses the term 'troubled' with the meaning given to it in Constance Penley and Sharon Willis' 'Editorial: Male Trouble', *Camera Obscura*, 17 (1988).

'crisis' rather 'reveals that "men" and "male subjectivity" are historically mutable and ideologically unstable, constantly constructed and reconstructed in representation'.[147] Another argument against the axiom of 'masculinity in crisis' is that it is not culturally and historically specific.[148] However, it is not necessarily true that historical approaches overlook the specificities of diverse historical experiences, as Roberts maintains.[149]

Although I acknowledge the limitations of this notion, I stress the fact that 'crisis' here is not intended as descriptive of the transformation that masculinity underwent in the second half of the twentieth century, but as a performance and a discursive construction. Rather than reflecting an actual disempowerment of men, the narratives of 'crisis in masculinity' reflected the anxieties about the state of masculine identity, perceived as endangered. These are thus representative of a *perception* of power loss. Talking about the apocalyptic cinematic imagery depicting males as an 'endangered species' in the 1960s and especially 1970s, Sergio Rigoletto warns us: 'this imagery should not be considered a specular space reflecting an actual male experience of disempowerment but as a performative one in which the anxieties might be staged, given a particular configuration, and dealt with'.[150] With 'crisis of masculinity', I am thus referring to a 'performance' of crisis rather than an actual crisis.[151] I will evaluate how this performative tool has been employed in Manganelli's texts to find answers in a period of broad interrogation on the meaning of masculinity.

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[147] Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists*, p. 105.

[148] Roberts, 'Beyond "Crisis"', p. 361.

[149] See Sandro Bellassai's analysis, which highlights similarities and differences between the post WWI and WWII crises in *La mascolinità contemporanea* (Rome: Carrocci, 2004).

[150] Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema*, pp. 32-33.

[151] On the performative character of both crisis and masculinity see Fintan Walsh's *Male Trouble. Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also Judith A. Allen, who talks about a 'rhetoric of crisis' in 'Men Interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood', *Radical History Review*, 82 (2002), 191-207.

I argue that Manganelli's writings are structured around the masochistic model of masculinity illustrated thus far in as much as they frequently designate the male as victim and disavow male privilege. Images of self-victimisation and self-abasement are recurring in Manganelli's texts, as well as images of the castrating and powerful female figure. Read through the theories of reactionary masochism, renunciation of male dominance and investment of the feminine with symbolic power can be understood as 'a compensatory mechanism, allowing, at the level of fantasy, for the continuing reclamation and consolidation of masculine hegemony'.[152] At the same time, I will also acknowledge an aspect of Manganelli's work neglected by scholarly literature, namely the desire to free the self from normative identities and constraining gender categories. Given the imaginary reconciliation that masochism can offer to these conflicting processes, this is a particularly promising perspective to explore the negotiation of masculinity in Manganelli's writings.

1.3 'Masculinity crisis' narratives in post-war Italy

Although many of the theorists under review in the section above refer specifically to the U.S. scene, their arguments might be applied to the post-war Italian context, where a cultural narrative of male crisis and victimhood was similarly being constructed. During the economic boom, Italy was deeply influenced by cultural models coming from the US: this 'mythical country' worked as the catalyst for the transformations in gender perceptions in Italian society.[153] This allows us to place Manganelli's work within a transnational context of Western discursive constructions of masculinity and sexuality and to establish a link between the U.S. narratives of victimised masculinity and the rhetoric of 'crisis in masculinity' that took hold in post-war Italy.

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[152] Uebel, 'Masochism', p. 396. According to Uebel, masochism provides a solution to the contradictory tension between a 'patriarchal sedimentation' and the '"enlightened" consciousness' of the male subject who can no longer hold patriarchy to be acceptable. For the scholar, this could explain why masochism has become such a popular and highly visible cultural fantasy in contemporary culture. Uebel, 'Toward a Symptomatology of Cyberporn', in *Theory and Event*, 3.4 (2000), [n.p.].

[153] Bellassai, *La mascolinità*, p. 106.

According to various scholars, a narrative of crisis was developed in Italy to recast and renegotiate normative masculinity in the face of the unprecedented socio-economic transformations after WWII. Following Sandro Bellassai, we can schematise these transformations as such: the profound processes of modernisation and social mobility; the creation of consumer markets and the development of mass culture; the rapid changes in women's roles both in the private and public spheres.[154] In particular, the processes of urbanisation irreversibly unsettled the model of the patriarchal peasant family. Because of these unparalleled social and economic redistributions, 'Italy as a patriarchal society found itself in crisis from the late 1960s'.[155]

In the following section, I will examine some of the reasons why traditional masculinity was perceived as 'in crisis' in post-war Italy and illustrate how narratives of male victimhood were forged in the Italian context. In her study of Italian cinema, Jacqueline Reich holds that, in the years following WWII, the disempowered man 'comes to dominate the representation of masculinity'.[156] Rapidly changing gender roles and the feeling of being out of place in a shifting society are according to her the main motors for the formation of new images like the figure of the Italian *inetto*. Ruth Ben-Ghiat analyses the new ideals of masculinity circulating during the transition from the fascist regime to democracy and explains that, after the horrors both suffered and inflicted in war, the Italian society started to reject the ideal of virility of the fascist ideology equating masculinity with strength and military valour.[157] New models were needed, which could absorb on the one hand, the feeling of humiliation for

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[154] Bellassai, 'Mascolinità, mutamento, merce' in *Genere, generazioni e consumi: L'Italia degli anni Sessanta*, ed. by Paolo Capuzzo (Rome: Carrocci, 2003), p. 108.

[155] Maud Anne Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political*, p. 11.

[156] Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 1.

[157] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Unmaking the Fascist Man: Masculinity, Film and the Transition from Dictatorship', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10.3 (2005), 336-365 (pp. 348-49), http://ruthbenghiat.com/2019/03/unmaking-the-fascist-man-film-masculinity-and-the-transition-from-dictatorship/ [accessed 27 April 2019].

Italy's defeat and foreign occupations, and on the other, the sense of guilt for the crimes perpetrated under fascism.[158]

According to Silvana Patriarca, the military defeat and foreign occupation 'gave rise to a deep sense of crisis and frustration among Italian men, only partially balanced by fighting in the Resistance'.[159] 'Crisis' was linked to a feeling of de-virilisation of society, especially after the fall of fascism and the weakening of the model of virility endorsed by the regime:

> Fascism had represented an aggressive attempt to 're-virilise' the nation by reshaping Italian masculinity in a militarised and militaristic way and by reasserting traditional gender roles at a time when they were being questioned by feminists. Necessarily the military defeat in the Second World War made the trope of the effeminacy of Italian men – which had tormented Risorgimento patriots – resurface with a vengeance.[160]

Patriarca explains that this link between 'crisis' and emasculation was determined by 'older nationalist tropes which associated political and military weakness with effeminacy and strength with masculinity'.[161] She suggests that the stereotype of the weak and dependent Italian man – which flourished in the aftermath of the war in the context of this sense of crisis – is actually the signifier of another, deeper, anxiety: the perceived crisis of Italian society at large and the sense of backwardness as compared to the more advanced Europe.[162]

The change in material circumstances in Italy after WWII contributed to the growing feeling of crisis. Bellassai looks, at one level, to the shift from industry to service and at the other, to the incompatibility between a rigid patriarchal

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[158] Ben-Ghiat, 'Unmaking the Fascist Man', pp. 348-49.

[159] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', in *La Mamma. Interrogating a National Stereotype*, ed. by Penelope Morris and Perry Willson, Italian and Italian American Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 29-50 (p. 32).

[160] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', p. 32.

[161] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', p. 30.

[162] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', p. 32.

masculine identity and the new consumer culture.[163] In a constantly changing world, men's power could no longer rest on the authority of traditional values. However, Bellassai underlines that the dissociation from traditional types of masculinity did not mean the end of male supremacy, nor of the hierarchical principle structuring society.[164] Most often, the new ideals of masculinity reconciled the need for an identity attuned with the current trends and able at the same time to re-incorporate the traditional values.[165]

Media played a pivotal role in the formation of the 'male crisis' discourse. It is important once more to underline that articles and cinematic representations did not necessarily reflect what was truly happening in society. However, they are relevant for my analysis as they allow us to interrogate the process through which the narrative of crisis is assembled and to analyse on the symbolic level the impact of this rhetoric of crisis. Italian media paid great attention to the cultural transformations in the US, perceived as enormously ahead of Europe, and to the state of American men, as it was thought to be showing Italian men's near future.[166] The following 1958 article provides a good example of the recurring narratives of those years, representing men as impotent victims of excessively powerful women:

> In questo dopoguerra è stata profonda l'influenza della donna-mantide americana. Gli Stati Uniti hanno sommerso l'Europa non soltanto di zuppa in polvere, di scatolame [...] ma anche, e soprattutto, di ginecrazia concentrata. Il maschio americano ha ormai

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[163] In the 1950s, the Western shift to an economy based on aid, care and assistance meant that historically 'feminine' qualities were now required and economically valued, while traditionally 'masculine' qualities were in certain contexts obsolete.

[164] For example, Bellassai shows how the hyper-virile and militarised fascist man was succeeded by the ideal shaped by the 'consumer pedagogy' ('pedagogia consumistica') of mass media: the 'successful man', the 'winner', whose essential qualities were dynamism and the ability to anticipate future transformations. However, the emphasis on success promoted a model of masculinity still based on hierarchy, individualism and competitiveness. Bellassai, *La mascolinità*, pp. 109-12.

[165] Bellassai, 'Mascolinità, mutamento', pp. 133-34.

[166] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', p. 40.

dichiarato fortait, ha gettato la spugna e raccolto lo strofinaccio di cucina.[167]

Here, the 'maschio americano' is depicted as confined within the walls of the house, doing housework, dominated and controlled by tyrannical, praying mantis-like mothers and wives. The American male, described as increasingly powerless in a 'gynocratic' society, became the symbolic receptacle of the anxieties and uncertainties on gender identity.

In Italian newspapers, critical observers of the Italian society retrieved old tropes linking modernisation and 'feminisation' or 'devirilisation'. Many opinion makers highlighted the new centrality of woman in the mass-merchandised culture and observed that the consumer culture, constructed around the purportedly 'feminine' principles of glamour and entertainment, led to a 'feminisation' of society.[168] Often these representations took an apocalyptic tone, as exemplified in the following excerpt where the empowerment and new centrality of women ('esseri più deboli') are presented as adumbrating the risk of male extinction:

> Il maschio sta forse seguendo il destino [...] dei mostruosi dinosauri, che dovettero cedere il posto a esseri più deboli ma più facilmente adattabili alle mutazioni ambientali. Vedremo gli ultimi maschi relegati nelle riserve al modo dei pellerossa?[169]

As Rigoletto shows, images of the disempowered man feature prominently also in Italian cinema throughout much of the post-war period. In the 1960s and 1970s there flourished a catastrophising and apocalyptic trend of imagery providing the framework for stories about the inescapable demise of men and of the social

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[167] Enrico Gianieri (Gec), 'La Donna Conquista il Potere', *L'Europeo*, 2 November 1958, p. 16, quoted in Bellassai, 'Mascolinità, mutamento', p. 119.

[168] For example, Giorgio Bocca wrote in 1963: 'Nella civiltà dei consumi – l'universo del confort appare affidato alle donne, sono esse a decidere gli acquisti ed i primi ad esserne persuasi sono i venditori, prova ne sia che la pubblicità va ai giornali femminili nella misura del settanta per cento'. Giorgio Bocca, *La Scoperta dell'Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1963), p. 108, quoted in Bellassai, 'Mascolinità, mutamento', p. 115.

[169] Gianieri, 'Il Sesso Forte Depone le Armi', *L'Europeo*, 9 November 1958, p. 18, quoted in Bellassai, 'Mascolinità, mutamento', p. 120.

order that has allowed their hegemony. For Rigoletto, this imagery 'establishes a space for a male subject position to confront anxieties of delegitimisation and subordination'.[170] Rigoletto also points at the fact that the creation of such male fantasies of martyrdom and self-castration represents an ultimate act of self-control: the male protagonist 'appears to be defeated yet still remains master of the fantasy that he has created'.[171] Coherently with the figure of the masochistic male victim expounded in the previous section, cinematic and media representations of men in crisis might be used as a way to re-assert male centrality and authority.

Thus far, I have discussed the sense of social victimisation felt by Italian men in the second half of the twentieth century. I have established the emergence of the 'victimised male' as one of the dominant discursive formations on masculinity as the wider context for the exploration of sadomasochistic dynamics and masculinity in Manganelli. I would like now to focus on one of the mythologies related to the formation of the Italian male victim prototype: the *mammismo* discourse, which, in the post-war years, blamed motherhood for the emasculation of men and saw in the mother a source of symbolic power and oppression that was destabilising for society. I contend that the *mammismo* discourse represented the privileged channel through which notions of a wounded and weakened masculinity found expression in Manganelli's work.

As Marina D'Amelia has shown, the stereotype of *mammismo* is the result of an 'invented tradition', developed after the fall of fascism to find an explanation for perceived deficiencies in the Italian nation and related anxieties about the weakening of Italian masculinity.[172] Interestingly, D'Amelia singles out a 1961 essay written by Manganelli's psychoanalyst Ernst Bernhard as one of the key

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[170] Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema*, pp. 32.

[171] For example, in Marco Ferreri's French-language feature, *La Dernière Femme* [*The Last Woman*] (1975), the final scene figures a 'nightmarish fantasy' of Gérard Dépardieu as the male protagonist castrating himself with an electric carving knife. Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema*, p. 28.

[172] Penelope Morris and Perry Willson 'La Mamma: Italian Mothers Past and Present' in *La Mamma*, pp. 1-28 (p. 20).

texts for the construction of the *mammismo* myth. In 'Il complesso della Grande Madre', Bernhard interprets the Italian national character in light of the Jungian archetype of the 'Great Mediterranean Mother' which in his view dominated the Italian collective unconscious.[173] The model of motherhood influenced by this archetype consists for Bernhard in being protective and loving to the point of becoming an engulfing and castrating figure who impedes a normal development of the child. Bernhard's essay presents pernicious mothering as responsible for a decline in masculinity, substantially reproducing the discourses on the alleged 'excessive' power of Italian women in circulation at the time.

Gilda Policastro shows the influence of Bernhard's theories about Italian motherhood on Manganelli's novels and Marco Belpoliti shows that also the analysis of the Italian 'national character' carried out by Manganelli in his *corsivi* are dominated by the 'maternal complex' key.[174] Indeed, it is impossible to overstate the influence of Bernhard on Manganelli. Manganelli acknowledged that his Jungian therapist was essential in the process of turning his neurosis into literary creativity and defined Bernhard 'l'uomo che mi ha insegnato a mentire', which – in Manganelli's idiolect – is tantamount to saying that Bernhard taught him how to write.[175] However, neither Policastro nor Belpoliti provide a critique of Bernhard's essentialist set of assumptions on gender, which remain by and large unchallenged. This thesis on the other hand seeks to frame the construction of the Great Mediterranean Mother figure and the related *mammismo* critique in the wider context of the 'masculinity crisis' discourse to expose the misogynistic stereotypes on which these were based which assigned guilt to women for the ills of Italian society and the fact of men's suffering. As Molly Tambor observes, 'much of the motivation for the blaming stereotype of *mammismo* had its source in anxieties about Italian masculinity'.[176]

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[173] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', p. 36.

[174] Policastro , 'Madri/Inferni'. Belpoliti, 'Mamma mammifero'.

[175] Manganelli, *Il vescovo*, p. 142.

[176] Molly Tambor, 'Mothers, Workers, Citizens: Teresa Noce and the Parliamentary Politics of Motherhood' in *La Mamma*, ed. by Penelope Morris and Perry Willson, pp. 51-76 (p. 60).

Before proceeding to this discussion, it is worth dwelling on some biographical details which testify to the fact that Manganelli used the myth of the Mediterranean Mother to make sense of his life dominated by the 'fantasma materno'. This biographic material, permeated with descriptions of Manganelli's mother as a suffocating and abusive figure, will be merely used here to understand the author's construction of a personal 'mythology', or *mitobiografia*, to use the neologism coined by Bernhard.[177] In a letter to his brother, Manganelli traces back the origin of his being, as he wrote, 'un disadattato per sempre', to the relationship with his mother: 'Mia madre mi ebbe fra le mani indifeso quando ero all'inizio della mia storia: ma non si accorse di niente, e mi camminò sopra storpiandomi per sempre'.[178]

Manganelli held his mother Amelia responsible for his existential suffering and for his neurosis. Three elements in Manganelli's biography instantiate the castrating effect that Amelia could have had on his son. Lietta shows in *Album fotografico* that since Amelia wanted a daughter, she used to dress Manganelli up as a girl until he was too old to pass for a girl.[179] Amelia opposed Giorgio's decision to enrol at the Normale University in Pisa (one of the most prestigious universities in Italy) because she wanted her son to live close to her, therefore he decided to study Political Science in Pavia. Manganelli's belated literary breakthrough, with the publication of *H*, occurred only when Manganelli felt free

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[177] We have to take into account that this material is in large part filtered by Manganelli's daughter Lietta.

[178] Manganelli, Letter to Renzo, 2 November 1955, in *Circolazione a più cuori: Lettere familiari* (Turin: Aragno, 2008), p. 148.

[179] 'Amelia Censi, madre di mio padre, voleva una figlia femmina, ma ha avuto mio padre'; when Manganelli started the primary school 'mia nonna Amelia dovette rassegnarsi che non era una bambina e cominciò a mettergli i vestiti da maschio', as Lietta writes in *Album fotografico di Giorgio Manganelli: Racconto biografico di Lietta Manganelli*, ed. by Ermanno Cavazzoni (Macerata: Quodlibet Compagnia Extra, 2010), p. 69.

from his mother's oppressive presence, after Amelia's death.[180] Manganelli's life experiences met the contemporary cultural context where the debate on motherhood was more than ever inflamed and where competing discourses focused on normativity and deviance found in the maternal body their battlefield.

Marina D'Amelia contextualises Bernhard's essay reading it side by side with the 1952 study by Corrado Alvaro where the word *mammismo* made its first appearance.[181] Ten years before Bernhard, Alvaro talked about a 'complesso italiano del mammismo e maternalismo' as the root of all Italians' ills.[182] As D'Amelia emphasises, Bernhard retrieves many of the negative stereotypes found in Alvaro's essay.[183] Similarly to Alvaro, Bernhard identifies in the Italian mother's over-protectiveness the source for Italians' lack of virility.[184] The more protective the mother, the more she transforms into a devouring 'Bad Mother': 'la buona madre nutrice e protettrice si trasforma […] nella cattiva madre che trattiene, che divora, […] impedisce ai figli il raggiungimento dell'indipendenza

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[180] Lietta Manganelli, 'La mia famiglia', in *Le foglie messaggere*, p. 36. Lietta contradicts her own claim in the biography of the website dedicated to Manganelli: 'Centro studi Giorgio Manganelli', where she says that Amelia not only read the book but also liked it, http://manganelli.altervista.org/html/biografia.html [last accessed 26 April 2018]. This element of Manganelli's 'mitobiografia' is reflected in the autobiographical section placed halfway through *H* and entitled 'Aneddoto propedeutico'. In the final part of this short narrative excursus on the relationship between mother and son, the latter, who is also the narrating voice, concludes by saying that the realisation of the imminence of his mother's death encouraged him to write those pages (just like Manganelli supposedly did). The title's 'propedeutico' might refer to *H*'s textual whole: the (approaching) death of the mother was 'preliminary' to the writing not only of this short section, but of *H* itself.

[181] Marina D'Amelia, *La mamma* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

[182] According to Alvaro, mothers' over-protectiveness of their sons lies at the origin of the Italian amorality, lack of civic sense and disrespect for laws. Alvaro considers the maternal instinct as pertaining more to the natural than the civilised sphere, associating woman with bestiality. Corrado Alvaro, 'Il Mammismo', in *Il nostro tempo e la speranza: Saggi di vita contemporanea* (Milano: Bompiani, 1952), pp. 181-90.

[183] D'Amelia, *La mamma*, p. 30.

[184] 'A chi è dominato dalla Grande Madre mancano capacità d'astrazione e di disciplina virili', Bernhard, 'Il complesso', p. 170.

e li rende infermi e infelici'. Bernhard thus explains the 'Italian vices' (corruption, dishonesty, lack of punctuality) as the consequence of a society permeated by the maternal principle, an unruly, anarchic force by nature: '[q]uesta attitudine materna [...] è sostanzialmente asistematica [...], contro legge e regola, 'anarchica' si potrebbe dire'.[185]

In her discussion of the *mammismo* stereotype, Patriarca critiques the constructions of Italy as a matriarchy or 'maternal civilisation' as these 'ignored history and especially the autonomy and agency of fathers in the family' and 'failed to see [...] that the "maternal" in Italian society was itself a product of the continuing patriarchal arrangements of that society and not an archaic trait originating in time immemorial'.[186] The figure of the 'domineering mother', instead of being a peculiarity of the Italian character as Bernhard argued, was actually trans-nationally shaped: for example, in America a decade before Alvaro, Philip Wylie coined the term 'momism' to refer to the excessive importance of the mother figure in the American male's life.[187] Like his Italian counterparts, he blamed mothers for men's lack of virility and for the nation's weakness, presenting 'momism' as destabilising the social order.[188]

Returning now to Bernhard, it is little wonder that his profile of the 'madre dominatrice' closes with the reference to a 'weak' marital and paternal figure, feeding on the trope of a wounded Italian masculinity in circulation at the time.

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[185] Bernhard, 'Il complesso', pp. 170-71.

[186] Patriarca, '*Mammismo*/Momism', p. 43.

[187] Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 2007).

[188] Patriarca highlights that American momism and Italian mammismo differ significantly in many respects: 'while the former was a gendered reaction to war anxieties and the perception, as well as the reality, of the stronger position of women in American society, mammismo had more to do with the crisis provoked by the war defeat and the anxieties generated by the new postwar order. Moreover, while Wylie lambasted the tyrannical mother figure, Alvaro lamented the effects of the over-indulgent mamma who spoiled her male offspring. More importantly, the domineering mother figure lambasted by Wylie was construed as a contingent and thus temporary phenomenon, not as an anthropological and trans-historical characteristic of the whole society', p. 34. Despite the differences, it might be observed that both the constructions used motherhood as the scapegoat for the ills of society at large and of masculinity.

In the last paragraph of his essay, Bernhard makes his purpose explicit when he proposes that by freeing the collective unconscious from the identification with the Great Mother, the balance between the feminine and masculine principles will be restored:

> la Grande Madre, con la sua luce e la sua ombra, va resa trasparente […] per liberarsi dalla identificazione conscia e inconscia con essa e invece di esserne 'posseduti', poterla assimilare […] Questo darebbe infine come conseguenza naturale l'avvio alla compensazione organica della Grande Madre da parte del grande principio maschile.[189]

Berhard's project arguably falls into the wider post-war cultural project described in the previous pages aimed at recuperating a perceived marginalised masculinity. It is revealing that Bernhard interpreted Fascism as a 'tentativ[o] di sopraffazione patriarcale' doomed to failure and unable to undermine the power of the Great Mother.[190] We might conclude that Bernhard's psycho-anthropological analysis, and more in general the post-war discourse on *mammismo*, appear to be deeply interconnected with the 'crisis in masculinity' discourse. The two discourses originated from the same anxieties on the state of Italian society and masculinity generated by the new post-war order, to which they provided alternative answers. The two narratives fuelled each other, as both diagnosed the weakness of the average Italian man and cast the backwardness of Italian society in gendered terms displacing the blame onto women.[191] The analysis of Bernhard's essay has shown its affinities with the 'male crisis' discourse, bringing to the surface the set of assumptions on the maternal symbolic power and on male subordination and passivity that exercised a profound influence on Manganelli.

In concluding this chapter, I would like to make some final observations on the centrality of the maternal figure in all the theories presented thus far: it might

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[189] Bernhard, 'Il complesso', p. 179.

[190] Bernhard, 'Il complesso', p. 179.

[191] An important difference between the 'crisis' trope and *mammismo* stereotype is that in the latter case, the weakness and 'effeminacy' of Italian men is not constructed as temporary and historically contingent, on the contrary it is read as a structural and trans-historical category specific to the Mediterranean societies.

be noted that both Deleuze's account of the symbolic order of masochism and the narratives of male crisis with the connected discourse on *mammismo* hinge upon the maternal power. This can be connected to the fact that motherhood was central in the early political reflections produced by women's movements to re-evaluate woman and her role in society.[192] It is noteworthy how the discourse on maternity and her symbolic power has been appropriated by Deleuze as a way to imagine new practices subversive of patriarchy. Indeed, as we have seen, male masochism represents for Deleuze a pact between the son and the pre-oedipal mother to dethrone and remove the father from the symbolic order. Maternal symbolic power, exploited by some in the discourses on *mammismo* to launch a counteroffensive against the emancipation of women, became for intellectuals like Deleuze a reservoir of new symbolic formations to propose alternative cultural models. Both discourses – *mammismo* and Deleuze's model of masochism – point to a situation of subjection of the male with respect to the female. In both, the mother-son pair has subversive potential and is inimical to patriarchy, even if the former sees this as a threat and the latter as an opportunity for change.

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[192] For example, in 1950s Italy, motherhood was the ground on which women's emancipationist movements claimed the centrality of woman in society. The two main Italian women unions – the UDI, affiliated to the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and the CIF (Centro Italiano Femminile) affiliated to the Christian Democracy (DC) – endorsed the idea that raising children represented women's duty vis-à-vis society and a form of women's civic and political participation. It is also important to mention that, as Patriarca notes, this emphasis on the role of Italian mothers was 'the result of a long historical process [...] which had started with the making of the "patriotic mother" in the Risorgimento' (p. 30). As Victoria De Grazia observes, also fascist policy and *propaganda* regarding women contributed in various ways to the mobilisation of women into the public sphere. In particular, the view of the maternal role as a service to the nation 'submerged the individual in the collective'. Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 279. Crucially related to the mother figure were also theories and concepts formulated later by seminal feminist thinkers in the 1970s, like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, who had a deep influence on Italian feminism. Cixous's concept of *écriture feminine* is, as Toril Moi underlines, essentially bonded with the maternal figure. Writing is for Cixous 'the realm of the omnipotent mother', that 'omnipotent figure that dominates the fantasies of the pre-oedipal baby'. See her *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 114 and 119.

In this chapter, I have argued that a sado-masochistic perspective is particularly appropriate to investigate Manganelli's contradictoriness in addressing issues related to gender, sexuality and subjectivity. The very fact that Manganelli's texts communicate conflicting meanings about gender is the reflection of a society that was struggling with unprecedented shifts in the discursive constructions of gender.[193] I have surveyed the complex discursive environment in which Manganelli's texts were produced. I have contextualised sadomasochism in Manganelli's work by linking various discourses on gender and sexuality in circulation after WWII to the rhetorics of male victimhood. I have shown how new models of masculinity connected to this narrative were used to mixed ends and led to different outcomes, 'enabl[ing] both backward and forward movement'.[194]

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[193] Anne Cranny-Francis et al., *Gender Studies* (London: Red Globe Press, 2003), pp. 111-12.

[194] Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 10.

Chapter 2   The sacrificial victim in *Un libro* (1953-55) and beyond: from clarity to contradictory self

Un libro (henceforth *UL*), started in 1953, then abandoned and resumed in 1955, represents Manganelli's first attempt to write a book. It distinguishes itself from the works of the more mature literary stage (inaugurated by the publication of *Hilarotragoedia* around ten years later) because it employs more explicitly the terms 'masochism' and 'sadism' and especially it does so in relation to subjectivity. This does not mean that in later texts Manganelli does not elaborate further on these notions. I argue that there is an evolution over time in Manganelli's perspectives on sado-masochism, and this goes hand in hand with a shift in the way in which Manganelli's texts formulate discourses on gender. This is apparent in the trajectory that goes from *UL* to *Dall'inferno* (1985). What emerges is a shift from a logic of difference to a logic of indifference. In *UL*, differentiation from and abjection of woman is depicted as fundamental to protect a vulnerable ego. This vulnerability is related to the irreparable contradictoriness of the self, that disrupts the psychic stability of the writer. Masochism appears theorised as the counterpart of sadism, where self-aggression immediately turns into aggression against the Other (i.e. against woman). Conversely, as we will see in chapter 3, in *INF*, another logic is at work. Masochistic self-shattering will be presented in the later work as an antidote to identity, as an anti-identitarian practice, obtained thanks to the exploration of the domain of the abject and the return to indifferentiation.

This chapter has been organised in two parts. The first part focuses on the figure of the sacrificial victim in *UL*. I show that the writer's anxieties about the contradictoriness and precariousness of his male identity are compensated through fantasies of self-exclusion and self-annihilation, which enable the recovery of masculine values such as self-control and self-mastery. At the same time, the subject seeks to produce the self as coherent through a mechanism of abjection and othering of woman. In the second section of this chapter, I show the change in Manganelli's views on identity, literature and language. In *UL*, writing is seen as a means of bringing clarity and separating self from other. In

later works, Manganelli gives up the intent to risolve his internal fragmentation and instead conceives literature as a space for the exploration of the contradictoriness of the self. I argue that the shift from a logic of sexual difference to a logic of indifference can be understood against the wider backdrop of Manganelli's transition from a 'longing for clarity' and a binaristic thinking to a logic of conjunction of opposites.[1] As Francesco Muzzioli points out: 'Al dualismo, il testo manganelliano sostituisce l'ossimoro, cioè la congiunzione degli opposti'.[2]

To illustrate this transition in Manganelli's mindset, the second section of this chapter devotes attention to the further developments of the category of the sacrificial victim in Manganelli's work, with particular focus on *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma* (henceforth *DOS*). Here, the writer is still associated with a sacrificial victim and masochism is still seen as a structural element of subjectivity. In contrast with *UL*, however, in *DOS* the writer gives up the idea of producing a coherent, 'readable' self though the act of writing. Instead, *DOS* theorises that the conflicting impulses that lacerate his self can be sublimated into an aesthetic form and coexist. Finally, the last section of the chapter illustrates the steps that lead to this change by looking at Manganelli's theory of 'letteratura come menzogna', which sees literature as a space where oppositions collapse. Manganelli needs a domain in which impossibility and contradiction can be played out: this domain is literature.

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[1] Mussnung's analysis provides a key insight into this mechanism. He shows the 'anxiety for clarity' of the young Manganelli and argues that 'without Manganelli's secret longing for clarity, his overt praise of darkness remains ultimately inexplicable'. Although Mussgnug focuses on Manganelli's attitude towards philisophy and systematic thought, I think that Mussgnug's idea can be applied to Manganelli's reflections on identity and gender. Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 43.

[2] Francesco Muzzioli, *Teoria e critica della letteratura nelle avanguardie italiane degli anni sessanta* (Rome: Enciclopedia italiana, 1982), p. 69.

2.1 'L'avventizio': the scapegoat

In *UL*, an imaginary writer, quite suspicious of himself, chronicles his first attempt to write a book: 'Dunque faccio sul serio? Ho messo pagina uno, ho scritto in quei caratteri grossi un titolo' (*UL*, 60). The 'sbiadito e consumato professore' harbouring literary ambitions looks much like Mr Giorgio Manganelli in the act of measuring himself against the very same feat (*UL*, 67). The book is a meditation on murder and suicide as the only viable options in a universe governed by desperation and lack.[3] While specifying that his text is not to be intended as such, the writer engages in an enthusiastic apology of suicide:

> Non vuol essere questo un'apologia del suicidio come tale. Ma solo una 'consolatoria' dove si dice che se stai attento c'è sempre per te una strada di delicata, signorile ritirata. Per molti motivi ci si può fare violenti verso se stessi. Questa violenza nasce da mitezza, questa vertigine da ragione, questo abbandono da fedeltà, questa gagliarda disperazione da letizia e da carità verso la fragile pieghevolezza di codesto non ignobile corpo. (*UL*, 66)

As Arianna Marelli has demonstrated, Manganelli's insistence on the idea of 'automorirsi', at least in *H*, is to be understood as bearing a concrete referential meaning: 'pare da intendersi anche – se non soprattutto – nel suo senso proprio, come desiderio di (auto)annientamento'.[4] Although I agree with Marelli that 'suicide' in Manganelli denotes the desire for self-annihilation, I will show the connotations that Manganelli attaches to it in *UL*.

This 'libro in miniatura', as Mariarosa Bricchi has defined it, is the cornerstone of all the literary experiments, fragments of texts and discarded works collected by Salvatore Silvano Nigro in *Ti ucciderò mia capitale* (2011). Nigro calls this material 'il laboratorio di Manganelli', as it represents the twenty-year long

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[3] Salvatore Silvano Nigro, 'Il laboratorio di Giorgio Manganelli', afterword to Manganelli, *Ti ucciderò*, pp. 345-72 (p. 347).

[4] Marelli, 'La "volontà discenditiva", p. 4. For Marelli, a purely metaphorical reading of Manganelli's concern with death and suicide is reductive. The metaphorical interpretation is supported for example by Paolone, for whom 'morte' is a metaphor for the psychological operation of descent into the subconscious. Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, p. 40.

'prehistory' of the texts that will later be published by the author. According to Nigro, the themes and stylistic features of the other works of the collection converge on *UL*: 'fa sistema, dentro la catastrofe e l'agonia di carte dell'archivio di Manganelli. Aiuta a riordinare i racconti inediti'.[5]

UL is divided into ten titled sections, already presenting the structure that will become customary in Manganelli's work starting from *H*. The last three sections were written in 1955 after a two-year break from the start of the writing of the text. These last parts – 'Ripresa', 'Collaborazionismo' and 'Di Dio' – form a pseudo-treatise on 'atheology': the certainty of the non-existence of God leaves a central void, an empty space that, in Manganelli's later texts, will fill up with hypothesis and imaginative itineraries.[6] The most relevant part for my analysis is the first one, consisting of the sections entitled 'Scrivere libri e altre cose', 'La morte liberatrice', 'L'avventizio', 'La rinunzia alla gloria', 'L'aggressione del nulla', 'Senso di colpa e senso della storia' and 'Elogio dell'odio'. In these first sections, the writer identifies prose (as opposed to poetry) and suicide (as opposed to the acceptance of dying a natural death) as two ways of bringing clarity, order and dignity in his life, otherwise shaken by desperation and haunted by the spectre of insanity and the fear of death. Writing is regarded as the only alternative to suicide: in a note dated 1953 and quoted by Nigro in his afterword to *Ti ucciderò*, Manganelli writes that: 'scrivere un libro [...] serve per rendere tollerabile l'esistenza, per rinviare il suicidio'.[7]

The first sections develop a reflection that establishes a dialectic between pairs of opposites: on one side, poetry, disorder, indifferentiation, desperation, insanity and acceptance of death – 'la poesia [...] è dalla parte della disperazione. La morte parla in rima, in endecasillabi [...] La follia ama le cantilena, i ritornelli' –, and, on the other side, prose, clarity, differentiation, rationality and suicide – 'la prosa [...] nasce come differenza dalla disperazione'; '[A]lla poesia venne affiancandosi la prosa [...] quando

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[5]   Nigro, 'Il Laboratorio', p. 354.

[6]   Nigro, 'Il Laboratorio', p. 352.

[7]   Nigro, 'Il Laboratorio', p. 353.

all'accettazione della morte si affiancò l'odio della morte'; '[P]er scrivere prosa bisogna essere lucidi, esatti' (*UL*, 62-63). These pairs of opposites are also cast in gendered terms, as the author makes explicit by feminising death: 'Nella nostra lingua la parola morte è di genere, direi di sesso, femminile. [...] Una morte femmina – una morte forse affettuosa' (*UL*, 64). On the other hand, suicide (and with it clarity, separation, rationality) is associated with 'becoming a man':

> quelle ventotto pagine [...] erano un elogio del suicidio, della libertà dell'ultimo gesto, rubato, non come si ruba un gioiello, ma come il bimbo goloso sottrae una mela dalla dispensa materna, e così salva la sua dignità: si fa uomo. Un diventare uomo con la morte: molti neppure riescono a tanto. (*UL*, 80)[8]

At first glance, the reflection developed in *UL* seems intent on inscribing the condition of loss and mortality on the male subject, functioning in consonance with what Kaja Silverman identifies as a potential sabotage of the 'dominant fiction' of male plenitude. For example, in the section 'La Rinunzia Alla Gloria', the writer becomes convinced that: 'non c'è che una cosa da fare: rinunciare alla gloria. [...] Accettare la morte' (*UL*, 71). At the same time, the way in which the writer characterises suicide enables the male subject to augment and re-masculinise his self. The characteristics that are traditionally ascribed to masculinity, such as steadiness, order, coherence, are preserved in the suicidal option as it is framed by the writer:

> Codesta era se non mi sbaglio l'idea classica del suicidio: [...] un gesto calmo, che restituisce dignità e ordine alla nostra sconvolta figura. Direi anzi che la certezza del nostro ordine morale, [...] la sua dignità e fermezza e coerenza sta per l'appunto in questa idea del suicidio. (*UL*, 64)

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[8]   It might be noted that, at times, the writer contradicts himself and makes these oppositions collapse. For example, at the end of the first segment, after having announced that he will write a work of prose because prose is 'con tanta chiarezza dalla parte della chiarezza', the writer states that the text he is writing will be absurd, incoherent and led by his 'demenza', basically contradicting everything he had stated and dismantling the dichotomies previously established (*UL*, 63).

The subject fantasises on suicide as a way to emerge as victorious and regain self-ownership and control: 'noi possiamo farci liberi […] Non siamo stati vinti. Siamo ancora padroni' (*UL*, 65).

Violence against the self and desire for self-annihilation are read in this chapter within the sado-masochistic framework introduced in Chapter 1. The first observation indeed is that the profile of the writer matches the model of 'victimised male' there outlined: resentful – 'l'ira è il carattere più appariscente dello stimolo che mi induce a scrivere' –, frustrated, experiencing an irremediable contradiction of the self, the writer carries within himself a feeling of marginalisation and victimisation (*UL*, 80).

Of the male victim prototype, the writer offers us a sort of anthropological analysis in the section 'L'avventizio', that is, the 'temporary', the 'precarious'. The etymology of the word – from Latin: *adventicius* 'coming from abroad' – captures the condition of being estranged not only from one's social community but also from one's self. The *avventizio* is introduced as an individual within a species marked by some inferior quality or habit:

> Si scopre nella nostra società l'esistenza dell'avventizio come si scopre una qualità di animale, che pelo e colori e usi fanno simile ad altro, ma che se ne distingue per qualche inferiore caratteristica, come l'odore, o qualche sconcia abitudine o istinto. (*UL*, 67)

The methodology adopted to delineate this category of *avventizi* consists in becoming one of them: 'Talvolta se ne scopre l'esistenza diventandolo: […] siamo avventizi. Così io ne conosco le qualità, gli istinti, le attitudini' (*UL*, 67).

Among the great variety of *avventizi* ('[l]aureati e ragionieri, braccianti, manovali'), the writer is particularly specialised in the figure of the 'avventizio intellettuale'. The juxtaposition made by Nigro with another text collected in *Ti ucciderò* entitled *Caligola* clarifies that the feeling of 'provvisorietà' and thus social exclusion and subordination experienced by the writer stems from the transitoriness of his job as a professor.[9] Also the protagonist of *Caligola* indeed

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9   Nigro, 'Il Laboratorio', p. 354.

'era un incaricato, niente più che un incaricato, un uomo cui ogni anno il provveditorato dava un incarico, il permesso di vivere un anno ancora; poi, l'anno prossimo, si sarebbe visto'.[10] In the slightly different wording of *UL*, the *avventizio* is: 'lo sbiadito e consumato professore, l'uomo cui ogni anno si presta un anno di vita' who knows that his worst enemy is 'quel sentimento vago, stolidamente euforico, che gli sussurra che dopo tutto egli verrà confermato' (*UL*, 67). Impermanence and marginalisation turn from material conditions into existential conditions. His state ostensibly draws attention to the characteristics of uncertainty, precariousness and thus finitude of human life. Indeed, he describes the *avventizio* as a living corpse: '[q]uell'uomo sa di cadavere' (*UL*, 68).

The life of the *avventizio*, he informs us, is driven by guilt and impotence: his condition is 'quasi una malattia, o un vizio ignobile e irresistibile, che colori di colpa, di impotenza, ogni ora della giornata' (*UL*, 67). His life is 'peripheral', 'humiliated', 'subdued', neglected: 'quell'uomo che non è salutato che per distrazione, costretto a una immonda riconoscenza davanti a ogni casuale sorriso' (*UL*, 68). From an alternative perspective, the self-portrait of the writer as an outcast could be read as a version of the archetype of the artist's 'difference', or of the Romantic outcast artist. However, it differs from these literary commonplaces as it focuses on psychological dynamics of guilt and self-chastisement, humiliation and submission. The writer despises and negates himself, cultivating what he defines the 'atheism of the self'. The *avventizio*'s perennial state of mind is that of a marginalised and precarious guest among other, more stable and deserving, living beings:

> Riconoscerà il suo carattere di ospite tra i grevi 'presenti' dell'esistenza. E dell'ospite svilupperà quel timore di sedere sulla sedia, di far macchie, e quell'aria di disperata comprensione per gli impegni e i gravami che la stabilità conferisce a chi gli sta di fronte. (*UL*, 67)

Although married, he lives in a sort of self-confinement, cultivating a feeling of passivity that intensifies his acrimony. Becoming a father made him hate the

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[10] Manganelli, *Caligola*, in *Ti ucciderò*, pp. 326-334 (p. 327).

sexual instinct (presumably to avoid further offspring) and this is linked by the writer to the condition of an 'invertito': 'quel sesso allacciato al sudore della sua esistenza provvisoria lo fa un invertito astratto' (*UL*, 68). He alternates comforting uxoricidal fantasises to promote healthy sleep – 'Ognuno di noi, va da sé, ha talora meditato un delitto. Chi è sposato ha pensato alla moglie o al marito. [...] Sono momenti deliziosi. [...] Con un risolino squisito ci allunghiamo sotto le coperte. Poi ci si addormenta' – with proud fantasies of committing suicide to get back a sense of ownership of his dispossessed existence: 'nella perfetta, angelica parabola con cui ci si scaglia da un decimo piano, provare la gagliarda vibrazione della proprietà del proprio corpo, del proprio sorriso, del proprio istante' (*UL*, 60 and 69).

'Mors voluntaria' is the secret thrust that guarantees that he is still the master over his own fate: 'Non siamo stati vinti. Siamo ancora padroni' (*UL*, 65). This reflects the mentality of the masochist, who, as Theodor Reik notes, 'loses all battles except the last. He knows – at least in anticipating fantasy – that the prize beckons after he has experienced all defeats. [...] he patiently waits for the moment to bring the great turn'.[11] And the great turn for the *avventizio* is suicide:

> abbiamo l'estrema risorsa, il colpo segreto; come quel duellante
> sopraffatto dal numero che si accosta al muro, quasi abbattuto, finché
> alla segreta pressione una molla nascosta apre una fulminea porta
> nella muraglia, e di lì sparisce, intatto, eroico, elegante. (*UL*, 64)

However, instead of achieving this purportedly heroic, grand gesture, the *avventizio* absentmindedly implements another form of suicide in everyday life: 'l'avventizio comincia a suicidarsi [...] coltiva una sorta di ateismo di se stesso, si nega con distrazione, come taluno bestemmia per distrazione, senza accorgersene' (*UL*, 68). Here suicide is not to be understood as in Marelli's analysis in a literal way. In place of death as a conscious choice, he accomplishes an almost mechanical obliteration of the self.

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[11] Reik, *Masochism*, p. 430.

Finally, the *avventizio* reaches the 'truth' about himself: he is a masochist: 'In definitiva io sono ad ogni istante assassino ladro ruffiano sfruttatore sadico – e la verità si riduce al fatto che sono un masochista' (*UL*, 75). The origins of his masochistic self-hatred are explained thus:

> Nel suo inconscio i raffrenati istinti si contorcono come serpenti […]. Il sano istinto di uccidere si contrae e addomestica. Impara a odiare qualcosa, perché l'odio non può soffocarlo: ma odierà se stesso.
> (*UL*, 68)

'Odio', the 'healthy' killer instinct, has been domesticated: aggressiveness cannot be suppressed but only turned against the self. Manganelli seems here to find an explanation for his sado-masochistic stance with a perspective that adheres to the early Freudian elaborations on the phenomenon, in which, as explained in the previous chapter, masochism is theorised as sadism turned back on the subject.

In particular, the comments on the *avventizio*'s self-destructiveness might be subsumed within Freud's concept of 'reflexive masochism': 'the object [of violence or power] is given up and replaced by the subject's self'.[12] As Silverman notes, the peculiarity of the reflexive masochist is that this individual incorporates both the sadistic and masochistic functions and 'enjoys/suffers pain without renouncing activity'. According to Silverman, because reflexive masochism does not demand the renunciation of phallic characteristics such as activity, control and power, 'it is ideally suited for negotiating the contradictions inherent in masculinity'.[13] This is in line with my previous observations on the way in which Manganelli frames the choice of suicide as a way to recuperate masculinist values such as order, self-domination and self-possession. All the elements brought together fit the cultural narrative of 'male victimisation' that took shape in the aftermath of WWII. The *avventizio* stages his self-deprecation and self-aggressiveness and his anxieties about disempowerment, about his 'peripheral' and 'marginal' social status. He is characterised by qualities that

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[12] Freud, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', p. 92.

[13] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 326.

patriarchal thought excludes from its representation of masculinity: frailty, alterity, mortality. At the same time, this is connected to fantasies of self-ownership and self-domination that suggest that the performance of victimisation works as a strategy of 'remasculinisation'.

A further dimension to my argument in this chapter concerns the shape that the broader category of the victimised male takes in *UL*. Here, self-victimisation is closely related to guilt. The *avventizio* indeed is incapable of assuaging an overwhelming sense of guilt which makes him feel culpable for all – his and others' – wrongdoing and sins:

> io mi sento colpevole di tutto il male che accade, e soprattutto mi sento contraddittorio. Io sono pederasta e vergine, muoio alcolizzato e sono astemio. E sono tutti coloro che si uccidono, gli assassini e gli assassinati. (*UL*, 76)

Despite his intention to get rid of his sense of guilt, the *avventizio* finds himself trapped in a sort of affection for and attachment to it:

> [T]anto affetto ci lega alle colpe, le nostre, le altrui, questo mare paludoso di ambigua, inutile sofferenza. Ben disse Pavese, Dio è masochista: e ci fece a sua immagine e somiglianza. (*UL*, 77)

Manganelli expands on Pavese's remark in *Il mestiere di vivere* about the creation of the world by God as being a 'banale caso di masochismo': if God is a masochist, so is humankind 'created in his image and likeness', as both are intimately related to self-punishment.[14]

In this regard, another significant aspect to consider is the similarity between the *avventizio* and the young man portrayed by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone* page of 5 November 1823: the 'giovane escluso dalla vita', whose masochistic stance

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[14] 'Siccome Dio poteva creare una libertà che non consentisse il male (cfr. lo stato dei beati liberi e certi di non peccare), ne viene che il male l'ha voluto lui. Ma il male lo offende. È quindi un banale caso di masochismo'. Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere: Diario 1935-1950*, ed. by M. Guglielminetti, L. Nay, intro. by Cesare Segre (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), p. 100.

has been highlighted by critics.[15] Leopardi's young man shares the *avventizio*'s feeling of exclusion and the self-destructive attitude. In *UL*, Manganelli does not make a mystery of his literary and intellectual influences. The words and expressions he adopts frequently echo Leopardi's prose, for example the *avventizio*'s 'ateismo di se stesso' is reminiscent of Leopardi's 'misantropo di se stesso'.[16] Also, Manganelli explicitly quotes a line of Leopardi's 'Amore e morte' – 'La gentilezza del morir comprende' – in his defence of the suicidal option.

In her paper on Leopardi's portrait of the 'young man rejected by life', Cosetta Veronese argues that this figure describes the condition that Sylvia Brinton Perera has called the 'scapegoat complex', based on the Jungian archetype of the scapegoat.[17] According to Perera, the individuals who suffer this condition 'identify with [the scapegoat] masochistically, feeling profound self-hatred and self-rejection'.[18] The individuals who identify with the sacrificial victim understand the world through binary opposites good/bad and carry the shadow

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[15] Cosetta Veronese remarks that 'the attitude of the young man in the *Zibaldone* appears to be characterized by a strong masochistic stance'. See her '"Misantropo di Se Stesso"? Self-love, Self-exclusion, Self-sacrifice, and Compassion in Giacomo Leopardi', *The Modern Language Review* 104. 4 (2009), 992-1007 (p. 998), http://www.jstor.org/stable/25655043 [accessed 29 September 2019]. Fausto Curi is of the same opinion, as he finds that the 'giovane' portrayed by Leopardi presents traits very similar to those of Freud's masochist ('tratti assai somiglianti a quelli che caratterizzano il masochista descritto da Freud'). See his *Struttura del risveglio. Sade, Sanguineti, la modernità letteraria* (Bologna: Mulino, 1991), p. 152. Many critics have underlined the affinity between Manganelli and Leopardi.

[16] Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone* (Rome: Newton Compton, 2016), p. 799.

[17] Veronese, '"Misantropo di Se Stesso"?', p. 999. In Jungian psychoanalysis, the archetype of the scapegoat is used to illustrate the practice of repression in the unconscious, and is thus related to the notion of 'shadow' defined as 'the thing a person has no wish to be': '[t]he shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself'. Carl G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1): Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, ed. and trans. by Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 265. The individual who suffers from the scapegoat complex identifies with the collective shadow.

[18] Sylvia Perera, *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1986), p. 50.

material of the community (what the social community defines unacceptable and alien to maintain a sense of purity and order). As a result, 'they identify with the stuff branded "wrong" or "ugly" or "bad"'.[19]

Similarly to Leopardi's, Manganelli's work can also be explained in light of the scapegoat complex. Taking the example of *UL*, it might be noted that the *avventizio* shows the tendency to identify with the contaminating scapegoat. The term itself, meaning as mentioned 'coming from abroad', describes his condition of estrangement: he is an exile, alien to the community, set apart. This exclusion is due to the fact that, as previously illustrated, the precariousness of his existence is a reminder of the finitude of human life. As Silverman notes, mortality is 'the most narcissistically injurious of all the qualities we share with others', traumatic to the subject's stability and coherence, thus the most likely to be refused and jettisoned onto the Other (the 'foreigner'). By calling himself *avventizio*, the writer thus underlines his position as a cultural 'Other'. The *avventizio* sees his condition of being an outcast as sacred: 'è una condizione [...] che ha il carattere di una esclusione religiosa' (*UL*, 67). It is the result of a ritual of excommunication which allows the social community to strengthen itself:

> Condizione religiosa, s'è detto: [...] se si considera che in una società una religione si inserisce con la sua precettistica a dare una posticcia dignità ai rapporti umani [...]: per cui quel vivere in prestito, o a rate, è sanzione di un giudizio, un marchio, una scomunica'. (*UL*, 68)

In light of Perera's analysis, the masochistic attachment to guilt acknowledged by the *avventizio* can be explained thus: the identification with the victim, the excluded, leads to a compensatory identification with the 'unusually strong', 'chosen', 'omnipotent'. Indeed, Perera explains that while the individual who suffers from the scapegoat complex 'consciously represses, condemns or rejects parts of him or herself (the shadow)', the dynamics activated by the scapegoat complex produce an intermingling of pleasure and pain:

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[19] Perera, *The Scapegoat*, pp. 14-15.

> But there is also, to compensate this, a feeling of omnipotence – a sense of being the sin-carrier, dedicated to carrying guilt for necessary collective shadow qualities, thus one chosen and unusually strong. [. . .] This suggests the curious pride and pleasure in being like Azazel's goat, the Strong One of God, able to bear so much. The individual feels affirmed in being the 'rock who can hold up' and carry collective shadow material, being the Christ-like, Chosen One, selected to the task.[20]

Enduring the suffering caused by the identification with the sacrificial victim also offers affirmation, a way to 'exist'.

This is particularly evident in 'L'effige', another short story written around 1970 and collected in *La notte*, where we find again the figure of the exiled. A former preacher is repudiated by the religious authorities of his village because of his belief that the end of the world has already taken place. Because of this heresy he becomes a pariah, an untouchable, and is released into the wilderness to carry away the sins and decontaminate the community: 'dovevo tenere alte sul capo le mani, per mostrare come in nessun modo io toccassi qualcuno dei fedeli e infine mi venne sommessamente intimato di allontanarmi dal villaggio'.[21] However, the apostate remarks that his position at the margin actually guarantees him centrality: excommunication makes him 'seen', the chosen one, designated for the task of being the 'heretic':

> la condanna dell'eresia mi era salvezza. Condannato, ero al centro di infiniti raggi di rifiuto, ma quel diniego mi guardava, ed era la prova

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[20] Perera, *The Scapegoat*, pp. 50-51. Azazel was a goat god onto which energies like sexuality and aggression were projected in original Hebrew scapegoat rituals.

[21] Manganelli, 'L'effige' in *La notte*, pp. 19-29 (p. 20).

della essenziale centralità della mia esistenza; mi era affidato il compito di essere "eretico"'.[22]

Marco Paolone too believes that the sacrificial logic is a useful perspective for analysing Manganelli's texts.[23] His inquiry, applying René Girard's theory of the scapegoating mechanism, shows that also after *UL* Manganelli's work is characterised by the paradigm of the sacrificial victim, articulated under new guises and masks: the clown, Dionysus (*Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma*) and the *trickster* (*Pinocchio: un libro parallelo*), all of which Girard catalogues as falling within the scapegoat category. In Paolone's opinion, Manganelli differs from Gadda (one of Manganelli's literary 'fathers'): in the latter, writing is a form of revenge against a society that has excluded and marginalised him, and this pours into his texts in the form of violent and obscene language. Instead, for Paolone, Manganelli refuses to have an external target:

> Manganelli assume su di sè quelli che Girard chiamerebbe 'segni di selezione vittimaria': clownerie, anomalia, teratologia, teriomorfia, dionisismo, malinconia, morte, […] coincidendo con la voce della vittima, la scrittura di Manganelli demistifica il meccanismo persecutorio esercitato sull'Altro.[24]

However, Paolone's interpretation of Manganelli's self-victimisation, and the use of Girard for this purpose, does not bring out the ambiguity of Manganelli's position: in fact, if on one hand it is true that the author lays bare his self-abjection, on the other he also projects aggression outwards, in the form of

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[22] Manganelli, 'L'effige', p. 21. The tale of the heresiarch is narrated a second time in the next story collected in *La notte*: 'Racconto sbagliato'. Here is put forward the hypothesis that the orthodox authorities forced upon the heresiarch a sinful 'form' ('effige') in order to demonstrate that the end of the world has not come yet: 'giacchè sono dopotutto quei peccati che costituiscono la garanzia che il mondo non è finito' (p. 35). This is reminiscent of Butler's argument that the constitution of a 'world', of a community of viable subjects, is based upon the simultaneous constitution of an external domain of abjected, improper subjects. See her *Bodies That Matter*, p. 3.

[23] Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, pp. 51-53.

[24] Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, p. 52.

aggressive language against women. Since the construction of woman as abject in Manganelli's texts is left unproblematised by Paolone's approach, another approach seems necessary.

2.2 'Elogio dell'Odio': woman as abject

In this section, I will analyse the dynamics described above in Kristevian terms of abjection, which she defines thus: 'the place where I am not, and which permits me to be'.[25] Julia Kristeva defines abjection as the foundational mechanism of expulsion at the basis of the construction of one's identity, as well as of human institutions. She has the merit of having shown that if it is true that exclusion is a fundamental mechanisms for the formation of identity as well as human societies, it is also true that patriarchal societies are based on the identification of woman with 'bad' and 'other', thus on the exclusion and social blaming of woman. Coupling the 'scapegoat complex' with Kristevian theories allows us to explain the coexistence in Manganelli of self-victimisation or self-rejection, on the one hand, and rejection of woman, on the other. These could be seen as part of the same mechanism, in which the denial of the feminine is internalized: the individual has to condemn or suppress identifications with the feminine.

As already mentioned, in the first lines of *UL*, the writer informs us about his resolution to abandon poetry and to finally start a prose work, because he deems prose's coldness, clarity and coherence (as opposed to the *demenza* of poetry) antidotes to the chaos of his divided self, to his horror of being Other to the self. Writing is thus seen as a practice of separation from what is perceived as Other, which could allow him to secure the borders of his unstable, porous self:

> [o]ccorre che io sia io, e solo io, e se caso mai si rendesse necessaria una più minuta spiegazione, sarebbe nel senso di sminuzzarmi in più minute particelle, non mai di integrarmi in quello sconcio ammasso di alterità, di nonio che è la storia. (*UL*, 77)

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[25] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 3-4.

In the writer's mind, the desire for self-unity and self-sufficiency is to be obtained through the abjection of the 'filthy mass of Otherness' ('sconcio ammasso di alterità'). It is useful here to adopt Kristeva's notion of abject: that which does not 'respect borders, […] disturbs identity, system, order'.[26] The abject is what Manganelli calls 'nonio': Kristeva's 'the place where I am not, and which permits me to be', that which must be expelled in the construction of one's identity.[27] In a 1980 interview, Kristeva characterises abjection as an act that is 'above all a revolt of the person against an external menace […], but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but it may menace us from the inside'.[28] This is the case of the writer of *UL*, who realises that he identifies simultaneously with 'assassini' and 'assassinati', that persecutor and persecuted both issue from within the self.

The most interesting aspect of Kristeva's theory is the idea that patriarchal societies are based on the abjection of the feminine, in particular of woman's sexuality and reproductive role.[29] For Kristeva, the maternal figure as abject is related to the primitive struggle for differentiation from the mother experienced by all individuals: at the pre-oedipal stage, before the access to language and before the fundamental distinction Self/Other, the baby must struggle to become a separate subject from the mother and to distinguish itself from the maternal body, 'to sort out the inside and the outside of the body'.[30] At this stage, its rudimentary ego is constantly threatened with annihilation as it has not clearly secured its borders.

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[26] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

[27] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 3-4.

[28] Kristeva, *Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 118.

[29] Barbara Creed criticised Kristeva as the latter limits herself to explaining or – according to Creed – even justifying the abjection of the feminine. See her *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[30] Gary Peters, 'Review of Barbara Creed *The Monstrous-Feminine*', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*. 3.2 (1994), 108-13 (p. 109), https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.3.2.108

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the oral mother and the pre-phallic stage have been identified by Deleuze as fundamental in the fantasy-life of the masochist. Like the Deleuzian masochist, the writer of *UL* appears to re-stage the relationship with the pre-Oedipal mother and the conflicting instinctual impulses struggling within in this archaic phase. Indeed, in this text, Manganelli seems to give voice to anxieties replicating those experienced in the 'pre-history' of subjectivity, before the access to language, during the process of separating self from other:

> Oggi sono me stesso: domani sarò l'angolo del tavolo. Ma giuro che non diventerò mai quel cassetto, o l'unghia del gatto, o lo sterco del cavallo. Poi un giorno ci si scopre tutte queste cose, e altro ancora. (*UL*, 65)

Language protects him ensuring that he resists the urge to abandon himself to the 'delicato torpore dell'essere "altro"': 'allora prima che sia troppo tardi ci ricordiamo di quella sintassi di cose e nomi e pensieri che ci diede modo di essere qualcosa di diverso da quelle cose' (*UL*, 65). The *avventizio* plays out the battle to distinguish the inside from the outside also at the level of the body:

> Saremo ogni cosa: i genitali di una sgualdrina, la voce rauca del fascista, il mendicante, il pauroso di morire; *la nostra pelle non ci darà più forma*'. (*UL*, 66)[31]

Abject elements – the first of which is, not surprisingly, female genitalia – must be repelled to avert the peril of collapse of corporeal boundaries.

The writer is convinced that unless he becomes separated from others through committing suicide, his imaginary borders will disintegrate and he will 'become everything':

> Non c'è sterco in cui non riconosceremo le linee di un volto che una volta ci fu quotidiano e tollerabile. Ma vivremo. Erniosi e invertiti, cinedi e prostitute, intenti alla vicenda quotidiana dei nostri escrementi, dureremo a vivere. (*UL*, 66)

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[31] My emphasis.

It should be noted that the author includes *invertiti* and *cinedi* (young male homosexuals) among the abhorred elements that threatens the author's sense of a coherent self. Homosexuality must be expelled because, as Raewyn Connell argues, it is positioned 'at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity. [...] from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity'.[32]

Abjection of woman is cemented in the section 'Senso di colpa e senso della storia', where the writer rejects the idea, which is implied in the concept of 'history', of sharing a common matrix with his contemporaries and refuses to bear the burden of the crimes perpetuated in the past. He forges a parallel between this and another matrix that must be repelled: female genitalia:

> Ma quello che ripugna è quella matrice, che sa terribilmente di genitali di femmina, qualcosa da cui si esce, in cui ci si ributta, frugando sconciamente, qualcosa da cui non ci si libera, una tara, una bruttura, una 'colpa'. (*UL*, 77)

Reincorporation with the original matrix, the maternal body, is depicted as both source of attraction ('in cui ci si ributta') and horror ('ripugna') because it signifies the obliteration of the self, not developing as a separate subject.[33] As mentioned before, this ambivalent movement between desire and horror of fusion with the mother (which corresponds to the attraction/horror of the undifferentiated) is recreated in the masochistic dramatisations.

In the segment 'Elogio dell'odio', hatred becomes a protective measure against the risk of annihilation, of sinking irretrievably in the Other, here explicitly represented as 'una donna':

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[32] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn (Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 78.

[33] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 64. Kristeva explains that abjection is 'above all ambiguity': 'abjection itself is a composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning' (pp. 9-10).

> C'è un odio sano, giusto, necessario: tutti noi sappiamo che per star bene l'odio è necessario come l'amore. [...] È l'amore che mi lega a una donna, ma è una sorta di odio delicato, trattenuto ma del tutto cosciente, che mi ingiunge di sapere 'sempre' che io sono una cosa diversa dalla donna – che me ne protegge, sempre. (*UL*, 77-78)

Hatred is necessary to guarantee order and establish definite boundaries between self and woman: 'l'amore è generico, elusivo, e senza confini definiti; dove l'odio è definito, preciso, esatto' (*UL*, 77). These boundaries have to be continuously redrawn and sexual difference must be constantly reaffirmed ('sempre'). As Lacan points out, since identity is an imaginary construct, the subject is in 'constant danger of sliding back into the chaos from which he started'.[34] This is why, according to Judith Butler, after the primitive abjection of the maternal, rejection of woman in the patriarchal system has to be continuously repeated: because of the persistent possibility of the disruption of self boundaries.[35]

What Manganelli labels 'odio' is actually the perception of sexual difference, which, as Rebecca Falkoff notes, is posited by Manganelli as the basis of language itself and of the social order: 'c'è una specie di odio universale, una volontà di dire di no, di rifiutare qualcosa, che non è altro che il fondamento del linguaggio, dell'ordine delle cose' (*UL*, 78).[36] These observations of the *avventizio* illustrate the dynamic of repudiation through which the 'coherent' subject is constituted and preserved. This logic of difference and essentialist view on sex and gender reassures the writer of *UL* of the 'purity' of his (gender) identity ('occorre che io sia io e solo io'). We find confirmation of the argument made in the previous chapter: anxieties about the state of masculine identity,

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[34] Jacques Lacan, 'Some Reflections on the Ego', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34 (1953), 11-17 (p. 15). Identity is formed for Lacan during the mirror stage, which represents the moment when the baby first recognises itself as a unitary being in an image he receives from outside itself. Even though this image is external, the baby takes it for the self: rather than a recognition is a misrecognition (*meconnoisance*). In conclusion, identity is fictional, imaginary: it depends on identification with something external, other than the self.

[35] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 8.

[36] Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 76.

perceived as endangered especially when confronted with the feminine 'other', constitute the underlay for the feeling of victimisation, crisis and loss of power reflected in the figure of the *avventizio*.

We might conclude that at this early stage, writing represents for Manganelli an attempt to produce a coherent self, to make the self intelligible, 'pure'. The ejection of the abject is required to order the conflicting impulses residing within the self and lacerating it. To deal with his intolerable contradictoriness, the writer adopts a mode of relationality based on division and abjection, called by Manganelli 'l'odio severo dell'alterità' (*UL*, 78).

One last element recognisable in *UL* that deserves critical attention concerns the origin of the sense of guilt felt by the writer. In the aforementioned passage from the segment 'Senso di colpa e senso della storia', by implying that the expulsion from the maternal body is 'una tara, una bruttura, una "colpa"', the author hints at the fact that he perceives guilt as originating from the very fact of being born. Similarly, in a poem written in the 1950s, thus coeval with *UL*, Manganelli regards being born as a mistake made by himself: 'Forse l'errore fu nascere, niente altro'.[37] The theme occurs also in the short story 'Racconto sbagliato'. Here is introduced the concept of 'compulsory shame' that refers to: 'la vergogna di essere nati prima della fine del mondo'.[38]

Elettra Stimilli, in her essay *Debt and Guilt* (2019), analyses the mechanism through which human beings interpret the existential condition of openness and potentiality that characterises human life as an 'abyss', a lack and a menace, and quite surprisingly 'accredit' this lack and negativity to themselves, in the form of guilt. She notes how a great deal of twentieth-century philosophical thinking shares the view of subjectivity as fundamentally masochistic, as it is based on an 'original disesteem':

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[37] Manganelli, *Poesie*, ed. by C. Piccini (Milano: Crocetti, 2006), p. 81.

[38] Manganelli, *La notte*, p. 37.

> Much of the philosophical thought of the twentieth century – aimed at dismantling the metaphysical notion of the subject and interested in the definition of a new anthropology – arises precisely from a reflection on this 'original disesteem' and has for the most part ended up conceiving the extent to which human life is open as impoverishment, lack and negativity.[39]

Stimilli suggests that the sense of guilt originates from birth:

> guilt originates at birth along with the anxiety for the loss of the beloved object. With their contrasting instincts, human beings feel responsible for such loss, but this loss is precisely what allowed their life to begin. [...]
> It is as if the ontological openness to different possibilities existing at the beginning of life, in order to assume a power that belongs to it, finds the way of accusing itself of a fault, a lack, a debt, which in this way becomes the only thing in which it can invest to give value to what seems not to have any.[40]

For Paolone, the 'inaugural loss' of birth which lays the foundation of every subjectivity is the most predominant topic in Manganelli, and this is what Manganelli refers to when he talks about *nulla*. Lack of being, the thematic nucleus programmatically placed at the centre of Manganelli's work, is a word for the lost condition before birth and Manganelli's writing would be the result of a melancholic attempt to re-establish this lost state.[41] *Nulla* is thus a word for the first loss, that of the mother as love object: in an interview with Camilla Cederna, to the question 'quando hai amato la prima volta?' Manganelli answered: 'Nel quarto mese di gravidanza'.[42]

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[39] Elettra Stimilli, *Debt and Guilt. A Political Philosophy*, trans by S. Porcelli (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 151.

[40] Stimilli, *Debt and Guilt*, pp. 150-52. This process is similar to that of the melancholic who is unable to identify the lost object, and therefore, as Butler explains, '[t]he pain of loss is "credited" to the one who suffers it, at which point the loss is understood as a fault or injury deserving of redress'. Butler, *The Psychic Life,* p. 184.

[41] Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, pp. 116-22.

[42] 'C'è anche l'amor scortese', interview by Camilla Cederna in Manganelli, *La penombra*, pp. 94-95.

Paolone again overlooks the other side of the coin: if coming into existence is tantamount to the loss of the body of the mother, self-blame and self-deprecation can easily turn into holding the mother accountable for this original wound. Manganelli reflects explicitly on this mechanism, arguing that the myth of being marked by a loss that the mother could, but will not, redeem underpins Western children's literature classics like *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland*: 'hanno un fondamento [...] nel mito puerile dell'essere perduti [...] segnati di una perdizione che la madre potrebbe stornare, ma non lo farà'.[43] Here Manganelli exposes the belief that at the origin of human life one experiences a loss, but also an abandonment. Silverman observes that the 'tacit belief that she [mother] *could* satisfy our desire if she *really* wanted to', thus the accusation of a 'betrayal', has great costs for women in the Western culture.[44] It sustains the exclusion of woman in Western societies and the association of femininity with death: the 'mother inevitably teaches the lesson of death'.[45]

The idea of woman's betrayal and unfaithfulness is also reflected in *UL*. Here, 'mors voluntaria' is connoted as female but with a peculiar trait: being faithful:

> Codesta idea della morte, che ci sta accanto tutta la vita, ha una consistenza femminile: e la sua prima virtù è la fedeltà. È un pensiero carezzevole, che rende mangiabile ogni pezzo di pane [...] Forse è l'unica immagine coniugale che non ci eluda. (*UL*, 66)

Voluntary death, that is the soothing idea that the human being has always the option to commit suicide, is the *only* 'female' that, like a devoted wife, never abandons the *avventizio*.

The stereotypes of woman's unfaithfulness and feminisation of death are replicated throughout Manganelli's work, starting from *H*. In the section 'Chiosa sulla donna infedele', the mother, presented as 'la prima donna infedele' as

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[43] Manganelli, 'Peter Pan amore mio' in James Matthew Barrie, *Peter Pan.Peter Pan nei giardini di Kensington. Peter e Wendy*, trans. by Milli Dandolo (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), p. v.

[44] Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, p. 94. This cohesive 'Western' notion is an approximation I am adopting as terminology drawn from Silverman's work.

[45] Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, p. 69.

Giorgio Biferali notes, is substituted with other equally unfaithful women.[46] As often happens in Manganelli, the feminine and maternal power is figured as a deity – 'Divinità ingannevole: unica possibile' (*H*, 48) – worshipped with a sacrificial rite. Here we find again the logic of the male sacrificial victim. The adoration becomes a masochistic ritual, where erection is depicted as a religious procession ('muscoli, inguine, prepuzio, incolonnati in questua sessuale, con sventolare di pii testicoli, sotto a baldacchini di scroto, dietro a ciborio di vulva') and the sexual act as sacrifice of male blood and sperm ('per cui necessitano propiziazioni di sangue e sperma').[47] This passage illustrates the fluidity of masochism into sadism and vice versa, and the interconnection of the two concepts especially at this early stage of Manganelli's work. Indeed, suddenly, roles are reversed: the unfaithful woman becomes the martyr, the sacrificial Lamb. The male reader ('amico') is invited by the author to feed on the unfaithful 'whore' and set her on fire:

> la magalda infedele [...] si umilia a vas sacrificale, ti si fa ancella e martire, la lussuriosa si fa agnelliforme, scottadito per tuo interiore nutrimento. Tu ne mangerai la memoria [...] Così, la femmina infedele, ministra e puttana, dà fuoco al proprio rogo; e tu bruciala, amico. Tu amala, cornuto. (*H*, 48)

In this section, I have analysed the connection between masochism, self-victimisation and guilt in Manganelli by framing the discourse in terms of the 'scapegoat complex'. I have argued that this is one of the specific shapes that the discourse emerging in the post-war period of 'man in crisis' takes in Manganelli. By linking the fantasises of masochism and self-victimisation in *UL* with the model of the 'victimised male', I argue that these fantasies accommodate and compensate anxieties about the state of masculine identity related to the changes in gender roles and narratives in the 1950s. I have shown

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[46] Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 54.

[47] Also Falkoff has recognized the explicit masochistic character of this sexuality. She notes that Manganelli 'describes heterosexual sex as a religious rite involving the sacrifice of sperm to "il fiore della fregna"' and she highlights '[t]he masochism inherent to this sexuality'. See her 'Giorgio Manganelli and the Illegible Obscene', p. 147.

how *UL* articulates a discourse on suicide and self-sacrifice that, while seemingly subverting certain patriarchal values, is actually oriented towards their reassertion: for example, we have seen how the suicidal option is linked to Western traditional values of masculinity like steadiness, order, self-mastery and control. In addition, I have shown how the claim to the margin and to the position of the victim guarantees a new centrality to the subject. I have disclosed the misogynistic implications that this masochistic identification with the sacrificial role might sustain, and which seem at work in Manganelli's texts. While the male subject posits itself in the role of the victim, at the same time, the feeling of an unstable and threatened identity triggers a mechanism of abjection of what is perceived as Other ('una donna'). In addition, male victimisation in *UL* and *H* also bolsters stereotypes assigning guilt to women for male's suffering.

2.3 The sacrificial victim after *Un libro*

Also after *UL*, Manganelli's texts keep invoking tropes of male victimisation and associating the writer with the sacrificial victim. In Manganelli's view, the condition of the outcast, called 'disadattato' in the following excerpt, is a precondition for artistic creativity:

> Noi abbiamo imparato da Jung che l'esperienza della creazione non è euforica, ma che anzi spesso è affidata a persone scarsamente adattabili, giacché solo chi è tanto disadattato da poter diventare anonimo, può sperimentare una condizione di creatività impersonale.[48]

Also in Micol Argento's portrayal, the writer in Manganelli's work is represented as a martyr. The writer has an 'obscure vocation' which makes him the 'chosen one' who can testify the angst of the universe:

> [lo scrittore] è un inetto, un disadattato, è completamente incapace di vivere una vita integrata e appagante; scopre così di perseguire

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[48]   Manganelli, 'La psicanalisi della poesia', in *La stampa*, 5 August 1979.

un'oscura vocazione, di essere votato a un destino 'altro'. [...] Lo scrittore è il martire, l'estremo testimone dell'angoscia cosmica.[49]

The figure of the sacrificial victim singled out in *UL* returns in Manganelli's later texts, for example in the already mentioned stories 'L'effige' and 'Racconto sbagliato' collected in *La notte*. These, together with other short pieces, constitute for Nigro the laboratorial material that will take final shape in *La palude definitiva*, the last work by the author written before his death in 1990 and published posthumously.[50] Also *La palude definitiva* indeed revolves around the theme of the scapegoat, the morally tainted, the anomalous, the impure. A man is not able to recall why he has been banished by his community: he knows that he is guilty, but he does not remember of which crime:

> quel che ricordo è una folla che, di notte, gremiva la piazza davanti all'ingresso – un ingresso elaboratamente ornato da belve allegoriche, devotamente araldiche – e urlava la mia infamia. Si agitavano torce, come a promettere il rogo, si scuotevano ferri; ma che mai avevo compiuto per essere oggetto di tanto furore?[51]

The narrating subject suspects he committed a sacrilege, because he has now found refuge in the swamp, where 'non osa andare se non chi abbia compiuto gesti tali da essere abbandonato dagli dei e odioso agli uomini'.[52] The theme of the forgotten origins of guilt (which can be seen as a variation of the theme of loss/guilt through the fact of birth) frequently reappears: also the protagonist of the unpublished short story *Destarsi* does not remember the sin for which he was convicted: 'Mi desto chiuso nelle catene; dunque mi hanno catturato; sono stato condannato, anche se ho dimenticato la minuta precisione della dannazione'.[53]

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[49] Micol Argento, *Giorgio Manganelli: Indagine per una riscrittura infinita* (Naples: Liguori, 2012), pp. 73-74. For a more detailed account of the figure of the 'inetto' and how this came to be pervasive in the representation of Italian masculinity in the years following WWII, see the already mentioned study by Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*.

[50] Nigro, afterword to Manganelli, *La notte*, pp. 229-48 (p. 230).

[51] Manganelli, *La palude definitiva* (Milan: Adelphi, 1991), p. 9.

[52] Manganelli, *La palude*, p. 12.

[53] Manganelli, *La notte*, p. 73.

The prisoner of the *centuria* 'Settantanove' finds himself in an analogous situation – segregated in a labyrinth without knowing 'per quale delitto sia stato condannato'.[54]

Another text that presents similarities with *UL* and employs a self-sacrificial logic is *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma o, del lettore e dello scrittore considerati come dementi* (1982). This work can be read as a compilation of various myths that purport to describe the genealogy of literature, one of which is a retelling of the myth of Moloch, Phoenician god of fire related to child sacrifice:

> Quel che segue è una fola, e abbastanza triviale da non diventare mai racconto, libro; forse, un film. A Cartagine, luogo elettivo di fantasmi, esiste una necropoli con minuscole tombe; racchiudono, mi dicono, le ceneri dei bambini bruciati nelle viscere del Moloch. (*DOS*, 54)

In Manganelli's version of the myth, literature was born when a child offered as sacrifice to the god of fire Moloch becomes aware of his destiny and discards both the options available to him: suicide (sacrificing himself into the fire) or murder (by becoming a priest of Moloch):

> Sia che si uccida, sia che uccida, egli non può uscire dal regno angusto e decisivo di quell'essenza centrale, il signor Fuoco […] Tuttavia supponiamo che il ragazzo, sfiorato il suicidio e architettato il primo omicidio in nomine Dei si chieda se non esista una terza strada […] Che succederebbe se fosse possibile adoperare il negativo come materia di parole? (*DOS*, 56)

Notwithstanding the ineluctability of his future destruction, the child decides to host Moloch inside himself and to make it talk ('farlo parlare', *DOS*, 56).

Within this mythical explanation, at the core of literature lies the 'sacred force' of destruction and annihilation as a 'negative centre' around which language is organized, while the author is associated with a sacrificial victim (*DOS*, 56). At the same time, the child/author is also an enchanter who manages to dominate the Moloch:

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[54] Manganelli, *Centuria*, p. 163.

> colui che incanta il Moloch recepisce il Moloch dentro di sé [...] diventa custode, protettore, tutela, assistente [...] in una certa misura, tiene in proprio controllo il Moloch. (*DOS*, 107)

It can be argued that the Moloch tale shares *UL*'s very core: both texts represent the moment of origin of writing and in both cases, writing or narration is woven around a negative centre and around the meditation on killing and suicide.

In *UL*, Manganelli posits a 'desperate will' as the force that governs not only the human psyche but the entire universe ('la volontà disperata di tutto l'universo', *UL*, 71). Similarly, in *DOS*, the world is dominated by a sacred force of annihilation and destruction: the Moloch is 'sacra forza', 'centro del mondo abitato dall'annientamento', 'luogo della distruzione' (*DOS*, 55). Just like the imaginary writer in *UL*, the child in *DOS* is kept in balance between the choice of being a killer or commiting suicide, and is dominated by heteroaggressive and autoaggresive destructive impulses. Manganelli's *Weltanschauung* did not change over the years: by the time he wrote *DOS*, it still hinged upon the idea that God and humankind are masochists aimed at self-destruction. In the Moloch myth, indeed, the child knows that 'il senso del mondo è la distruzione sacrificale sua e del mondo stesso [...] la distruzione sacrificale del mondo' (*DOS*, 55). However, *DOS* introduces the idea – that finds no equivalent in *UL* – of literature as an opportunity to control Moloch, that is, living together with destructive impulses and making a literary use of opposed psychic tendencies.

The allegory of the child offered to Moloch conveys the idea of the author as completely subject to the discursive system, renouncing responsibility for his words. Moloch also can be interpreted as a divine personification of the tyrannical nature of language. Indeed, in Manganelli's oeuvre, language often takes the shape of an inscrutable and threatening God whom the writer has to obey blindly.[55] See for instance this excerpt from *La letteratura come menzogna*, where Manganelli defines language as 'un dio barbaro':

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[55] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts*, p. 78.

> [Lo scrittore] non lavora secondo estro o fantasia, ma secondo ubbidienza; cerca di capire che cosa vuole da lui il linguaggio, dio barbaro e precipitosamente oracolare. La sua devozione è fanatica e inadeguata.[56]

Manganelli gives us a demonstration of this process in *DOS* showing how, during the act of writing, the writer has to remissively obey words, for example those that do not want to be written:

> Linea retta e labirinto, sfera e monodimensione, la parola ombra – non so che aggiungere, può capitare che una frase rifiuti di farsi scrivere, e non resta che ubbidire, fare delle ossa della mano scrivente una morbida gomma inetta e inerte. Buona sera. (*DOS*, 67)

Also in the Moloch tale, the child is an instrument of Moloch (an instrument of 'language'), a means through which Moloch finds expression. Yet, by becoming a storyteller, the child is also able to reach a position of control: 'tiene in proprio controllo il Moloch' (*DOS*, 107). The insistence on the use of causative constructions, where the Moloch is the object of the verbal complex ('far parlare il Moloch', 'far agire il Moloch'), signals this contradiction.

In *DOS*, Manganelli highlights the fact of cultural subjection: man is confined in and determined by the linguistic horizon, from which there is no escape:

> la parola ha nello stesso tempo creato e ucciso la natura; prima della parola non c'era natura; il grande bang fu semplicemente l'esplosione di un dizionario. Avere a che fare con le parole è una condizione irreparabile; non vi è patteggiamento possibile con il loro indifferente ricatto, ed ogni assenso accresce la torturante esigenza della parola. (*DOS*, 98)

The impossibility of having an immediate (i.e. not mediated by language) relation with one's own 'nature' is an irreparable condition: the laws of language dictate our being and how the things in the world come into being for us. We might note the difference in Manganelli's philosophy of language from *UL* to *DOS*: in the former, language brings order and works as a means of separating self and other; in the latter, language is linked with 'torture' and 'blackmail'. Language is characterised as a form of blackmail because, as Butler explains, in

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[56] Manganelli, *La letteratura come menzogna*, pp. 220-21.

order to have social recognition and validation of one's being, one is forced to identify with categories and classifications that are never one's own.[57] This means being formed at the same time as subject and subjected.[58]

In the following passage, where we can see a clear influence of Lacanian thought, Manganelli states that the fact that 'we are spoken by language' locates us in a condition of 'inability', powerlessness: we are forced to identify with the cultural representations that are 'out there', that precede us and speak for us:

> la dimensione illusionistica della parola, il fatto che la parola parla, non è soltanto parlata, crea una condizione di inabilità violenta, che è insieme l'unico luogo abitabile che possiamo concederci'. (*DOS*, 64)[59]

Access to language thus constitutes the subject as divided: speaking for Moloch, or speaking of Moloch, estranges the child from itself:

> quando egli era uomo di Moloch, come suicida o omicida, egli sapeva tutto di sé [...]; ma dal momento che ha scelto di parlare con Moloch, a Moloch, di Moloch, egli non sa più nulla di sé, è tutto parole. (*DOS*, 57)

At the same time, outside the linguistic universe, we could not exist (è insieme l'unico luogo abitabile che possiamo concederci'). Manganelli insists on language as the only 'livable' dimension: 'le nostre parole sono estremamente lontane, non le toccheremo mai, dita da vecchio fin dalla nascita, [...] ma quelle parole dementi [...] sono appunto le parole che fummo progettati ad abitare' (*DOS*, 112).

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[57] Butler, *The Psychic Life*, p. 197.

[58] Butler, *The Psychic Life*, p. 11.

[59] For both Manganelli and Lacan, lack is at the heart of subjectivity; for both, access to language introduces division in the subject and foregoes its possibility of being a 'whole'. Manganelli's idea of being a means in the hand of Moloch could be read as a variation of Lacan's well-known idea that the subject is spoken by language. Biferali has already underscored the affinity between Manganelli and Lacan, emphasising that Manganelli's reversal in the subject/language relationship 'avvicina il pensiero manganelliano alle riflessioni freudiane e lacaniane sul linguaggio e inconscio'. Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 15.

Manganelli's fantasy re-stages the experience of violence and loss involved in the submission to the symbolic order, which always predates the individual. The word – defined as 'carnefice culturale' – exercises a terrible violence on the subject, introducing division and foregoing the possibility of being a 'whole': 'Dunque, ritorniamo all'elemento ermeneutico delle parole, la loro indifferenza, e ferocia, e distanza, la loro terribile violenza, maestre di lacerazione e trafittura' (*DOS*, 68 and 121). The Moloch myth, by replicating the moment of loss by which we are constituted as subjects, demonstrates that masochism is a structural element of subjectivity.[60] Similarly to *UL*, *DOS* stresses the role of masochism in the constitution of subjectivity, although more emphasis is placed on the experience of suffering related to the further loss involved in the access to language, rather than on the first loss represented by birth.

Whilst the emphasis on the fundamentally masochistic posture of the subject proves to be a constant in Manganelli's work, *DOS* differs from *UL* with regard to the author's stance on the meaning and practice of literature as well as to his outlook on language and identity. Starting from the subtitle – *Del lettore e dello scrittore considerati come dementi* – Manganelli declares that literature is not the domain of clarity, but of insanity. The in-between, the contradictory, the ambiguous, which tainted and tormented the subject in *UL*, becomes in *DOS* the interstitial position from which literary production becomes possible, as it represents a fracture in the cultural norm (the 'tyranny of language').

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[60] It is interesting to note that the 'Moloch fantasy' is a locus classicus in scholarly work on masochism, starting from the case analysed by Theodor Reik of a patient whose fantasy was being sacrificed to 'a barbaric idol somewhat like the Phoenician Moloch'. In the fantasy, the patient identifies with a prospective victim, waiting in line to submit to a sacrificial ritual involving mutilation of genitals by the hands of priests and subsequent dropping into the fire. According to Silverman, the Moloch fantasy recounted by Reik's patient stages the 'foundational cultural moment' of access to language and literalises its castrating effects on the subject. Theodor Reik, 'The Characteristics of Masochism', *American Imago*, 46. 2 (1989), 161-95 (p. 162), https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/docview/1289744350/fulltext/A84D24CC53B54E7CPQ/1?accountid=14540, [accessed 30 January 2018]. Silverman, *Male subjectivity*, p. 206.

In *DOS*, the author gives up *UL*'s idea of producing a coherent, 'readable' self through writing. On the contrary, writing is conceived as a process of demolition of identity and of the normative identifications through which it is constituted: to write, one has to undergo a process of 'abrasione del nome':

> Se l'abrasione del nome viene consumata, la parola ci priva [...] di tutto ciò che ci sta dentro, ci prepara come un pollo per la cottura. Quando siamo vuoti e anonimi, la parola può cominciare ad agire, purché abbiamo la cortesia, naturalmente, di toglierci prima la pelle, che nel palazzo della parola è considerato un cappotto, che nessuno terrebbe indosso mentre rumorosamente succhia una tazza di tè ospitale. (*DOS*, 67)

Writing is a process of de-personalisation: this is what can be grasped from the rather obscure passages such as the one that reads: '[Il fanciullo] deve separare il fuoco da Moloch [...] Separare il fuoco da Moloch significa conferire ad esso fuoco una demenza obbiettiva – non psicologica' (*DOS*, 110-11). Otherwise, writing 'rischia di essere una trovata pubblicitaria, come il poveraccio che vuole buttarsi dal Colosseo per ragioni del tutto private' (*DOS*, 110). Basically, literature does not deny the structurally masochistic nature of subjectivity nor the violence inherent in our drives but sublimates and modulates destructive drives into an aesthetic form.[61] It de-personalises violence and turns it into a more controlled demolition of the self that takes place in the textual space. Unlike the 'poveraccio' who wants to jump off the Colosseo, the writer is paradoxically able to lose himself in a controlled way: 'presuppone una perdita di sé che non è, forse, la mera abrasione del nome, ma un precipitare lento, un dirupare cauto' (*DOS*, 105). To understand these changes in Manganelli's approach, I would like to return back to *UL* to illustrate the steps that lead to

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[61] This could be read next to Leo Bersani's analysis in *The Freudian Body* that understands masochism as the constitutive principle of artistic work: 'The taming of our sexuality perhaps depends [...] on the cultural "assumption", or replay, of its masochistic nature. [...] Only through this process of ironic *reprise* – productively mistaken replications of consciousness – is the violence of our masochistic sexuality modulated into a product, or rather a process, of culture. Cultural symbolisation, then, would be nothing more mysterious than the *work* of this replicative process'. See his *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 115.

this shift. This is at the heart of my understanding of the evolution of the notions of masochism, sadism and sexual differences after *UL*, which will be the object of the next chapter.

2.4 *La letteratura come menzogna*

In his comparative analysis of Manganelli and Pavese, Filippo Milani examines the relationship between the suicidal option and biographical writing in the two authors. As also Nigro points out, Pavese's suicide and the posthumous publication of *Il mestiere di vivere* in 1952 represented a turning point in Manganelli's artistic trajectory, and were central to his decision to venture upon writing *UL* in 1953:

> C'è una data, l'unica certa, di questo lungo e travaglioso apprendistato manganelliano. È la pubblicazione del *Mestiere di vivere* di Pavese. Siamo nel 1952. Pavese si era ucciso nel 1950. Manganelli legge il diario dello scrittore suicida. E in due riprese, datate 1953 e 1955, improvvisa sulla macchina da scrivere la 'teologia' autentica di uno scrittore immaginario che [...] misura la 'volontà disperata di tutto l'universo', mentre medita sul delitto e sul suicidio.[62]

From Milani's comparative analysis emerges how Pavese and Manganelli started from similar existential anguish and obsessive thoughts on suicide but reached two opposite outcomes. Manganelli interpreted Pavese's suicide as an act of

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[62] Nigro, 'Il laboratorio', p. 347. Just like Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, also Pavese's *Il mestiere di vivere* is explicitly referenced in *UL*: 'l'idea di vivere nella storia rende incredibilmente pesante il mestiere di vivere' and the already mentioned: 'Ben disse Pavese, Dio è masochista' (pp. 75 and 77). It might be argued that masochism is a key element at the basis of the three authors' affinity. In his doctoral thesis, Alessandro Gazzoli analyses the relationships between the three authors and mentions the masochistic nature of their observations on self-hatred and self-destruction: 'Leopardi, infatti, individua con estrema lucidità che c'è un compiacimento nel farsi del male, nel trattarsi come esseri abietti, che ci può essere insomma una sorta di *delectatio morosa* nella sofferenza: "La disperazione aumenta. E se diminuisse? È una prospettiva che spaventa", appunta Manganelli. Anche Pavese, se si guarda indietro, trova la stessa masochistica abitudine'. See his 'Auto Da Fé', p. 74.

honesty.[63] For Pavese, life coincided with literature and his refusal of writing –
'non scriverò più' are *Mestiere*'s last words – accompanied the choice of suicide
as a coherent gesture. At this early stage, for Manganelli, the contradictions of
the self are uncontrollable and unbearable while identification with Pavese did
not come without the fear of heading down the same track. In a page of his
diary dated 26 June 1955, he wrote:

> Se leggo due o tre righe, qua e là, del Diario di Pavese, ho paura [...]
> Quanti anni sono che io mi dibatto negli stessi problemi? E l'esito –
> l'esito sarà il medesimo? Sarà *quello* il mio unico gesto umano,
> ragionevole, quello che mi parrà in accordo naturale con la realtà,
> che ora mi è tanto difficile capire?[64]

In contrast with Pavese, Manganelli was able to overcome self-destructive
impulses thanks to the encounter, in 1959, with the psychoanalyst Ernst . As we
have seen in the previous chapter, Manganelli defined his therapist 'l'uomo che
mi ha insegnato a mentire'. On a personal level, as Lietta Manganelli explains,
this meant for Manganelli the possibility of 'inventarsi un'altra vita, diversa e a
lui più congeniale'.[65] On the literary level, it resulted in the theorisation of
'letteratura come menzogna': literature, immune to the law of non-
contradiction, is the place where life's contradictions and painful internal
divisions can be, instead of solved or suppressed, allowed to 'react' and coexist.
Manganelli was able to overcome the idea of suicide by giving up the intent –
still preponderant in *UL* – to resolve the fragmentation of his self. According to
Paolone, Bernhard helped Manganelli use the literary medium to cultivate and
integrate 'the otherness within' without destroying it: 'coltivare e convivere con
l'alterità presente nell'Io, integrarla senza distruggerla'.[66] As Filippo Milani
explains, by acquiring a wider consciousness of his internal divisions, Manganelli

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[63] Manganelli defines Pavese's suicide as an act of 'coatta, angosciosa onestà' in a 1970 article:
'Recitava una parte', *L'Espresso*, July 1970, now in *Riga*, p. 144.

[64] Manganelli, 'Quaderni di *appunti critici*', in *Riga*, p. 93.

[65] Luca Barbirati, 'Il "Manga" di Lietta: Intervista inedita ad Amelia Antonia Manganelli',
https://samgha.wordpress.com/2014/05/20/il-manga-di-lietta-intervista-ad-amelia-antonia-
manganelli/ [accessed 29 October 2020].

[66] Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, p. 69.

learned how to make a literary use of his opposing psychic tendencies, by making 'contraddizione' his stylistic mainstay.[67] Arguably, Manganelli's 'disonestà', as opposed to Pavese's 'onestà', is what saved Manganelli's life.

In Manganelli's theory of literature, the lie is celebrated because it allows one to give up the illusion of a 'true' and 'coherent' identity – the illusion he still harboured in *UL*: 'occorre che io sia io e solo io'. In a 1990 interview with *Corriere della sera* entitled 'Io, Manganelli, un dizionario impazzito' and bearing the subheading: 'Con la psicoanalisisi ho scoperto l'arte della menzogna. E la molteplicità delle mie autobiografie', Manganelli explains how Bernhard helped him to abandon the idea of the self as a monolithic entity:

> la prima cosa che ha provocato in me l'impatto con Bernhard è stato proprio il rompere quella idea lì. L'idea della unicità dell'io e quindi una decomposizione dell'immagine della mia personalità, di quello che io ero. Questa è stata la prima cosa che ho capito e che non mi ha più abbandonato. Questa scoperta l'ho fatta mia.[68]

Unlike *UL*'s quest for 'chiarezza' (clarity) in writing – analogous to the choice of suicide as the only possible 'ordinato e coerente' action given the impossibility of acquiring a stable, intelligible identity – Manganelli's writing evolves into making 'contraddizione' his writing *formula*. Indeed, as Giorgio Agamben puts it: '[o]gni lettore attento concederà che questa zona d'indistinzione definisce il luogo essenziale della scrittura di Manganelli, traccia la cifra indelebile della sua geografia mentale'.[69]

Manganelli's idea of literature as a form of deceit represents his contribution to the Gruppo 63's debates. The purpose of the Italian neo-avant-garde was exposing the falsifications of common sense and everyday language, which was

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[67] Milani, *Retorica*, p. 235.

[68] Caterina Cardona, 'Io, Manganelli, un dizionario impazzito', in *La penombra mentale*, p. 225.

[69] Agamben, 'Introduzione', p. 9. Scholars have invariably identified Manganelli's most recognisable feature in the coexistence of opposites, both at a macroscopic level, with novels where 'una sostanziale indecidibilità [...] è il più evidente approdo' and at a microscopic level, with the oxymoron as the privileged figure of speech. Federico Francucci, 'I libri non esistono'.

seen as always fundamentally ideological. In Florian Mussgnug's opinion, Manganelli's position consists in a challenge not only to 'the current ideological system', which was the purpose of other neo-avant-garde intellectuals, but also to 'every possible set of linguistic conventions'.[70] Is this challenge extended also to sex and gender as fictional systems of signs?

To better understand the potentially subversive implications of Manganelli's theory of 'letteratura come menzogna', it is useful to outline the problem in the terms posed by Paul De Man, who defines as '"literary" in the full sense of the term, any text that implicitly or explicitly signifies its own rhetorical mode'.[71] As Stef Craps comments, this means that since literature 'flaunts its rhetoricity, [it] avoids the bad faith of other discourses which try to repress or deny their rhetorical status'.[72] For De Man, literature is 'a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations', because it exposes the purported coincidence between our historically contingent and constructed categories and 'nature' as the effect of ideology.[73] By showing that literature is as unreal as 'reality', or that reality is fictional just like literature, Manganelli lays bare the illusionistic quality of our perception of reality, which depends on arbitrary linguistic conventions: 'Sono persuaso che la realtà sia piuttosto irrealistica'.[74]

In contrast with literature's exhibition of its own mendacity, sex and gender are systems of signs whose artificiality has to be concealed from consciousness, 'to perpetuate the power relations of which [they are] a product': heterosexuality and masculine hegemony.[75] Manganelli did expressly tackle the artificial status of

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[70]   Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 27.

[71]   Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 136.

[72]   Stef Craps, 'Gender Performativity in Woolf's *Orlando*' in *BELL: Belgian Essays on Language and Literature* (2000), 51-70 (p. 68).

[73]   De Man, 'The Resistance to Theory', *Yale French Studies*, 63 (1982), 3-20 (p. 11), https://www.jstor.org/stable/2929828 [accessed 05 November 2019].

[74]   Manganelli, *Laboriose inezie* (Milan: Garzanti, 1986), p. 219.

[75]   Craps, 'Gender Performativity', p. 52.

gender and sexual linguistic categories in a 1979 literary review of *Una strana confessione* by Herculine Barbin. Manganelli grapples with the story of Barbin, an intersex person, from a linguistic point of view: Barbin's curse was being 'innominabile':

> Il fantasma di Barbin era innominabile; e quando egli cercò di raccontare la sua storia mostruosa e patetica, egli si accorse di non avere pronomi, non aggettivi, non participi. La linguistica indoeuropea non pare tollerare l'esistenza di figure cui non si adatti la secca e rigida uniforme del pronome; le lingue europee esigono il sesso definito e catastale, e il neutro si riferisce a un fantasma che ha rinunciato al sesso, esattamente il contrario di Barbin, che aveva cercato di possedere entrambi i sessi.[76]

Barbin was 'intollerable' and 'monstrous' for the Indo-European linguistics and its rigid gender taxonomy because these have no adequate pronouns, adjectives and participles. For Manganelli, Barbin's body demystifies Indo-European languages: Barbin negotiaties with 'un mondo innocente, che il suo corpo ostinatamente smentisce'.[77] Worthy of notice is the fact that Manganelli frames the issue in terms of 'lie' ('smentisce') and 'innocence' ('mondo innocente'). This suggests that in Manganelli's mind also gender and sex are linguistic constructions which have been naturalised to the point of being perceived as 'innocent', while in fact they sustain certain ideologies. This leads us back to De Man's observations on discourses that present themselves as coincident with the natural reality repressing their rhetorical, 'literary' status.

As discussed above, in *UL*, gender identification is a primary concern for Manganelli in his struggle to produce his identity as coherent and congruous, and abjection of woman is a fundamental mechanism to circumscribe and fortify his subjectivity. In the next chapter, I will argue that later on Manganelli found new ways of addressing the division of the self and the ambiguity of the self/other relationship, shifting from a logic of difference to a specific masochistic suspension of differences. It is important to stress that my aim is pointing at a tendency and that this should in no way be intended as a rigid

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[76] Manganelli, *Il vescovo e il ciarlatano, inconscio, casi clinici, psicologia del profondo,* ed. by Emanuele Trevi (Naples: Quiritta, 2001), p 66.

[77] Manganelli, *Il vescovo e il ciarlatano*, p. 67.

compartmentalisation of Manganelli's work. On the contrary, the two mechanisms are often simultaneously at work in Manganelli's texts. Furthermore, the idea that this logic of negation of all differences entails a real critique and deconstruction of the gender binary system will be put into question.

Chapter 3   The Masochistic Total Subject: *Dall'inferno* (1985)

In the previous chapter, I mapped out the path that goes from the idea expounded in *Un libro* (1953-1955) of writing as a means to produce a coherent identity to the idea of literature as the space for the exploration of the contradictoriness and multiplicity of the self. In this chapter, I will return to the already introduced image of the pregnant male devoured by an intestinal doll in *Dall'inferno* (1985) because, when compared with the dynamics in *UL*, it brings into focus the transformation not only in Manganelli's literary theories but also in his views on concepts of identity, gender relations and sado-masochism.

It is observed that in *INF*, in contrast with what happened in *UL*, identity is no longer, or not exclusively, defined by way of rendering abject what is perceived as Other. Although this mechanism persists, it coexists with a kind of subjectivity that carries out quite the opposite operation, identifying with all its potential others and including them within the self. Suppression of woman gives way in *INF* to a male narrator who features female reproductive functions. In 1955 the contradictoriness of the self had become unbearable for Manganelli as he wrote in his diary: 'Non c'è dubbio che questo anno mi darà modo di vivere, o mi indurrà a morire: le cose vanno male, le 'contraddizioni' sono giunte a un fondo intollerabile'.[1] Conversely, in *INF*, mixture and complexity are not only accepted, but actively pursued and turned into a source of pleasure. For example, if we take into account the remark made by the pregnant male: 'Ridendo mi sussurro: sono gravido', it can be noted that the idea of the duality within the body is intriguing for the subject, and is internalised pleasurably as an interior dialogue (*INF*, 23).

A movement is noticeable from abjection of the Other to self-abjection. In *UL*, woman and the 'filthy mass of otherness' were to be radically separated from the self. In *INF*, the doll brutalizes, tears apart and reduces the narrator's flesh

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[1]   Manganelli, *Quaderno 1954-1956*, diary at the Fondo Manoscritti in Pavia, quoted by Andrea Cortellessa, 'Il Giroscopio dell'Anima' in *Riga*, pp. 100-11 (p. 101).

to waste and filth: 'mi rosicchia, mi strazia […] io debbo diventar tutto escremento' (*INF*, 34). As we have seen, in *UL*, the emphasis is on the attempt to neutralise the contradictoriness of the self: the writer is taunted by the horror of being other to the self, of 'becoming everything' ('Saremo ogni cosa'). By contrast, *INF* is all about body and identity in the process of becoming-other. Indeed, in *INF*, it is self-renunciation as a liberating practice that becomes the most important theme in Manganelli's elaborations on masochism.[2] Masochism functions as an antidote to identity, which has to be read in the context of Manganelli's radical critique of essentialist notions of identity.

What is the meaning of this new conceptualisation of masochism in gender terms? In *INF*, Manganelli stages an intricate game of mutual appropriation and exchange of subjective positions between what we may call the male and the female characters. As we will see, also in *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma* (1982), written a few years before *INF*, Manganelli engages with the idea of becoming the other sex, and 'becoming-woman'. In this chapter, I will interrogate the implications of this shift from a logic of 'othering' woman to a logic of sexual 'indifference'. Sexual indifference seems to be consistent with Manganelli's concept of literature as the domain where impossibilities and contradictions can be reconciled in a *coincidentia oppositorum*. As many scholars have pointed out, the sado-masochistic disavowal of sexual difference inevitably challenges the naturalisation of gender binarisms. As I showed in the first chapter, Deleuze maintains that fantasies like the one described in *INF*, since they entail an alliance with an authoritative and powerful female image, radically oppose male dominance. Furthermore, in his opinion, these also challenge fixed and polarised identities. Indeed, the desire to become one with the mother represents the desire for a return to a pre-genital phase where sex

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[2]   Although in *INF* Manganelli does not explicitly employ the terms 'sadism' and 'masochism' with regard to the relationship of the protagonist with the doll or with other 'torturers', the dynamics that can be observed in this text have a clear sado-masochistic nature (see chapter 1).

and gender are irrelevant.[3] Hence Deleuze's observation that the masochist believes it is possible to become both sexes. However, in this chapter I will critique the notion of 'indifference' showing that it represents a complication of gender binarisms that does not necessarily deconstruct the polar opposition and hierarchy between them.

The kind of male subjectivity constructed in *INF* can still be linked to the model of the masochistic 'male victim'. Notwithstanding the potential inherent in Manganelli's upsetting of prescriptive gender identities in *INF*, in this chapter, I still address masochism in Manganelli as a tactic of power, as a sophisticated and circuitous way to re-centre masculinity and to recuperate a masculine principle perceived to be disenfranchised. I argue that in *INF* this is obtained through a contradictory mechanism that is based on the subject's performance of a total annihilation and dispersion of the self. I will demonstrate that this results in actual fact in a maximisation of masculine subjectivity.

UL and *INF* help single out two different forms in which the male victim logic is implemented in Manganelli's texts: the 'sacrificial' paradigm and what I will define, by applying Nick Mansfield's terminology, as the structure of the masochistic 'total subject'. In the previous chapter, I explained that in *UL*, masochistic fantasies of self-immolation compensate the subject's anxieties about the state of his masculine identity through the recovery of masculinist values such as self-control and self-mastery. I showed how the male subject's feeling of a threatened identity triggers a mechanism of suppression and abjection of woman. In contrast, when *INF* is published in 1985, outright violence against women and a binaristic thinking appear no longer viable modes of dealing with gender and sexual differences.

In part, this is the result of the shift in Manganelli's mindset charted in chapter 2, from a logic of 'dualism' to a logic of 'coincidence of opposites'. In part, this

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3   As previously explained, according to Deleuze, the masochistic desire to return to the oral stage indicates a desire to overcome differences in that the oral stage is before the access to language and the fundamental distinction of self/Other.

might also reflect the changes in the intellectual and social climate: thanks to the political effects of second-wave feminism and its critique of male power and privilege, blatant patriarchalism was becoming increasingly unacceptable. What results is a tension between Manganelli's explicit engagement in a critique of patriarchy (as in the author's *corsivi* written around 1980) and a 'patriarchal deposit' that still shows through his text.[4] The following comments by Michael Uebel, although he circumscribes his analysis to the American context, illuminate how masochism provides a solution to this contradictory tension between a patriarchal inheritance so entrenched it seems indissoluble and the '"enlightened" consciousness' of the male subject who can no longer hold patriarchy to be acceptable:

> [the] tension between the 'enlightened' consciousness of the American male at the end of the 20th century and a patriarchal sedimentation [...] is then reconciled fantasmically through a masochism that, on the face of it, seems to involve a forfeiture of dominance, but that in fact is nothing other than a compensatory mechanism, one that, at the level of fantasy, allows for the restoration and consolidation of masculine power. [5]

My discussion will be articulated in two parts. In the first, I will demonstrate that in *INF* masochism and self-abjection assume the meaning of a radical liberation from identity categories, including that of sex/gender. I will show that Manganelli's anti-identitarian stance comes very close to Deleuze's idea of 'becoming-other' and 'becoming-both-sexes'. In the second section of this chapter, this kind of subjectivity which fragments the self by identifying with all

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4   It has to be noted that Manganelli makes explicit reference to the word 'patriarchy' and to this 'patriarchal deposit' in a 1980 article, where he defines the Italian family as a 'curiosa sopravvivenza della tribù patriarcale'. In line with his proverbial ambiguity, in this satirical *corsivo*, Manganelli seems to both condemn this 'sopravvivenza' as an expression of Italy's backwardness and express a nostalgic attachment to the patriarchal family as opposed to its contemporary nuclear counterpart: the patriarchal family 'non era gran che [...]: ma c'era più traffico, nonni, zii e nipotini facevano del loro meglio per scioglierne il nucleo faticoso e amaro'. Manganelli, 'Famiglia I', in *Mammifero italiano*, pp. 47-50 (p. 47).

5   Uebel, 'Toward a Symptomatology', [n.p.].

its potential others and the related shift from othering woman to a logic of 'indifference' will be understood through the structure theorised by Mansfield of the masochistic 'total subject'. This is described as the fantasy of 'a subjectivity in which all contradictions can subsist': a subject that is both self and other, masculine and feminine, and which at once operates power and refutes power.[6] Mansfield makes the point that masochistic indifference does not deconstruct gender binarisms and hierarchies. Rather, it is 'a specific suspension of differences, somewhere between unity and longed-for radical diversity', which arguably rests on a fantasy of limitlessness: 'the masochistic subject refuses to recognise his limits'.[7]

This chapter will provide new insights to understand the upsetting of normative patterns of gender and sexual identification in Manganelli's texts. I suggest these represent the attempt to digest the meanings of femininity and masculinity at a time when, in the wake of second-wave feminism, their encoded social meanings were being culturally challenged and reinterpreted. Is the manipulation of gender and sexual categories in *INF* a queering of masculinity or is it a more sophisticated version of masculine entitlement? The extreme ambiguity with which gender and sexuality are treated in Manganelli's text makes it difficult to tell. However, in this chapter I will deal with the second hypothesis starting from various considerations. Manganelli's vast opus, from the 1950s till his last work written in 1990 (*La Palude Definitiva*), consistently returns to the problem of subjectivity, obsessively staging 'the drama of subjection',[8] and keeps presenting the masculine subject as a victim, implying a wounded masculine principle that needs to be strengthened. Moreover, Manganelli's texts are always two-faced. For example, it may be noted that although in *INF* the abject body is the subject's own body, it is still abject in so far as it becomes a maternal body. And indeed, Gilda Policastro has noted that this appropriation of the maternal can be read in two ways: as much as it is a 'possibilità alternativa' to violence and

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[6] Mansfield, *Masochism*, pp. x and 10.

[7] Mansfield, *Masochism*, pp. 21 and 33.

[8] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 3.

repression of the feminine and the maternal, it can also be a way to disguise violence ('travestimento').[9]

3.1 'Abandon all hope – Ye who read': a guide to Hell

INF is an extremely disorienting and overwhelming text, which, as it swings between a light-headed, playful tone and bleak despair, catapults the reader into a journey through hell. While the protagonist endures both the experience of pregnancy and, as we will see, a *katabasis* into his own bowels, the reader participates in a disparate and incongruous carnival of bodily parts and religious ceremonies. No logical handhold is offered by the text: the reader is plunged in a sort of primordial condition and dragged into a vortex of chaotic situations and preposterous dialogues – including one with a false god abruptly interrupted by a cultivated discussion with a hairy and modest ear.

The narrating voice is a perfect example of the 'anti-personaggio' which was typical of the 1960s experimental novel, and this, together with the radical parcelling out of the body, exacerbates the state of crisis of the reader, as they cannot indulge in any form of identification.[10] Leo Bersani holds the view that this kind of text offers to the reader a masochistic '*jouissance* of exploded limits': 'the pleasure of a liberating participation in dissolving of fixed identities' and 'the delight of returning to multiple identities'.[11] The reader is indeed invited to experiment with the shattering of the self endured by the narrating voice in its subterranean itinerary. In *Hilarotragoedia*, where we find the first Manganellian journey into Hades, Manganelli had already encouraged

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[9]   Policastro, 'Madri/Inferni', p. 389.

[10]   The 'anti-personaggio' is charachterised by Massimiliano Borelli as a 'cinico abbandono dell'umano a favore di un corpo-marionetta disarticolato, metamorfico, plurimo'. See his *Prose dal dissesto. Antiromanzo e avanguardia negli anni sessanta* (Modena: Mucchi, 2013), p. 111.

[11]   *INF* is also a perfect example of the Barthesian 'text of jouissance', defined as 'the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language'. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller, 23rd edn (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), p. 14.

the reader to learn to be 'dead', that is, the reader has to undergo a process of decomposition of the self: 'Difenditi da te stesso. Aborrisciti. Impara l'arte di essere sempre un poco a fianco a te stesso, o più avanti, o di essere costantemente già morto' (*H*, 102).

On the jacket cover of the first edition of *INF* (Rizzoli, 1985), Manganelli warns those who, drawn by the title, come looking for some reliable and organised guide to the infernal regions: 'dal punto di vista turistico, che è poi quello che più interessa, il testo è dispersivo e inattendibile, un esempio di pessima professionalità'.[12] Just like *H* – ironically passed off as a 'Baedeker che intendeva, con ragionevole modestia, additare e in parte chiosare talune bellezze dell'Ade' – *INF* caricaturises touristic guidebooks in an operation that is consonant with Barthes' de-mystification of the myths of bourgeois daily life in *Mythologies*.[13] In this text, Barthes comments on how the popular French guidebook *Blue Guide* presents the landscape as morally 'regenerating' – propagating myths such as prosperity, nationalism, order, hierarchy, puritanism as if these were natural and universal.[14] The 'ideological abuse' hidden in seemingly mundane cultural representations like touristic books is neutralised in *INF*: the guides in *INF* present the narrating subject – who at a certain point is turned into a crowd of tourists: 'mi scopro trasformato; sono turista, più esattamente una folla di turisti, i cappelletti, le giacche a fiori, macchine fotografiche a tracolla' (*INF*, 111) – with morally corrupting sceneries explicitly publicised as consumer goods: 'L'importante è che tutto ciò venga diffuso come genere di consumo [...] il delitto genera diletto – è il nostro motto – o anche – non meriti un morto?' (*INF*, 122). The *suburra* district for example, is illustrated by one of the guides ('informatori') thus:

> 'La suburra' risponde la voce bene educata 'la suburra le offre ciò che non può trovare altrove; tutti i gesti che altrove sono proibiti qui sono non solo consentititi ma non di rado obbligatori [...] Sente questi odori? Sono tanfo di orina stantia – un animale ha orinato mentre

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[12] This is included in the Adephi edition at pp. 141-42.

[13] Letter to Gastone Novelli, reproduced in Manganelli, *Le foglie messaggere*, p. 13.

[14] Barthes, 'The *Blue Guide*', in *Mythologies*, pp. 74-77.

> veniva squartato […] Sente queste urla? In fondo a questo vicolo si
> apre un quadrivio nel quale vengono seviziati i masochisti più distinti:
> queste sono urla di piacere, signore. Se lei, come spero, percorrerà
> poche centinai di metri della nostra sotterranea città, si accorgerà
> che il nostro obiettivo più ambizioso è questo: la metamorfosi del
> male in pura letizia. (*INF*, 121-23)

In addition to its character as 'guide', the text appears in some regards as the transcription of a nightmare. Indeed, Andrea Cortellessa describes it thus: 'un trattato sull'incubo, che si snodi ossessivo e minaccioso con la sintassi stessa dell'incubo'.[15] The text can also be depicted as an exploration of the unconscious of a mentally ill person who diligently takes notes of the hallucinations experienced. Among the literary antecedents then, in addition to Samuel Beckett, Lewis Carroll, the Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* and the inevitable nods to Dante's *Inferno*, arguably figures also judge Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*. Schreber's *Memoirs* was the subject of a review that Manganelli wrote in 1974, showing a deep fascination with Schreber's 'classic' text. The question he asks is of which genre it should be seen as a classic. Manganelli concludes that it must be 'un classico dell'alterità, dell'altrove'. As Manganelli explains, 'insanity' represents the only possibility to be culturally 'Other': 'il demente è un'altra cosa, potremmo dire che è l'unico modo di essere un'altra cosa che la nostra cultura ci suggerisce'.[16] The link with *Memoirs* seems thus particularly apt for this chapter, for it is concerned with this idea of becoming 'Other'.

If we posit, as Emanuele Trevi does, that 'dall'*Hilarotragoedia* alla *Palude definitiva*, tutti i libri di Manganelli sono delle speciali "mitobiografie"', *INF* can also be read as a mythobiography.[17] Arguably, for its construction, Manganelli

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[15] Andrea Cortellessa, *Libri segreti: autori-critici nel Novecento italiano* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2008), p. 261.

[16] Manganelli, 'Il giudice impazzito', originally published in *Il Mondo*, 30 May 1974, now in Manganelli, *Il vescovo*, pp. 31-33.

[17] Emanuele Trevi, 'Come si diventa uno scrittore: lo spazio psichico di Giorgio Manganelli', in *Il vescovo*, p. 99.

adopted some material from the mythical universe produced by Schreber. Significantly, Jung likewise used Schreber's *Memoirs* to give voice to his own earlier reflections on mythopoiesis and on the myth-making function of the unconscious.[18] Schreber's delusionary world includes intruding voices, perverse doctors, bodily manipulation, souls and shadows, struggles against upper and lower gods. All this is woven together in a cosmic experience entailing the destruction of the world and the creation of a new one through divine penetration of Schreber's body.[19] Manganelli engages with similar symbolic contents in *INF*, including the end-of-the-world experience and a male pregnant body through which a new excremental world is created. If we do what Michael Vannoy Adams suggests, which is to deliteralise the image of the end of the world, this can be understood as 'the end of an image of the world'.[20] Indeed, Manganelli was primarily interested in Schreber's itinerary as a ritual of decomposition of two socially constructed 'lies' – to use Manganelli's terminology: 'identity' and 'reality'. As Rosemary Dinnage explains in her introduction to the *Memoirs*, Schreber's testimony reverses 'the putting-together of reality from infancy onwards. Step by step, the ordinary growing child puts together time and space and identity. Schreber deconstructs them'.[21] So, through *INF*'s mythical journey, Manganelli wants to deconstruct, like Schreber did, 'our assumptions about reality, about the structure of our perceived world, its time and space and objective identity'.[22] This is well put by Martino Ciano:

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[18] Michael Vannoy Adams, *The Fantasy Principle: Psychoanalysis of the Imagination* (Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), p. 94.

[19] Schreber was convinced that his psychiatrist Dr. Paul Flechsig had the 'abominable intention' to hand him over 'for sexual misuse' and felt the danger of 'unmanning'. Later he developed an alternative concept: he was being transformed into a woman to be able to have sexual intercourse with God through contact with God's 'rays' and deliver a new human race. Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. by Ida Macalpine (New York: New York Review of Books, 2000).

[20] Vannoy Adams, *The Fantasy Principle*, p. 81.

[21] Rosemary Dinnage, 'Introduction', in Schreber, *Memoirs*, pp. xi-xxiv (p. xii).

[22] Dinnage, 'Introduction', p. xxiv.

'Manganelli scorge nella follia del Presidente una iniziazione. La follia è prima rito di purificazione dal non senso della realtà'.[23]

If we are to read *INF* as a mythobiography, we have to take into consideration the persisting influence of Manganelli's psychoanalyst Ernst Bernhard and especially his study on the Great Mediterranean Mother myth. In the first chapter, I historicised Bernhard's analysis, by framing the construction of the Great Mediterranean Mother figure and the related *mammismo* critique in the wider context of the 'masculinity crisis' discourse. The purpose of this analysis was to expose the set of assumptions on which the trope was constructed, including the idea of the excessive power of domineering mothers in Italian society and the weakness of the average Italian man. I thus argued that this symbolic formation represented a vehicle for the expression of notions of victimised masculinity in Manganelli.

INF can thus be read as another fiction of masculinity crisis where the male subject deals with the threat of maternal power by incorporating and neutralising it.[24] In *INF*'s masochistic scenario, the male subject appropriates the maternal generative power, while he is in turn possessed by the doll. The cannibalistic, vampiristic function of the Great Mother is thus projected onto the doll who in fact bears a resemblance to a bat ('dentro di noi svolazza e squittisce il volatile ali di cuoio, si agita la bambola canora, e ci strazia il documentum interiore', *INF,* 94). The 'vipistrello materno' is expelled at the end of the novel when the narrator gives birth to the *bambola*: 'e dalla bocca esce il volo rapido e fetido di un topo dalle ali di cuoio […] Questa è la bambina. È stata bambola, è stata pipistrello' (*INF,* 135).[25] The expulsion of the *bambola* seems to mark the redrawing of gender boundaries. Indeed, this happens after the

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[23]   Martino Ciano, 'Daniel Paul Schreber. *Memorie di un malato di nervi*. Scrivere consciamente della follia', 21 June 2019, https://www.lottavo.it/2019/06/mamorie-di-un-malato-di-nervi-scrivere-consciamente-della-follia/ [last accessed 19 April 2020].

[24] See Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*, p. 7.

[25]   Manganelli refers to his mother as 'vipistrello materno' in a personal letter now collected in *Costruire ricordi* (letter dated 30 December 1957), p. 69.

subject's final transformation into a penis, when the subject is qualified by the doll as follows: 'Sappiamo che cosa tu sei: un cazzo' (*INF*, 134). Being reduced to male genitalia is associated with the lowest possible condition: 'Tu sei ora il luogo della piscia e dello sperma; escremento e manipolato seme […] Ora sei l'infimo, veramente inferiore a chiunque' (*INF*, 134). It is critical to notice how at the same time as the subject reaches the lowest form of abasement, there is also a reassurance that he has not been castrated. This undermines the castrating potential of the Great Mother figure. In the next sections of this chapter, I will examine the destabilisation of sexual categories in *INF* from a slightly different perspective, that is as part of a wider process of desubjectification and self-loss which has many points of contact with the Deleuzian notion of 'becoming-other'. I will show how the self-disintegrating subjectivity that is produced remains still trapped in the male victim logic.

3.2 Becoming-other

In this section I will show that, although starting from different premises, Manganelli appears remarkably aligned with positions outlined by Deleuze, as they shared an anti-identitarian project aimed at challenging dominant ideological structures. With the concept of 'becoming', Deleuze meant the demise of the dominant forms and conceptions of subjectivity (the philosophical 'master-subject'). As we will see, in *INF*'s transformative journey, the first person singular will be replaced by an all-including 'we' and finally by composite series such as 'io, noi, essi, talpa, topo, ratto, ramarro, colubro, luna, processione, anfesibena', which seems to satisfy Deleuze's idea that, through writing, the writer should become 'a set of liberated singularities, words, names, fingernails, things, animals, little events'.[26] Under this perspective, the adventures in *INF* can also be read as representing the writing process itself. It can be observed that Manganelli gave up *UL*'s idea of bringing clarity and producing a coherent, 'readable' self through writing. On the contrary, writing is

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[26] Deleuze, 'Letter to a Harsh Critic' in Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 3-12 (p. 7).

conceived as a process of demolition of identity, and a correlation is established between the text's illegibility and the production of a culturally illegible self.[27]

The argument for a close connection between Manganelli and Deleuze grounded on the notions of 'impersonality' and 'becoming' is put forward by Elisabetta Orsini, according to whom, for both authors, writing is a process of de-subjectification which frees the individual: 'La scrittura desoggettivante deleuziana, così come la scrittura desoggettivante manganelliana sono egualmente due forme anarchiche — addirittura terroristiche — di liberazione dell'individuo'.[28] However, Orsini's analysis is not concerned with the intersection in Manganelli of writing and masochism as two 'technologies of de-subjectification' – to use Amber Jamilla Musser's phrase – nor does Orsini explore the implications of 'becoming' in gendered terms.[29]

In order to understand what is really at stake in the idea of becoming, we should turn to Musser, who emphasises the outcomes of this process: 'transformation', 'impersonality' and 'freedom'. Musser explores Deleuze's reflection on his own chronic illness to flesh out the meaning of masochism as a method of producing the process of becoming: 'illness offers freedom through constraint' and enables to 'listen to life'. According to Musser, through masochism and becoming the subject is released from societal norms, from the coding of the body and is 'free to just be'.[30] In this chapter, I argue that for Manganelli de-subjectification can be pursued through two technologies: writing and masochism. From this perspective, the shattered body and the abject body that we find in *INF* –

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[27] For a discussion about the connection between the illegible text and the illegible body in Manganelli see Falkoff, 'Giorgio Manganelli and the Illegible Obscene'.

[28] Elisabetta Orsini, 'La stanza di Giorgio Manganelli', *Quaderns d'Italià*, 15 (2010), 179-94 (p. 193), https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/qdi.283 [accessed 10 January 2021]. Orsini has listed the three major themes shared by the two authors: 'il primo è il presupposto dell'anonimato e dell'impersonalità; il secondo è l'idea di una letteratura intesa come un divenire; il terzo è il valore clinico-terapeutico della scrittura' (p. 193).

[29] Musser, 'Reading, Writing and Masochism, p. 140.

[30] Musser, 'Reading, Writing and Masochism', p. 139.

including the equation of the subject with excrement – has a specific counter-cultural function: it satisfies the masochistic desire to enter a zone of self/other indifferentiation and thereby render the self *unreadable*. This means stripping the body from codification and short-circuiting society's demands for a stable and intelligible identity.

This is the meaning of the journey through hell in *INF* and of the torments that, like any worthwhile infernal journey, it entails. Indeed, the *strazio* inflicted by the doll on the body of the male character is a central motif of the text, and the protagonist also visits infernal regions where pain is taken much into account:

> Noi, signore, non crediamo solo nel dolore, il che è ovvio, ma lo professiamo come essenza delle nostre delizie. Amiamo pertanto i sadici, veneriamo i masochisti, offriamo ogni occasione per diffondere la sofferenza, l'angoscia, l'orrore. (*INF,* 122)

However, the primary focus is not pain and self-abjection *per se*. Pain is instrumental to, or stands for, the process of transformation and impersonalisation.[31] The doll, a sort of Dantean Count Ugolino, torments the narrator by devouring his body from the inside and turning it into shit:

> la bambola interiore mi tormenta [...] mi rosicchia, mi strazia, suppongo abbia delle forbici [...] il tanfo delle sue feci mi sale fino al cervello, mi sento bagnato della sua orina. (*INF*, 33-34)

The doll keeps gnawing the narrator's body till it becomes a 'fantoccio escremenzio' and a body empty as an abandoned cathedral (which is reminiscent of the chicken's cavity ready to be stuffed in *DOS*):

> Qui non c'è rimasto più niente. Questo abitacolo è uscito tutto in merda; ora costui è cavo come una cattedrale abbandonata negli anni della peste. Tutto l'ho mangiato; tutto l'ho digerito; tutto costui s'è fatto letame. […] non c'è nulla da straziare, nulla da trasformare in merda da cacare. (*INF,* 44)

At the same time, humiliation and reduction to faeces also represents a liberation from society's false identifications, thus allowing a transformative

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[31] Musser, 'Reading, Writing and Masochism', p. 134.

process to begin. Every step of *INF*'s journey points to the loss of the speaking subject's self and his experience of rebirth. This is a central node of the agency of the masochist: masochism is all about losing/re-finding the self, 'relinquish[ing] identity but remain[ing] in existence'.[32]

The fragmentation and indeterminacy of identity are given prominence starting from the outset, where an anonymous 'I' finds itself in the abject situation par excellence, between life and death: 'Secondo ragione dovrei ritenere d'esser morto; e tuttavia non ho memoria di quella lancinante decomposizione' (*INF,* 9).[33] The subject is lying down, engulfed by fog, only able to distinguish voices, which are equally perplexed about the possibility of making sense of time and space and of their existence.[34] The categories of time and space are in fact in total disarray. Time coincides with its opposite: 'non-tempo'. There is no 'before' and 'after': those are substituted by a condition of 'semprità', an infinite 'quasi', although there is 'un quasi che precede il "quasi" e un quasi che segue il "quasi"' (*INF,* 42). Similarly, there is no 'here' and 'there': there is 'quaggiuso' and 'laggiùso', which, as Joseph Denize indicates, is a calque from Dante's 'qua giuso' but with a semantic twist, to make it a compound of 'top' and 'bottom': 'laggiùso, così intendo una compenetrazione di laggiù e lassù'

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[32] Musser, 'Masochism: A Queer Subjectivity',[n.p.].

[33] Kristeva indicates the corpse as the ultimate abject: 'the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object'. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 231.

[34] It can be noted that this condition is comparable to that of a foetus. The subject makes a similar speculation, asking its infernal guide: 'Non mi dirai che l'inferno altro non è che plateale allegoria del grembo materno' (*INF*, 101).

(*INF,* 30).[35] As Anna Longoni notes, this is the only 'ossimorico deittico' that can be used in this spatial dimension.[36]

Just as the voices around the subject appear and disappear, the narrator's selfhood also begins to split up. The subject sees a 'fake-man' – 'un uomo finto, un manichino, un che di paglia' – and with the uttermost horror recognises itself in that artificial alterity: 'ne scruto il volto; ed è il mio: ma un volto affilato dall'angoscia, ed occhi immobili senza palpebre che mi guardano con ininterrotto orrore. Oh, me stesso!' (*INF,* 16).[37] The subject also meets its infernal 'mentor': the *cerretano*, a quack doctor, a charlatan. This sort of Virgil – but 'sottilmente sadico' as specified in the Adelphi cover flap – is in charge of guiding the subject in the recesses of this improbable hell, although his explanations have the effect of making everything even more confusing. It is the charlatan who, using scissors, inserts in the *fantoccio*'s womb the doll – introducing the narrator to its personal version of Beatrix. The figure of Manganelli's psychotherapist Bernhard emerges here in filigree, figuring both as a 'symbolic father' and as the one who initiated Manganelli to the idea of

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[35] For this and more aspects on the Dante-Manganelli filiation see Joseph Denize, 'L'"Alta Fantasia" de Dante Alighieri à Giorgio Managanelli : vers une poétique de la 'catagogie'', *Filiations*, 1 (2010), http://preo.u-bourgogne.fr/filiations/index.php?id=85 [last accessed 19 April 2020]. 'Qua giuso' is used by Dante in *Inferno*, *Canto II* (82-84), when Virgil asks Beatrice: 'Ma dimmi la cagion che non ti guardi / dello scender qua giuso in questo centro / dell'ampio loco ove tornar tu ardi'. Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1986).

[36] Anna Longoni, *Giorgio Manganelli o l'inutile necessità della letteratura* (Rome: Carrocci, 2019), p. 149.

[37] It is worth noting the similarity between Manganelli's 'uomo finto', also defined later on 'fantoccio escrementizio', and the 'flüchtig hingemachte Männer' that Schreber sees teeming around and in his body. This Schreberian neologism – that fascinated Freud and Jung and is also mentioned by Manganelli in his review – was translated by Ida Macalpine as 'fleetingly-improvised-men' but it that can also mean 'botched' and 'defecated'. See James R. Simpson, 'Ways We Allegorize Now: Transforming Texts and Bodies from the Roman de Renart to Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs* and Chris Morris's *Four Lions*', *Exemplaria*, 26.2-3 (2014), 178-198, (p. 196), https://doi.org/10.1179/1041257314Z.00000000049 [accessed 10 January 2021].

literature as pure 'demenza'.[38] And indeed, Manganelli talks about the figure of the psychoanalyst as a mixture of a 'bishop' and a 'charlatan': 'potrei dire che nello psicoanalista c'è una strana mescolanza del *fool* e del prete, direi del vescovo e del ciarlatano'.[39]

Stripping the subject of the 'uomo finto' – that is, the identity necessary to be viable and valuable in society – is the aim of the three 'ceremonies' chaired by the Charlatan. The purpose of these trials is self-loss: the first is a game of dice with a cat, a seal, a clock and a flag where – in a Carrollian atmosphere of surreal nonsense – the goal is to pawn parts of the body and lose them. After this bodily laceration, the second trial consists in the chasing of fragmented shadows only one of which is 'oneself'. The protagonist ends up escaping from the shadows, because he fears being successful in the pursuit of his 'own self': 'ma in verità temo [...] che io possa piegarmi a raggiungermi, ed essere coniugato a un perfezionato orrore che esige di essere me stesso' (*INF*, 41). During the last ceremony, called 'the big defecation' – 'Sii lieto del tuo letame, amico! –, the speaking subject sits on a throne, defecates the doll and then is defecated by her (*INF*, 36). This takes on religious and cosmogonical connotations, although instead of the Genesis's *fiat lux* – the division between light and darkness which gives order to the world – we have 'fiant faeces' which calls into being an amorphous blending (*INF*, 46). After this rebirth, self-abjection is experienced at the peak of its strength when the anonymous subject articulates his name for the first time by identifying with the latrine: 'io sono latrina, io sillabo il mio nome, la-tri-na, mi pronuncio finalmente fogna' (*INF*, 46). The subject is disintegrated, becoming a *tabula rasa*, no longer restricted by organisation.

In *INF*, Manganelli lashes out at the body with fury – the flesh is brutalised, torn apart, eaten, reduced to wastes, made monstrous, deformed, animalised: 'la forma animalesca si mescolava [...] alla forma umana' (*INF*, 30). The human form remains only as a vague memory: 'forma umana, che ancora nebbiosamente ma

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[38] As previously mentioned, for Manganelli the idea that literature was 'pura demenza' means that literature is the realm where it is possible to decompose identity and reality.

[39] Manganelli, *Il vescovo e il ciarlatano*, p. 29.

ostinatamente custodivo, più come un ricordo di famiglia che non cosa che mi appartenesse veramente' (*INF*, 30-31). I argue that the body in *INF* is a masochist body in the process of becoming, what Deleuze and Guattari would call a 'Body without Organs' (without organisation). The space of *INF* is all turned inwards, encapsulated inside the body, which is manipulated to form an assemblage where bodily parts and organs can be sloughed off and lost.[40] In *INF*, the corporal dimension blows out of proportion and comes to coincide with the novel's landscape. The journey into hell – instead of involving a descent into the bowels of the earth as the *topos* requires – is actually a *katabasis* into the subject's own bowels: 'Lentamente, scruto ciò che chiamo il paesaggio. [...] Percorro l'inferno del mio addome, del mio ventre, dentro di me' (*INF,* 65).[41]

The body in the process of becoming is central to *INF*:

> 'Qui non si cresce'.
> 'Si resta uguali, dunque'.
> 'Mai più [...] Qui si diventa'. (*INF,* 66)

Corporeality is what remains after the abolition of identity, time and space. At the same time, the body is another site of destabilization. The dehumanisation and yet insistence and persistence of the human body recur throughout the book: the body parcels into a rich assortment of autonomous bodily pieces (going beyond the 'terminal stage' of the human form accomplished by Beckett, for example with the reduction to a mouth in *Not I*) or odd assemblages of them; for example, the narrator becomes a crowd of feet, with an eye on every ankle (*INF,* 97). The body becomes, as Jeffrey Cohen explains referencing Deleuze's

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[40] 'The BwO: it is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them' in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 150.

[41] Manganelli was deeply influenced by the psychoanalyst Hillman, who mapped an imaginary bodily geography locating the Hell in the viscera: 'Il tratto labirintico dell'intestino é [...] considerato un mondo infero interiorizzato, con il suo calore, con la sua ubicazione profonda, con il suo fetore sulfureo'. James Hillmann, *Il sogno e il mondo infero* (Milan: EST, 1996), p. 173.

concept of assemblage as well as the Foucaldian project of the 'Death of Man', 'a site of possibility and invention', 'not a singular, essential thing but an inhuman circuit full of unrealized possibility for rethinking identity'.[42]

Arguably, it is in this context of masochistic desire to return to a non-differentiated state, thus refusing the obedient and useful body that cultural norms construct, that we can read the overcoming of sexual difference in *INF*, as well as in other texts by Manganelli.

3.3 'The shame of being a man': becoming-woman

In the next section, I will read *INF* and other texts by Manganelli (*Hilarotragoedia*, *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma* and an article of comment entitled *Familia II*) through the lenses of Deleuze's concept of 'becoming-woman', which according to Deleuze radically opposes male dominance and polar identities. I will also highlight the weaknesses and critical issues with this line of reading.

An antecedent to *INF*'s overcoming of sexual difference is found in *H*, where non-binary expression is inserted in a signifying system that connects shifts in gender identifications with masochistic fantasies and the death wish. In the narrative segment 'Documentazione detta del disordine delle favole', *disordine* stands for the anonymous narrator's impossibility to fit into any classification: 'Io non posso tenere discorso di me senza che in due batter d'occhio tutto sia piombato nella più inestricabile contraddizione' (*H*, 121-22). In particular, *disordine* manifests in the impossibility to determine whether the 'Anonimo' is male or female: 'Ascoltatemi: in primo luogo nè io, nè alcun altro, è mai riuscito

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[42]   Jeffrey Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 76. Andrea Santurbano has connected the theme of the monster in Manganelli to Foucault, approaching 'the subject of the monster as infringement and subversion essential for the disruption of a hermeneutic and anthropocentric horizon, as Foucault, among others, wished'. Andrea Santurbano, 'Giorgio Manganelli and the need for a monstrous literature', in *Brumal. Revista de investigación sobre lo Fantástico*, 4.1 (2016), 225-38 (p. 225), https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/brumal.218 [accessed 10 January 2021].

ad accertare con sufficiente stabilità se io sia maschio o femmina'(*H*, 122). Gender queerness is reflected on the syntactic level, with shifts between male and female endings and pronouns ('ero piccolo', 'ero cresciuta', *H*, 123 and 127).[43] At the end of the narrative section, the anonymous narrator falls in love with a dragon, first assuming the role of the female victim chosen to be eaten by the monster:

> Lo amai prima come fanciulla legata allo scoglio in attesa di essere divorata. Lo amai non appena lo vidi emergere dalle acque, amai l'orrido, il mirabile, il tremendo, l'ottuso, e indugiai in stremata delizia, in attesa di cedere ai suoi denti... (*H*, 128)

Then, the narrator plays the role of the male warrior in charge of killing the dragon:

> Io non sono più la ragazza innamorata e moribonda. Sono il guerriero. … Guardavo incantato il mostro, indugiavo, lo amavo. [...] mi sarei fatto mangiare, senza opporre eccezione alcuna. Destino passivo. (*H*, 129)

In both cases, the narrator experiences 'l'insieme di amore e volontà di morire' (*H*, 129). The desire to abandon the self to the dragon's jaws arguably stands for the desires to fully abdicate identity and gender categories. The 'disorder' of the subject in 'Documentazione' can therefore be read as an early example of the disorganised subject-in-becoming outlined thus far. However, as shown in the previous chapter, in *H*, non-binary figurations still coexist with the repudiation of sexual difference based on abjection and hatred.[44]

In *INF*, Manganelli engages with ideas of being impregnated and giving birth, giving voice to the desire or anxiety of feminisation. This occurs when the Charlatan pierces the narrator's body with scissors and implants the doll in his

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[43] I am using here Butler's notion of queerness.

[44] Also Falkoff has exposed this dynamic in *H* by isolating the metaphors which depict the confrontation with femininity as horrific and petrifying, reproducing the *topos* of the 'Medusan gaze that suggests the threat of castration'. See for example the discussion on the figure of the *litopedio* and the related scene of petrification at the gaze of female genitalia deleted by Manganelli from the first draft of *H*. Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 69.

abdomen. The narrator is thus metaphorically impregnated by this 'amico e torturatore', who assumes a sinister resemblance to Schreber's psychiatrist doctor Flechsig – 'alle cui perverse cure [Schreber] era affidato', as Manganelli comments.[45] From a Deleuzian perspective, this fantasy could be part of the process of becoming, if, as Deleuze believed, 'all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman'. For Deleuze, indeed, 'becoming-woman' is 'the key to all other becomings'.[46]

As Deleuze explains, one has to become woman to dismantle 'Man', that is a 'dominant form of expression' that claims to be universal:

> Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become a Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose himself on all matter, whereas woman, animal or molecule always has a component of flight that undermines its own formalisation. The shame of being a man – is there any better reason to write?[47]

Here Deleuze is describing the ways in which writing leaves behind patriarchal notions of subjectivity (mastery, domination, autonomy) and the assumption of the universality of the masculine point of view. However, masochism has for him the same objective as writing: he claims that what is beaten during masochistic rituals is the 'shame of being a man', the likeness to the father, who is the representative of the dominant structures of society. Both writing and masochism therefore activate the process of 'becoming'. For Deleuze, becoming means extricating us from the 'binary machines' that '*steal* [our bodies] from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms'.[48] It means leaving behind normative

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[45] Manganelli, *Il vescovo*, p. 34.

[46] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 277.

[47] Deleuze, 'Literature and Life', trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, *Critical Inquiry, 23*.2 (1997), 225-30 (p. 225), https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343982 [last access 20 January 2020]. In Deleuze's writings, the notion of becoming assumes various designations: 'becoming-other', 'becoming-both-sexes', 'becoming-animal', 'becoming-world'.

[48] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276. Emphasis in original.

subjectivities: becoming 'undermines the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality'.[49]

It must be noted that, although Manganelli never explicitly talks about the 'shame of being a man', he touches upon similar points, such as in his critique of society's dominant ideologies, including models of masculinity based on violence and domination and institutions such as the family. This aspect is evident in some of his short comment pieces on the Italian family written in the 1980s, to which I will return soon. At this juncture I would also like to underline how *INF* carries embedded within it a reflection on the family cell, its organization and subjacent power mechanisms: 'ora siamo il rudimento di una famiglia' (*INF*, 23). When the narrator starts a 'perorazione argutamente argomentata' aimed at persuading the doll to leave his body, he covers different argumentative levels: 'a) giuridici, b) morali), c) sociali, d) estetici, e) teologici' (*INF*, 23).

The juridical arguments amount to a parody of the apparatus of rights and obligations attributable to the family institution. These comprise different areas, notably: property and economic relationships:

> la bambola, sostengo, non ha alcun diritto di occupare il mio spazio interiore, e il nutrimento che essa trae dalle mie viscere è un puro furto; la bambola ribatte [...] di godere ormai di una usucapione.
> (*INF*, 23)

In the following juridical arguments one can discern a lampoon of duties of assistance and fidelity – 'replico che l'impossibilità di un adulterio diminuisce di molto nel nostro caso la libera fruibilità del nostro perverso e inverso e introverso coniugio' – and duties of care and nourishment of the children: 'obietto essere immorale che essa si ponga a carico di persona estranea' (*INF*, 25). The section concludes with allusions to rights and duties related to the personal development of the individual:

> obiettai, con educata fermezza, che la presenza della bambola nel mio addome mi avrebbe distratto dai molti e gravi doveri che mi

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[49] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 233.

> riconoscevo nei confronti della società; [...] Aggiunsi, non senza
> sottigliezza, che, racchiusa a quel modo nelle mie viscere la stessa
> bambola sarebbe stata gravemente impedita all'esercizio di una
> attività a lei peculiare. (*INF,* 25)

It can also be noted that this system of rights and obligations were an object of discussion in the contemporary political arena, if we recall that a year after the publication of *INF*, in 1986, the Italian Corte Costituzionale passed sentence recognising the 'famiglia di fatto', this step representing an unprecedented breakthrough in the area of family law, leading to the implementation of new rights for couples that did not conform to the 'legitimate' model of the family unit.[50] The terminological choice 'simbiosi di fatto' to refer to the subject/doll relationship could also be seen as a possibly sarcastic allusion to the kind of 'de facto' non-marital cohabitation and thus to the debate regarding formalised and non-formalised cohabitation. This could be an indicator revealing that *INF* – despite its absurdist, fantastic posture, apparently depurated of any reference to reality – was in actual fact not entirely detached from his socio-historical context.

It is interesting to read *INF* side by side with a short article of comment, a satirical *corsivo* written in 1981 and now collected in *Mammifero italiano* under the title 'Famiglia II', where Manganelli expresses the reasons for his 'antifamilismo':

> Non dispongo di una famiglia, e ne sento la mancanza. Non ho, ad
> esempio, una moglie indifesa da percuotere a sangue per motivi di
> minestra, e bambini da terrorizzare con mirabili malumori cosmici. I
> terrori sono educativi. Nella mia infanzia io ho posseduto una

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[50] 'Un mutamento radicale nei confronti della rilevanza giuridica di siffatti rapporti [convivenze di fatto] si è avuta con la sentenza n. 237 del 1986, nella quale la Corte [...] afferma [...] la rilevanza giuridica della famiglia di fatto [...] quale formazione sociale nella quale si realizza e si sviluppa la personalità dell'individuo'. Arcangelo G. Annunziata and Roberto F. Iannone, 'Dal concubinato alla famiglia di fatto: evoluzione del fenomeno', *Famiglia, Persone e Successioni*, 2 (2010), 1-13 (p. 3), http://www.uniba.it/ricerca/dipartimenti/scienze-politiche/docenti/prof.ssa-valeria-corriero-1/persone-famigliae-legislazione-socilae/materiale-didattico/seminario%20convivenze%20more%20uxorio.pdf, [accessed 22 September 2017].

famiglia normale – o piuttosto ne sono stato posseduto – [...] Mi dicono
che una maggioranza di coloro che sono in istato di cattività familiare
ritiene che l'amore sia il fondamento della famiglia; opinione
accreditata dal clero, formato esclusivamente da celibi. In verità, se
non ci fosse amore, non si proverebbe alcun piacere a percuotere la
sposa, far venire gli incubi ai minorenni e indurre nella sposa
vagheggiamenti vedovili. [...] Chi volesse dedurre che questa
descrizione fonda la famiglia sul sadismo e non sull'amore cadrebbe in
un errore terminologico, giacché il sadismo si fonda a sua volta
sull'amore. E tenete presente che l'amore della famiglia si
accompagna spesso all'amor di patria.[51]

The two texts provide a similar portrait of the family institution: words such as 'vessazione', 'vittima', 'sevizie' that we find in the 'strictly juridical' section of *INF* find their counterparts in 'percuotere a sangue' and 'terrorizzare' in 'Famiglia II'. '[H]o posseduto una famiglia – o piuttosto ne sono stato posseduto' in the *corsivo* finds a deformed analogy in the condition of 'possesso attivo e passivo' that characterises the relation between the narrator and the doll (*INF,* 24). In 'Famiglia II', sadism is established as the foundation of the family. Manganelli starts with the taken-for-granted assumption that love is the foundation of the family. Then, he describes love as the origin of the pleasure of beating the wife and traumatising the children, that is to say, the origin of sadism. Thus, Manganelli agrees with the initial statement that 'family is based on love' but only if we understand 'love' as the foundation of sadism. Family, in both *INF* and 'Famiglia II', is based on the interpenetration of love and sadism. In both, the taken for granted institution of family is made unfamiliar, the 'famiglia normale' is denaturalised, so that its underlying patriarchal power relations may be exposed.

In 'Famiglia II', Manganelli performs a faithful adherence to the model of the 'despotic' family that, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, serves the perpetuation of an authoritarian society. As Foucault remarks in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, it is impossible to disentangle the modern family from 'microfascisms': Deleuze and Guattari 'track down all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us, to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness

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[51] Manganelli, *L'Europeo,* 21 September 1981, now in *Mammifero italiano*, pp. 51-53.

of our everyday lives'.[52] Manganelli exposes the power relationships inherent in the 'germinal cell' of bourgeois society. The sarcastic enactment of a total adhesion to these relations and the hyperbolic excess with which he impersonates the aspiring patriarch clearly expose these very structures to ridicule. However, even if he sardonically unmasks these dynamics, he does not distance himself from them.

As Marco Belpoliti explains, also underlining the 'perfetto masochismo' of Manganelli's manoeuvre:

> Manganelli non si chiama mai fuori da ciò che descrive anzi: riesce a raccontare così bene e a fondo i fenomeni che osserva perché è parte del quadro visto, c'è dentro – osservatore e osservato. Il Manga non è infatti uno di quei moralisti che fustigano i costumi sentendosi dalla parte del giusto. Al contrario, egli prova la netta sensazione di essere dalla parte del torto; o meglio: di essere egli stesso il torto che descrive, così che, con perfetto masochismo, parla dell'altro come fosse se stesso. [...] al centro della descrizione – si leggano i due fulminanti corsivi dedicati alla famiglia – c'è sempre lui medesimo.[53]

Manganelli does not proclaim himself as assuming a position 'above and outside' what he describes, but rather feels he is part of it. Since, as Belpoliti claims, at the roots of Manganelli's description of the Italian national character lies the analysis of his own subconscious, the social critique of his time takes the form of a self-denunciation: to unmask society, he unmasks himself. The *corsivo* betrays an anguished awareness that patriarchal mechanisms of power, prevarication and desire are not alien to the writer himself, while hyperboles and sarcasm function as rhetorical strategies to keep anguish at bay.

The comparison with this *corsivo* brings into focus the broader implications of the theme of 'amore domestico' in *INF*. The personal elements (the author's relationship with his mother-wife-daughter) meet the social context, where the

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[52] Michael Foucault, 'Preface' in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. xi-xiv (p. xiv).

[53] Belpoliti, 'Mamma mammifero', pp. 141-42.

rethinking of the parameters of the family institution and of gender roles was underway, in part also thanks to the political effects of feminism. From the excerpt of 'Famiglia II', there emerges the awareness of the hegemonic social position of masculinity in bourgeois culture, by now presented as a blatant platitude. This suggests, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, that Manganelli felt the need to get rid of the worn-out and, as we would say today, 'toxic' patriarchal paradigms of masculinity.

If we look again at the assemblage of *INF* from a Deleuzian standpoint, the male masochist's incestuous relationship with the doll (mother) has the function of reversing the patriarchal model of gender power relations, expelling the paternal image and what Deleuze calls 'the shame of being a man'.[54] However, scholars have in different ways questioned Deleuze's claim that masochism creates a dimension in which phallic power is expelled and gender binarisms are dismantled. These critical arguments drawing attention to the gendered limitations of the Deleuzian theories can help us shed light on the dynamics of Manganelli's texts.

First, as already discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, although the paternal image is expelled in the Deleuzian scenarios, male power is reconfirmed in the figure of the 'son'. This can be seen in *INF* as well, where the male masochist conferres symbolic power to the female figure in order to fulfil his desire for impotence, submission and victimisation: 'Da gran tempo desideravo un ordine; desideravo sperimentare l'ubbidienza'; 'io non solo non mi rifiuto, ma collaboro al mio volto di vittima' (*INF*, 66-67 and 105). As shown in the first chapter, because the female is used as an 'instrument' by the male masochist in the fulfilment of his desire, he is the one who holds real power.

Scholars also argue that Deleuze's concept of 'becoming' retains a residue of phallologocentrism, as the process of becoming makes sense only if the starting

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[54] Deleuze states that in the masochistic fantasy and narratives 'everything points at parthenogenesis'. The oral mother has the power to bring about a rebirth where the father has no role. (*Coldness*, p. 95).

point is implicitly 'male'. Although Deleuze maintains that woman also has to 'become' woman, admittedly, as Rosi Braidotti explains:

> Only a subject who historically has profited from the entitlements of subjectivity and the rights of citizenship can afford to put his 'solidity' into question. Marginal subjectivities, or social forces who historically have not yet been granted the entitlements of symbolic presence – and this includes women – cannot easily relinquish boundaries and rights which they have hardly gained as yet.[55]

Deleuze's discourse works only starting from a neutral, unmarked flesh – 'male', 'white', 'middle-class', 'heterosexual'. Musser makes this point clear when she recounts a personal anecdote in which her delivery of an academic paper on Deleuzian theories of self-disintegration and transformation intersected with her identity as a woman of colour and made her question the actual possibility for her 'to escape [her] body, to use masochism, to use reading, to use writing, as Deleuze did, as a way out of identity'.[56]

Two years after *A Thousand Plateaus* was published, Manganelli used the same metaphor of 'becoming-woman' in *DOS* (1982). Manganelli's deployment of this notion there can be the target of the same criticism raised against Deleuze and Guattari, in so far as Manganelli does not seem to problematise his own manhood and malecentrism.[57] In *DOS*, Manganelli links the experience of death – which, as outlined in the previous section, can be understood as a process of self-decomposition – to that of 'becoming the other sex':

> Morendo noi cambiamo sesso. Questo spiega e la difficoltà e l'imbarazzo dei colloqui con i morti. (*DOS*, 44)

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[55] Rosi Braidotti, 'Nomadism with a difference: Deleuze's legacy in a feminist perspective', *Man and World*, 29 (1996), 305-14 (p. 310). According to Rosi Braidotti, feminist philosophy should focus on a 'politics of location' and on the 'embodied nature of the subject', against the universal notion of 'impersonality'.

[56] Musser, 'Reading, Writing and Masochism', p. 146.

[57] Thanem and Wallenberg, 'Buggering Freud', p. 7.

Manganelli goes on to say that the writer has to 'diventare donna, e ad ogni morte imparare a non nascondersi la propria natura femminile' (*DOS*, 44). In this passage, it can be observed how a universal notion of 'becoming-other' ('noi cambiamo sesso') is made to coincide with a more gender-specific 'becoming-woman' ('diventare donna'). Manganelli reaffirms his male starting perspective, revealing a malecentrism where the woman has the role of the Other. This might betray the fact that 'the feminine' is used as a cultural 'Other' which can be appropriated to produce the subject-in-becoming, without the recognition of woman's specificity and autonomy.

3.4 The masochistic total subject

Thus far, I have linked masochism and the upsetting of gendered binaries in Manganelli to the author's broader critique of essentialist notions of identity, showing that the process of depersonalization at work in *INF* resonates strongly with the masochistic strategy encapsulated in Deleuze's concept of 'becoming'. If on the one hand I have pointed out how Manganelli's writings corrode traditional gender and sexual categories, on the other, my discussion has highlighted a structural contradictoriness in Manganelli on the question of woman, and shown how his texts re-inscribe gender binarisms. For this reason, I will try to better understand what is at stake in the kind of subjectivity that, as argued above, is constructed in *INF* – a masochistic subject in the act of 'becoming' – by using the conceptual framework mobilised by Mansfield in his *Masochism: The Art of Power*. Mansfield tries to capture the meaning of masochism, concluding that 'masochism is a specific experiment with power, in which the subject dreams of a scenario in which there is no difference between pleasure and pain, activity and passivity, power and powerlessness' as well as female and male. Mansfield calls this kind of subjectivity to which nothing is alien the masochistic 'total subject'. In his introduction, Mansfield clarifies that he wants to distinguish between different forms of nonbinarism: the first is deconstruction: 'managing binary oppositions by subverting and dispersing them in a field of multiplying differences'. Nonbinarism in the guise of the 'masochistic total subject' instead, 'imagines a subjectivity in which all contradictions can subsist'. The total subject dreams an 'indifference' between

genders and sexes in which binary oppositions are suspended but not overcome.[58]

According to Mansfield, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming' belongs to this second form of nonbinaristic thinking. Although it is presented by Deleuze and Guattari as the repudiation of subjectivity, Mansfield asks if this non-fixed entity 'in a constant state of becoming something other' might instead 'be as much a part of the reinvention of a dominant subjectivity'.[59] Mansfield shows that in the process of 'becoming-woman', 'becoming-animal' and their apotheosis '*devenir tout le monde*' (translated by Brian Massumi as 'becoming everybody/everything'):

> the residual and disintegrating subject plays out both its self-annihilation and self-maximisation, under the sign of its own, at least narrative, intentionality.[60]

So, while pursuing self-annihilation and self-dispersion, the 'residual' masculine subject, identifying with and including within the self all its 'others', manages to produce a more totalizing and powerful version of its subjectivity.

The assemblage of pregnant male and doll provides a neat example of this idea of the subject as a 'locus of indifference'.[61] Manganelli builds a perfectly interlocking mechanism where activity and passivity, power and powerlessness, pain and pleasure, self and other are indifferent from one another. As we have underlined at the beginning of this chapter, the distinction of activity/passivity and power/powerlessness collapse in the masochistic dyad, so that the subject, as the Charlatan remarks, is both 'carnefice' and 'vittima': 'Dunque diciamo che il carnefice appartiene alla tua definizione di te, sebbene non ci sia dubbio che tu sia vittima' (*INF*, 104-05). The two 'sposi' are also wavering between affection and revulsion ('l'orrore si mescolerà irreparabilmente alla dolcezza', *INF*, 21),

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[58] Mansfield, *Masochism*, pp. x and 19.

[59] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 20.

[60] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 96.

[61] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 96.

are both owned and owning ('possesso attivo e passivo', *INF*, 24), are each other's parasite ('la mia conclusiva convinzione è che io sia parassita di costei, e come parassita costei mi manipoli e maneggi', *INF*, 111). This couple's *coniugio* is 'perverse' because it is the point of conjunction of every opposition and 'crosses the boundaries separating food from excrement (coprophilia); human from animal (bestiality); life from death (necrophilia); adult from child (pederasty); and pleasure from pain (masochism)'.[62] While the subject 'digests' the doll and what she represents, the doll digests the subject, in what Giorgio Biferali calls a 'pasto reciproco e consequenziale'.[63] The two characters are thus also each other's wastes, as becomes clear in the 'great defecation' ceremony (*INF*, 99). Moreover, as noted before, the roles of mother and child are mutually interchangeable between these two 'intimi estranei'. The resulting (inter)subjectivity is a labyrinth, as the subject is told by the *cerretano*:

> 'La bambola mi tormenta'.
> 'Naturalmente, naturalmente. È sempre parte del labirinto'.
> 'In che senso? Lei è dentro'.
> 'Ma tutto è parte del labirinto' (*INF*, 34).

As noted above, in *INF* the subject is caught in an infinite succession of metamorphoses which leads him to become a multiplicity: 'E io, noi, essi, talpa, topo, ratto, ramarro, colubro, luna, processione, anfesibena ci percuotiamo il petto' (p. 94); 'io non so quanti sono' (p. 67); 'io sono innumerevole, il mio nome è legione' (p. 99); 'qualcuno io' (p. 114); 'un mio io si alza, con aria timida e imbarazzata' (p. 120). At some point, this plural subject takes the form of a procession of psalm-singing followers: 'dietro di me odo un rumore di quiete voci come un goffo e umiliato tentativo di salmodia […] non so perché mi accade di essere multiplo e canoro, seppure assai sommessamente', which is reminiscent of the 240 Benedictine monks led by a jesuite Father wandering inside of Schreber's body. The cortege turns into the subject's own funeral procession:

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[62] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, p. 187.

[63] Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 89.

> Riprendo la mia processione plurima; parte di me batte i piedi, parte canta in modo inadeguato, parte si inchina; […] ogni tanto precipito e scompaio: probabilmente muoio. […] qualche io sfinito si sdraia lungo la strada e altri io lo ricoprono di sassi, rustica ma non irriguardosa sepoltura. Effimeri elogi funebri mi scortano lungo il percorso. Mi offro giganteschi crisantemi, mi propongo parole di effimera consolazione, esigua e forse insincera. (*INF*, 73)

The restless series of 'metamorphoses' that the male subject undergoes comprises the transformation into moon, various animals, city, labyrinth, comet, nose, till the transformation into the 'infimo, veramente inferiore a chiunque' penis. The last transformation, 'la mia estrema metamorfosi', is left unknown, as it consists in a series of hypotheses: 'forme verminose', 'larve di angeli', a Medusean 'sterminata capigliatura di rettili' forming the crown of a skull. *INF* is framed in a ring composition – commonly found in Manganelli's texts – that opens and ends with the hypothesis of being dead.

The whole prose of *INF*, which consists in a never-ending series of speculations, originates from the doubt about self-presence. According to Mansfield, the speculative quality of subjectivity is one of the forms in which the masochistic 'total subject' constructs itself. Subjectivity 'becomes the collection point for an infinite number of reversible hypotheses', in this process maximizing and enlarging the self. Indeed, the 'perhaps/perhaps-not' structure allows 'the subject [to] extend itself into a realm of ever-expanding possibilities'.[64] As Mansfield comments, this subjectivity:

> represents the highest aspiration of the masochistic subject – the subject to whom every apotheosis and abasement is always available; to whom there are no alternatives […] who is, in short, capable of (being) anything.[65]

Nowhere is this speculative mechanism more manifest than in Manganelli's texts. Following his public debut at the founding meeting of Gruppo 63 in Palermo, Manganelli established literature as the domain of pure speculation.

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[64] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 50.

[65] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 42.

Indeed, in the semi-theatrical monologue entitled *Hyperipotesi* presented at the meeting, the formulation of hypothesis is defined as the most honourable literary activity:

> Signori e signore, l'importante è proporre delle ipotesi. Nessuna attività è più nobile di questa, più degna dell'uomo. In primo luogo, in qualsivoglia condizione, senza pausa elaborare ipotesi; in secondo luogo, confortarle di documenti, indizi, argomenti, fenomeni, epifenomeni... Ipotizzare è sano, relaxing... è un'attività euforica ed euforizzante, da week-end, come fondare religioni, concepire generali, merendare con consanguinei...[66]

This debut paper heralds Manganelli's later production, where the subject is presented as a sum of mutually exclusive suppositions. Returning to *INF*, also in this text the hypothetical status of subjectivity is given prominence starting from the outset, where the narrator makes conjectures about his death ('non posso più che supporre che io sia morto') and his whereabouts ('che significa, topograficamente, esser morto?'). These conjectures are reverberated through the polyphony of voices surrounding the subject:

> 'Dimmi, amico, giacché io sono giunto qui da poco...'.
> 'Giunto da dove?'.
> 'Ah, non lo so; suppongo di essere morto. Che ne dici?'.
> 'Una buona supposizione, certamente; ma di più non saprei dirti'.
> [...]
> 'Ma tutto ciò sarà dunque inferno?'.
> 'Se è, non potrebbe essere che inferno; ma se non è, non so che altro sia'.
> [...]
> 'Dunque non è inferno'.
> 'O forse dunque è inferno'.
> 'Ma allora era ed è inferno, sempre. Prima e dopo la condizione che diciamo vita'.
> 'E perché no?'.
> [...]
> 'Ricordi qualcosa della tua morte?'.
> 'Sei certo che io sia morto? Sei certo di esserlo?'.
> 'Per nulla. Ma se mi ritengo morto, mi sembra di essermi meno estraneo'.
> 'Quanto "meno"?'.
> 'Non molto. Ma ti ho chiesto qualcosa della tua vita di prima'.

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[66] Manganelli, 'Hyperipotesi', p. 7.

> 'Non sono sicuro di essere stato vivo'.
> 'Supponiamolo'. (*INF*, 12-18)

It can be observed that every answer from the voices is vague, deceptive, consists in another question or in another supposition, forming an endlessly proliferating guesswork about the subject.

The examples provided above show that *INF* constantly announces the decomposition of the self and at the same time the opening of a hypertrophic field of hypothesis and possibilities. Perhaps the most emblematic figure of this is the killing of the 'divin feto', which figures as a sort of backstory to the 'Storia del non nato' in *H*.[67] When the narrator approaches the inmost cave ('la caverna', that is, his own womb), which could be defined its 'ultimate adventure' following Joseph Campbell's mono-myth theory, he finds a never-to-be-born foetus lying in a glass ampoule.[68] This is another figure for the narrator's own selfhood in the form of pure indistinctness and possibility. As the tourist guide of that region – a sycophant rat – explains to the narrator:

> Il feto non ha sesso determinabile. Ma poco importa. Infatti, la sua caratteristica soprattutto affascinante sta in questo, che il feto non è destinato a nascere. Mai. Esso è una presenza, una costante promessa di futuro, una prospettiva esaltante. (*INF,* 112)

Its power resides in its infinite potentiality:

> 'Il tuo dio, il tuo feto è potente' dico ad alta voce.
> 'Oh sì, certo, è la potenza...' (*INF,* 114)

Only by killing the foetus, the subject can ensure that it will never develop, losing its potential to be everything: 'giacchè non è impossibile che il ratto

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[67] 'Storia del non nato' is the 'autobiography' of a 'never born' who narrates the tensions his absence creates in the lives of those who would have been his parents and wife.

[68] In Campbell's monomyth theory, this is the step where the hero faces his greatest fear and through some form of 'death' is metaphorically reborn. Thus, read through Campbell's scheme, the killing of the 'divino feto' represents the killing of the subject's old self which allows a metaphorical rebirth. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2008).

mentisse, e che in realtà non fosse impossibile che un giorno quel feto giungesse a nascere' (*INF*, 124). This sort of self-induced abortion is both related to a desire for self-annihilation and at the same time is connected to the fantasy of being limitless, being all possibilities. This leads us back to the 'masochistic total subject', which is 'built on the contradiction between the collapse of selfhood and its intensification' obtained through the 'repeated and renewed hypothesisation of all the modes and particles of selfhood'.[69]

What kind of relationship can this kind of subject establish with its others? Luca Scarlini, talking about Manganelli's theatrical pieces collected in *Tragedie da leggere*, contends that every interaction in Manganelli allows the possibility of establishing a dialogue with the Other, 'un colloquio cerimoniale con l'altro da sé'.[70] However, I think that what happens in *INF* – which shares *Tragedie*'s dialogical form – is more in line with the operation of the masochistic total subject who, according to Mansfield, 'allows for the survival of its others, but only as versions, as parts of the interiority of the subject'.[71] An indicator in this sense is the fact that the multiplicity of voices in *INF* is clearly one and the same voice: that of the narrating subject.[72] The narrator realises quite quickly that all the voices he is talking to are part of his interiority:

> Confesso che non riesco più a capire esattamente quali siano i miei
> limiti; può essere che quella voce, o voci, che mi rispondono, altro
> non siano che luoghi del me stesso, così come un tempo avvertivo il
> mormorio delle orecchie o l'urlo del diaframma terrorizzato. (*INF*, 21)

Thus, the voices are not reading its mind, as it is presumed initially – 'Non sono stupito dalla lettura del mio pensiero, ma urtato, come da una indelicatezza' –, rather, the narrating subject is reading its own mind: 'Dunque, non è impossibile

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[69] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 96.

[70] Luca Scarlini, 'Dialogo notturno: un palcoscenico per Giorgio Manganelli', in Manganelli, *Tragedie da leggere*, ed. by Scarlini (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), pp. ix-xi.

[71] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 37.

[72] As Cortellessa puts it, in *INF*, 'l'io-naso dialoga con l'io-alluce e l'io-cazzo: maniacale psicodramma recitato da solo'. See his *Libri segreti*, p. 263.

che io legga il mio pensiero, ed io mi risponda' (*INF*, 21-22). Arguably, dialogues in Manganelli's work are always monologues of a divided self. Quite revealing in this sense is the theatrical dialogue from *Il personaggio*, where after a long monologue the character splits into two voices. In this soliloquy, 1 asks 2: 'are you talking to me?' (the feeling is of one talking to its mirror image like in the celebrated scene from *Taxi driver*) and 2 replies: 'no, I am talking to me, only to me':

> 1 – Dici a me?
> 2 – Oh, no, signore; non oserei parlarvi a quel modo.
> 1 – Non dici a me?
> 2 – No, davvero, io dico a me, solo a me.
> 1 – Parli solo con te?
> 2 – E con chi dovrebbe mai parlare una bassezza pari mio?
> 1 – Tu sei infimo?
> 2 – Molto infimo, signore. La mia infimità è tale, che per parlare con me debbo parlare a voce molto alta. Eppure io in genere mi sono vicino.
> 1 – Dunque, tu non parli che con te stesso; ma ti sopporti?
> 2 – A dire il vero, io nemmeno parlo con me stesso; quando mi parlo, lo faccio per zittirmi.[73]

The perspective outlined above of the total subject allows us to see more clearly what happens when the male subject-in-becoming of *INF* assumes feminine attributes, for example when the doll – 'è una femmina' – becomes part of the subject's interiority, and when the subject assumes maternal prerogatives: '[w]oman is defined as the privileged and specialized state around which masculinities can be successfully and productively deployed. Yet [...] in masochism femininity is to become the property of the masculine subject, a highly sensitive and even heroic moment of the recognition of himself'.[74] Although *INF*'s male subject assumes the attributes of its others, also subjecting the feminine to this logic, the point of view never actually changes. One gets the impression that these attributes are merely superimposed on the masculine identity, which remains constant.[75] In this operation, 'otherness is never

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[73] Manganelli, *Tragedie*, p. 255.

[74] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 95.

[75] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 45.

separated from the huge interiority that strives to generate it. The result is the persistent return to the narrating subject itself'.[76]

The construction of the narrating-subject in *INF* as a 'total subject' is also reflected in the aesthetic that pervades the text, which I argue is one of the sublime. As I will show, the shared nature of the masochistic subjectivity and the aesthetic of the sublime hinges upon the fact that both are defined by a desire for totality and limitlessness. The following part thus focuses a lens on what the protagonist of *INF* would call 'the aesthetic aspect of the situation' of his peculiar *concubinato* with the doll (*INF*, 26). During his 'perorazione argutamente argomentata' aimed at persuading the doll to leave his body, indeed, he proceeds to 'l'aspetto che dissi "estetico" della situazione' (*INF*, 23). He laments the fact that the doll's foreign body disfigures his classical vocation for the formal *concinnitas*, but the doll promptly makes him realise the superiority of the 'pulcretudine del discontinuo' and the 'teologia dell'errore'. This works as a metadiscourse on the aesthetic of *INF*, where – coherently with the sublime experience – 'failure' allows the arousal of a feeling of transcendent totality.

To better understand what I mean by this, it is necessary to have a look at Mansfield's investigation of the 'extraordinary correspondence' between masochism and the sublime. According to Mansfield, the two are 'inseparable': 'the sublime produces a masochistic experience for the subject, and the subject can only live out the impossibilities of masochism in the sublime'.[77] Mansfield highlights that in Kant's definition of the sublime and in Lyotard's discussion of this matter, the sublime is insistently presented as an aesthetic experience in

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[76] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 38.

[77] Mansfield, *Masochism*, pp. 28 and 31.

which pleasure and displeasure combine.[78] For Kant, what happens in the sublime is that 'our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea' but our imagination 'is inadequate to that idea […] Yet, this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power'.[79] This very experience of failure and unattainability 'awakens within us a consciousness of the scale of our ambition [...] Our very failure is somehow an extension of ourselves'.[80] Here, in 'the ability to turn its failure into its greatest victory', we clearly see the structural commonality between the masochistic subjectivity and the experience of the sublime.[81] It is worth reminding ourselves here of Reik's 'Victory though defeat', the maxim which captures the essence of masochism.

In what way is the aesthetic of *INF* sublime? I will use the categories suggested by Massimo Fusillo who has traced the contemporary developments of the sublime aesthetic in some key contemporary categories and phenomena, focusing on what he calls the 'camp sublime'.[82] If we take into account the stylistic features of *INF*, we might argue that the contamination of high and low at various levels allows us to link Manganelli's with the camp sensibility in which

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[78] Immanuel Kant describes the sublime as a 'negative pleasure': 'the object is apprehended as sublime with a pleasure that is possible only by means of displeasure'. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans by. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. 98 and 117. For Lyotard, the sublime 'carries with it both pleasure and pain. Better still, in it pleasure derives from pain'. Lyotard also describes it as a feeling consisting of 'contradictory sensations, pleasure and displeasure, "attraction" and "repulsion"'. Jean-François Lyotard, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Postmodernism?' in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, *Theory and History of Literature*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 71-82 (p. 77). Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. by Helen Rottenberg, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 109.

[79] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 106.

[80] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 27.

[81] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 42.

[82] Massimo Fusillo, 'Sublime isterico, estremismo tragico, posthuman, massimalismo: su alcune declinazioni contemporanee', *CoSMo - Comparative Studies in Modernism*, 8 (2016), 95-104.

this aspect of contamination finds its most evident articulation.[83] In *INF*, the dissolution of classifications coagulated in the pregnant male/doll image reflects the dissolution of aesthetic binarisms at the stylistic level. The text systematically upsets the aesthetic categories of hilarious-tragic, high-low, sacred-profane.[84] As Susan Sontag argues, '[t]he whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious [...] be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious'.[85] For example, an entire section of *INF* is devoted to a quasi-learned philosophical dialogue on the false nature of divinity, which could bear comparison with Cicero's *De natura deorum*, if it was not for the fact that the arguments make no sense – 'Capisco che la falsità divina è cosa non solo ardua, ma faticosa. Non pensa? E dopotutto codesti suoi giochi che riguardano in modo falso il vero, che sono mai se non le bizzarre cerimonie del falso?' –, plus the fact that narrator is talking with a hairy ear, surrounded by seductive mushrooms ('tocco un fungo che si mette a ridere, come se il tocco fosse un gesto estremamente spiritoso, anche galante, *INF*, 84). Guido Guglielmi suggests that for Manganelli we should talk about '[u]n sublime del comico'.[86]

Slavoj Žižek's notion of the 'trash sublime', a category that according to Fusillo overlaps with that of camp, seems to be even more appropriate for Manganelli.

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83   Theorised in 1964 by Susan Sontag, camp indicates a taste that emphasises artifice and theatricality and whose 'ultimate statement' is: 'it's good because it's awful'. Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 292.

84   In Manganelli, this stylistic mechanism is programmatically adopted from *H* onwards. Here, as the title itself already declares, 'il meccanismo dell'antitesi (alto-basso; solenne-quotidiano; sacro-blasfemo) impronta di sé il sistema stilistico dell'intero testo'. Mariarosa Bricchi, *Manganelli e la menzogna: Notizie su Hilarotragoedia con testi inediti* (Novara: Interlinea, 2002), p. 45.

85   Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', p. 228.

86   'Non il sublime visto dal basso [...] ma il basso della (bruniana) *coincidentia oppositorum*, che disordina, degerarchizza, disumanizza le cose. Un basso disambientato, straniato, sottratto alla misura, al di fuori delle convenzioni di basso e alto. (Un sublime del comico)'. Guido Gugliemi, *Critica del nonostante. Perchè è ancora necessaria la critica letteraria*, ed. by Valerio Cuccaroni (Bologna: Pendragon, 2016), pp. 113-44.

As Fusillo observes, the trash sublime does not simply destabilise categorisations, but reaches a *coincidentia oppositorum* which is more in tune with Manganelli's writing, where scatology coincides with the sacred.[87] As Žižek writes:

> In today's art, the sacred space of sublime beauty and the excremental space of trash (leftover) is gradually narrowing, up to the paradoxical identity of opposites: are not modern art objects more and more excremental objects, trash, (often in a quite literal sense: faeces, rotting corpses ...) displayed in – made to occupy, to fill in – the sacred *place* of the Thing?[88]

After all, Manganelli is convinced that, at the present time, excrements and genitals are the only appropriate objects of literature:

> E come potrebbe essere una letteratura oggi se non fosse in qualche modo pornografica e coprolalica? Se non fossimo in qualche modo immersi in genitali e escrementi di che cosa parleremmo noi, per fare gli scrittori?[89]

Starting from *H*'s 'teomerda', writing is 'prosar escreto': excrements occupy the place of the art object.[90] As already shown, *INF* overflows with excrements and religious ceremonies and defecation is synonymous with deification. Alberto Arbasino defines the ceremonies in *INF* as 'cerimonie metafisiche e [...] lutulente', 'putrescenze inesauste, di profile alto e sublime'.[91] Žižek explains that in the artistic practice of exposing excrements as art, the radical incongruence of the excrement and the Place that it occupies makes us aware of the specificity of that Place. In fact, the problem of modern art is not finding a beautiful enough object to fill in the Sacred Place of the Thing, but rather to 'ascertain that the Sacred Place is still there'. Our recognition that something is

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[87] On theology and scatology in Manganelli see Paolone, *Il cavaliere*, p. 5.

[88] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London-New York: Verso, 2000), pp. 25-26.

[89] Manganelli, *Il vescovo e il ciarlatano*, p. 29.

[90] Manganelli, *Hilarotragedia*, p. 142.

[91] Arbasino, 'Bambole e pipistrelli' in *Riga*, pp. 247-48 (p. 247).

in the wrong place at least makes us believe that 'the Sacred Place still takes place'.[92]

In *INF*, during the ceremony called 'cacca'– celebrated by playful series of alliterative and oxymoronic couples like 'sacro sterco, astri stronzi, santo escreto' – the tone becomes particularly grandiloquent and fanatical. The dolls sits on the throne, her buttocks are two moons, two deities. The narrator prostrates himself before the Trinity formed by buttocks and sphincter:

> E fra l'una natica e l'altra si insinua il sublime pertugio, l'empirea porta donde fuoriescono le tenebre escrementizie. Oh sublime, altissimo sfintere! Eccomi nella mia bassura, nel mio stato oltremisura vile eccomi prostrato [...] posso io dunque ammirare il tondo candore del duplice nume, fatto trino dalla vale intrinseca, luogo che descriverò: morbidezza collinare e decliva valle; satelliti reciproci, uniti e divisi da un luogo di conformato nulla (*INF,* 45).[93]

Manganelli plays here with the classical matter of sublime – to visualise the unimaginable, to express what language cannot express –: the sphincter is sublime as it is the place where Nothingness takes on a shape ('luogo di conformato nulla').

More in general, it can be argued that the sublime arises in Manganelli's texts precisely because these continuously interrogate the theme of *nulla* and the limits of representation.[94] Indeed, if we apply Lyotard's definition of the postmodern sublime – in the sublime, 'the art-object no longer bends itself to models but tries to present the fact that there is an unpresentable' – we notice that this is exactly what Manganelli does in his texts, which are, as Aldo

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[92] Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, p. 26.

[93] This is reminiscent of Baudelaire's paradoxes: 'O filthy grandeur! O sublime disgrace!' referred to woman's body and sexuality. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan, intro. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 55.

[94] For Manganelli, literature means nothing: 'è l'eterna ambiguità della letteratura che non sa se vuole o non vuole dire niente. Lo scrittore sa benissimo che la letteratura non vuole dire niente: ha ben altro da dire che non dire'. Paolo Terni, *Giorgio Manganelli, ascoltatore maniacale* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2001), pp. 45-46.

Tagliaferri puts it, 'variations' on the theme of Nothingness.[95] In different ways, Manganelli's work keeps presenting the fact that there is an inscrutable, an inaccessible, 'the hard kernel that resists symbolisation' (the Thing).[96] As Milani argues, the failure of language is essential for Manganelli: it is 'premeditated' in every detail and theatrically 'staged':

> Manganelli condivide con Beckett proprio la necessità del fallimento, un fallimento premeditato e allestito in ogni minimo particolare: una messa in scena della sconfitta della logica del discorso che è anche una liberazione delle sotterranee potenzialità semantiche del linguaggio.[97]

Mansfield's observations on the postmodern sublime can be applied to Manganelli's work, where the continuous staging of language's defeat is the device that produces language itself. Writing 'presents the point where it can no longer go on presenting, it can only repeatedly announce its inability to do so'.[98] By exposing the excrement as the art object or by making every discourse collapse into nonsense, the text announces language's failure. Yet it is precisely by announcing the failure of language that the sublime text is produced, and the aspiration to the impossible totality is fulfilled. Manganelli's 'sublime-trash' writing replicates the structure of the masochistic total subject, as in both failure inspires a feeling of endless potentiality. The best definition of the final goal of Manganelli's writing is given by the author himself in his review of

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[95] Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 196-211 (p. 206). Aldo Tagliaferri, 'Intorno alla genesi di *Hilarotragoedia* di Giorgio Manganelli', *ilVerri*, 6 (1998), pp. 25-32.

[96] Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, p. 26.

[97] Filippo Milani, 'Il teatro ilarotagico di Manganelli (tra Beckett e Bacon)', *Cuadernos de Filología Italiana*, 25 (2018), 197-211 (p. 205), http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/CFIT.57968 [last accessed 19 April 2020].

[98] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 27.

Beckett's *Murphy,* described by Manganelli as the first step towards a 'sublime, liberatoria decomposizione'.[99]

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the change of paradigm in Manganelli's later take on masochism and gender relations with respect to *UL*. As I have shown, especially in *INF* Manganelli leaves behind models of masculinity based on violence and suppression of woman, and moves towards the remaking of the masculine subject as a site of de-essentialisation and indifference. Instead of excluding difference and contradictoriness, the kind of subject imagined in *INF* includes all its others within the self. This has been read as an attempt to abandon obsolete patriarchal constructions of masculinity and authoriality. I have shown that the resulting destabilisation of gender and sexual categories, however, does not necessarily mean their deconstruction. Rather, it has to be read against a broader process of desubjectification and annihilation of subjectivity, whose final goal is the reassertion of the self. This is consistent with the logic of the masochist, whose aim is to demonstrate that self-destruction is part of the masochist's agency, in fact, its most important part and 'the highest expression of its desire'.[100]

This chapter has provided a further vector for the comprehension of what is behind the stress on textual plurality and the dissolution of conventional, fixed identities in *INF,* through the discussion of masochism and writing as technologies of de-subjectification and – at the same time – maximisation of subjectivity. By applying the structure of Mansfield's 'masochistic total subject', I have demonstrated that in *INF,* the collapse of selfhood results in its intensification (consistent with the essence of masochism captured in Reik's 'victory through defeat'). Self-maximisation is the result of the subject's hyper-hypothetical quality, which makes it potentially capable of becoming 'everything' and to be, at the level of fantasy, omnipotent and limitless. I have

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[99] Manganelli, *La letteratura come menzogna*, p. 98.

[100] Mansfield, *Masochism*, p. 33.

shown that this poses problems when woman is subjected to this logic, as woman is included within the masculine subject's endless potentiality, but is never acknowledged in her autonomy and specificity. In Manganelli's text, the residual subject in disintegration never questions the centrality of its speaking position, but on the contrary, performs an incessant return to its self. In conclusion, the more the subject decentres the self the more it re-centres, aggrandises and individuates the self. It is precisely because of this mechanism that the 'masochistic total subject' outlined in this chapter can be linked to the logic of the 'male victim'. While the male subject in *INF* keeps positing the self as victim (as I discussed in detail in chapter 1) and reaches an apparently total form of self-disintegration and decentredness, he is still able to reclaim an authoritative and central position.

Chapter 4   A 'perverse' hermeneutical training: Manganelli and Vladimir Nabokov

In the second part of this study, I will shift the focus onto sado-masochism as a means of relating to the reader, who is engaged by the author in sexual/textual sado-masochistic games organised around power and desire. This puts the model of authorship constructed in Manganelli's work in relation to the models of male masochism and male victimhood outlined in the previous chapters. The objective is to evaluate if the sado-masochistic models of relationality that Manganelli establishes with the reader can illuminate new ways in which sado-masochistic fantasies or practices can operate in a critical fashion and unsettle the kinds of exclusionary forms on which patriarchy rests.

Before delving into the two texts by Manganelli that most notably bring the 'perverse' relationship between author and reader to the fore (*Nuovo commento* and *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo*), I will investigate the hermeneutic 'training' which led Manganelli to develop his model of author-reader sado-masochistic relationship. I will do so by evaluating the impact on Manganelli of Vladimir Nabokov, one of the authors who is most frequently associated with sadism and a point of reference for literary games based on the acting-out of power structures. Probing into Manganelli's reviews of Nabokov's works and the marginalia that Manganelli left on his copies of Nabokov's text hosted in the Centro Manoscritti (University of Pavia), I assess how Manganelli made use of Nabokov's literary experiments to imagine new strategies to relate with his readers.

Literature on Nabokov has often associated him with sadism. Either the author himself or his novel's narrators and characters have been defined as sadistic and perverse. Carl Proffer for example, calls Nabokov a 'somewhat sadistic author'.[1] Former friend and collaborator Edmund Wilson condemned Nabokov's translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* highlighting 'the perversity of his tricks to startle or stick pins in the reader; [...] with his sadomasochistic Dostoevskian tendencies

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[1]   Carl Proffer, *Keys to Lolita* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 4.

so acutely noted by Sartre--he seeks to torture both the reader and himself'.[2] Not least, Manganelli himself has applied sadism to describe one of Nabokov's works: *Invito a una decapitazione* is described as a 'sadistically rigorous game'.[3]

Nabokov could pride himself with a long list of critics who lamented and/or were galvanized by his 'cruelty', like Martin Amis, who stated: 'Nabokov is the laureate of cruelty',[4] or Richard Rorty, according to whom 'cruelty' is the 'central topic' of Nabokov's work.[5] The most surprising account on the matter is an article by Dean Flower, where one of the scholar's objectives is to demonstrate – by collecting family members' memories of his cruelty – that Nabokov, the real man, was nasty.[6] Commenting on Nabokov's treatment of fellow writers, Alexander Dolinin depicts Nabokov's parodies of their style in terms of 'punishment' and 'caning': Russian authors who are 'found guilty' of philistinism, mediocrity and lack of inventiveness are 'sent to the caning chamber' by Nabokov and 'hurt[...] bad' with the 'stick of his parody'.[7] However, the chief target of Nabokov's sadism is represented by his readers. The list of reviewers and critics who have felt victimized by the implied author of

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2   Edmund Wilson, 'The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov', *The New York Review of Books* (1965), https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1965/07/15/the-strange-case-of-pushkin-and-nabokov/ [accessed 24 November 2020].

3   'Arbitrario, un poco turpe, sadicamente rigoroso, il gioco dell'*Invito* è stato eseguito, e vuole essere gustato nella sua coerenza inverificabile'. Manganelli, 'La scacchiera di Nabokov', first published in *L'illustrazione italiana* (1962), now in Manganelli, *De America. Saggi e divagazioni sulla cultura statunitense*, ed. by Luca Scarlini (Milan: Marcos Y Marcos, 1999), pp. 100-104 (p. 104).

4   Martin Amis, 'Introduction' in Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), pp. 1-9.

5   Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 146.

6   Dean Flower, 'Nabokov and Nastiness', *The Hudson Review*, 45.4 (1993), 573-82.

7   Alexander Dolinin, 'Caning of Modernist Profaners: Parody in Despair', *Cycnos*, 12.2 (2008), http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1449 [accessed 06 November 2020].

Nabokov's texts is long. For example, David Richter has commented that the readers are 'Nabokov's chosen victims'.[8]

In this chapter, I will argue that Nabokov stands out as an essential point of reference for Manganelli for the development of sado-masochistic strategies as a medium to relate to the reader. As David Richter points out, indeed, 'if there is [...] an author whose impact depends primarily on ironic victimisation and reader entrapment, it is surely Vladimir Nabokov'.[9] According to Tom Perrin, the hallmark of early American postmodernist novels is the 'sadomasochistic relationship between the implied author and the implied reader', and Nabokov's *Pale Fire* is regarded by the scholar as 'the most complete example of a text that facilitated such [masochistic] enjoyment of all the best-selling postmodernist novels of its period'.[10] Starting from these premises, I suggest that Nabokov worked as a key model for Manganelli's development of a masochistic aesthetic and more specifically for his construction of author-reader relationships based on sado-masochistic play.

As Luca Scarlini categorically puts it, 'Giorgio Manganelli è per opinione comune uno dei maggiori anglisti del Novecento italiano' and Nabokov is, again according

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[8]   David Richter, '*Pnin* and "Signs and Symbols": Narrative Entrapment' in *Anatomy of a Short Story: Nabokov's Puzzles, Codes, "Signs and Symbols"*, ed. by Yuri Leving (New York and London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 224-35 (p. 235). For a tracking of the incidence of descriptions of Nabokov's readers as 'trapped' or 'victims' in critical literature, see Tom Perrin, 'Book Smarts: Masochism and Popular Postmodernism', in *The Aesthetics of Middlebrow Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 109-34 (p. 125).

[9]   Richter, '*Pnin* and "Signs and Symbols"', p. 224.

[10] Perrin, 'Book Smarts', pp. 110 and 134. For the concepts of 'implied author' and 'implied reader' see Wayne Booth, *The Rethoric of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983). The implied author, as distinct from the real author, is the 'picture that the reader gets [of the author's] presence', an image that the reader infers based on rhetorical and formal elements of the text (p. 71). Similarly, the implied reader is the image of the reader that is implied by the text and that can be reconstructed thanks to specific elements of the text.

to Scarlini, 'senza dubbio in primo piano' as a touchstone for Manganelli.[11] Manganelli, who worked for a period as an English Literature lecturer at La Sapienza University in Rome, stated on various occasions his admiration for Nabokov and mentioned him as one of his favourite writers. This is also reflected in the considerable amount of books – thirty-seven copies – by Nabokov collected in Manganelli's library (donated to the Centro Manoscritti in Pavia). Some texts are present in various editions and for many Manganelli possessed both the original and the Italian translation. Manganelli also promoted the Russian-American author in the Italian context by writing a series of critical reviews. Scarlini goes as far as describing Nabokov as a 'protective deity' during the preparatory phase in which Manganelli developed his unique style – before the publication of his manifesto *Letteratura come menzogna* (1967). The critic notes the privileged position enjoyed by of one of Nabokov's novels in Manganelli's personal 'canon': *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 'l'amatissimo libro-feticcio'.[12]

In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the ties between Manganelli and Nabokov.[13] However, critics have never taken into account the sado-masochistic aesthetic as a pivotal element of conjunction of the two author's sensibilities. I will explore Manganelli's investment in Nabokov and his sado-masochistic strategy on multiple levels. In this chapter, I will analyse Manganelli's own experience as reader of Nabokov, first by relying on how he portrayed the experience in his critical reviews and then through the examination of the marginalia on his copies of Nabokov's texts available at the

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[11] Luca Scarlini, '*De America*: il Novecento letterario americano secondo Giorgio Manganelli', intro. to Manganelli, *De America*, pp. 11-13.

[12] Scarlini, '*De America*', p. 13.

[13] See for example Mussgnug 'Storie eretiche: Nabokov, Manganelli e l'invenzione della letteratura', in *Letteratura e Antropologia*, ed. by Massimo Bonafin e Simona Corso: *L'Immagine riflessa: testi, società, culture*, 12 (Alessandria: Dall'Orso, 2008), pp. 237-47; Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*; Lavinia Torti, 'Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya, Dear Manga: le postille di Manganelli a Nabokov e Wilson tra proiezione e riconoscimento, con un'appendice di articoli inediti dell'autore', *Avanguardia*, 23 (2018), 75-108; Arianna Marelli, 'Giorgio Manganelli tra "opera aperta" e "opera chiusa"'.

'Centro Manoscritti' in Pavia, which can provide a more immediate and 'intimate' picture of his relationship with the Russian-born author. In the following chapters, I will analyse the ramifications of some Nabokovian themes and stratagems in Manganelli's texts.

Nabokov's and Manganelli's concern with author-reader power dynamics was culturally and historically determined, despite their claims for the contrary (both indeed championed the idea of literature's disengagement from socio-historical contingencies).[14] First, a change in material conditions, with the publishing world becoming an industry in Western commodity and mass culture, radically altered the role of intellectuals and artists. They had to come to terms with the fact that they were now subjected to the law of supply and demand, and renounce ideas of 'autonomy' of the artist and of the 'purity of art'.[15] The all-powerful or powerless figures of authors and readers in both Nabokov's and Manganelli's works are also connected with a critical shift of focus from the author to the reader as producer of meaning. In 1968, Barthes popularised under the slogan 'the death of the author' a series of language-based theoretical reflections destabilising the traditional hierarchy in the author-reader dynamics. According to these theoretical approaches, the author is no longer the point of origin of the text and is supplanted by the reader. Some years before, in his 1966 *Criticism and Truth*, Barthes challenged the classification of modes of writing by abolishing the difference between creative writing and criticism, which already resulted in a weakening of the distance between writerly and readerly practices: '[A] unification has been occurring as regards the poetic and the critical functions of writing [...] the same language tends to circulate everywhere in literature [...] there is no longer anything but writing'.[16] The timing of Barthes'

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[14] For Manganelli, literature is 'asociale': he places literature totally outside/against culture. Manganelli was here on the same page with Nabokov, who famously boasted: 'My books are blessed by a total lack of social significance'. See his foreword to *The Eye* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 3.

[15] Re, 'Language, Gender, and Sexuality', pp. 138-39.

[16] Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, trans. and ed. by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 23.

interventions may be relevant in determining the differences between Nabokov and Manganelli, as whereas Nabokov contributed to fostering the debate, Manganelli started to write when the debate had reached its apex.

Indeed, the author's death sentence was the result of previous intellectual developments questioning the idea of the author as an exceptional creative individual– mediated by the notion of the Romantic genius.[17] Mallarmé paved the way for this critical shift: 'if the poem is to be pure, the poet's voice must be stilled and the initiative taken by the words themselves', so that 'the poet will be absent'.[18] Nabokov, working through the implications of this theoretical rethinking of the author's role, depicts a 'death of the author' in many of his works (Sebastian's in *The Real Life* and Shade's in *Pale Fire*).[19] On the other hand, *NC* was published in 1969, a year after Barthes' essay, when the debate on this transition of power had already reached a mature stage. To an extent, this can explain the (apparently) radically opposite positions of the two authors.

The most obvious difference is that while Nabokov performs the author's total control over the text and exhibits ownership over his work of art, Manganelli performs a radical renunciation of authorial power. In Nabokov, the author is the creator and the master. He often parades his absolute control over his artistic creations, likening himself to God or a dictator. For example, in *Strong Opinions*, he proclaims: 'A creative writer must study carefully the works of his rivals, including the Almighty'.[20] He also states that in the literary worlds that he creates 'every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability

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17 Massimo Fusillo, *Estetica della letteratura* (Bologna: Mulino, 2009), p. 69.

18 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, & Letters*, trans. and intro. by Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 41.

19 Thomas Karshan, 'Nabokov's "Homework in Paris": Stéphane Mallarmé, *Bend Sinister*, and the Death of the Author', *Nabokov Studies*, 12.1 (2013), 1-30 (p. 4), https://www.academia.edu/3754385/Nabokov_Mallarm%C3%A9_and_the_Death_of_the_Author [last accessed 30 January 2019].

20 Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 32.

and truth'.[21] Nabokov does not allow anyone but himself to impact upon his texts: in the foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading* he wrote: 'The only author whom I must gratefully recognise as an influence upon me at the time of writing this book [is] the melancholy, extravagant, wise, witty, magical, and altogether delightful Pierre Delalande, whom I invented'.[22]

Nabokov's references to himself as the 'master' can be aligned to the figure of the Sadian master, defined by Roland Barthes as the one who possesses the speech, 'who disposes of the entirety of language'.[23] Conversely, as we have seen in chapter 2 in the discussion of the Moloch tale, Manganelli presents himself as a writer who is possessed by language. Thus, on this point the two author's philosophies of language are opposed: for Manganelli, unlike Nabokov, language takes precedence over the author's creative power. Because of the priority of language, every human experience being 'already, and always, intrinsically linguistic', language is figured by Manganelli as a God and the author as its slave and 'sacrificial victim'.[24]

Nabokov's 'strong' notion of authorship does not mean that we can make sense of the text by appealing to the author's 'intended meaning'. Instead, as this chapter will show, Nabokov composes literary games with no definitive solutions or meanings in order to sadistically humiliate the reader and make the latter feel their failure in interpreting the text. It is my argument indeed that, due to changes in the conditions of power of the literary field, in both Nabokov and Manganelli the author is no loger conceived as 'autonomous' nor as the 'creator' of the meaning of the text. The author is not the repository of an ultimate 'truth'; rather, it assumes the new function of establishing and enacting a sadomasochistic relationship with the reader and producing desire.

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[21] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, p. 69.

[22] Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 6.

[23] Barthes, *Sade: Fourier: Loyola*, trans. by Richard Miller (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 31.

[24] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts*, p. 55.

We may conclude that, in spite of the striking critical claims advanced, rumours of the death of the author were evidently somewhat exaggerated. After all, Barthes in 1973 reviewed his position, admitting that he, as a reader, desired the author and 'needed his figure':

> The text is a fetish object, and this fetish desires me. [...] As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared; dispossessed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching, and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing; but in the text, in a way, I desire the author: I need his figure [...], as he needs mine.[25]

The figure of the author is thus not expendable in as much as it enables a circulation of desire.

4.1 'Who has the last word': author-reader power struggles

In what follows, I will introduce the texts by Nabokov that explicitly thematise the author-reader power struggles, which also represent the texts that were most influential on Manganelli: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) and *Pale Fire* (1962).[26] In the next chapters, I will survey Manganelli's literary debts to Nabokov by focusing on *Nuovo commento* (1969) and *Libro parallelo* (1977). I will highlight how, in different modalities, the works by both Nabokov and Manganelli shape the relationships between the characters so as to make them work metafictionally as models of the sado-masochistic exchanges between the author and the reader. In all these works, indeed, the plots revolve around a writer and a commentator attempting to dominate and control a text's meaning, which often turns into processes of identity appropriation and negotiation.

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[25] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 27.

[26] Manganelli annotated the following copies at the *Centro Manoscritti*, University of Pavia: Vladimir Nabokov, *La vera vita di Sebastiano Knight*, trans. by G. Fletzer (Milan: Bompiani, 1980) (F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 30) and *Pale fire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981) (F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20).

In both *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pale Fire* there recurs the motif of a critic who, while attempting to write the commentary on a dead artist, writes an autobiography instead. In *The Real Life*, V. tries to write the biography of his dead brother and famous writer Sebastian. V. follows the 'undulations' of his elusive brother's soul till the point where he appropriates the brother's identity:

> try as I may, I cannot get out of my part: Sebastian's mask clings to my face, the likeness will not be washed off. I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows.[27]

The reader is left with the doubt that the book they are reading is in fact a novel by Sebastian himself (who was a writer of 'fictional biographies' and before dying was working on the biography of Mr H.). In the novel's last line – 'I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows' – Nabokov reasserts his authority over the world of his invention, reminding us who has ultimate control: the real creator, trapping his characters in an oppressive role-play they cannot escape, is Nabokov himself.

Pale Fire comprises a 999-line poem by John Shade and a critical apparatus (foreword, critical commentary and index) edited by his neighbour and colleague, Dr. Charles Kinbote. Notwithstanding the scholar's claim for the contrary – 'I have no desire to twist and batter an unambiguous *apparatus criticus* into the monstrous semblance of a novel' – the commentary assumes abnormal proportions striving to phagocytise the poem.[28] Soon, the reader realises that the scholar, who is firmly convinced of being in fact a King in exile from the imaginary reign of Zembla, is a charlatan: his specious notes are loosely – if at all – related to the poem and narrate his completely invented life-story. Just as in *The Real Life*, the main question is whether the writer created the critic or the critic created the writer, or who has the final say on the poem's meaning. As Kinbote contends in a oft-quoted maxim, 'for better or worse, it is

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[27]   Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 173.

[28]   Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 71.

the commentator who has the last word'. [29] However, the reflexive structure of the novel artfully dodges any definitive answer.

The figure of Kinbote expresses Nabokov's preoccupation with 'encroaching hermeneutics' (like the psychoanalytic discourse, considered as a form of 'totalitarianism of thinking'). [30] However, if *Pale Fire*'s self-aggrandizing and intruding exegete has some real life counterpart, this is Nabokov himself: during the 1950s he ventured into the translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, producing a monomaniacal 1200 page commentary where, according to former friend Edmund Wilson, emerges the typical Nabokovian style 'at its most perversepedantic impossible'. [31] Not unlike Kinbote, Nabokov collects an extraordinary quantity of self-referential and 'generally quite useless' information, [32] which is interesting only for the one who writes, including specious claims 'feigning a connection between his own biography and that of Pushkin'. [33] For example, Nabokov writes in an annotation to Pushkin's reference to the name 'Shishkov':

> This reference is to the leader of the Archaic group of writers, Admiral Aleksandr Shishkov (1754-1841), publicist, statesman, president of the Academy of Sciences, and a cousin of my great-grandmother. [34]

Nabokov's texts explicitly fuse together interpretative and sexual desire and highlight the sexual component involved in the power struggle between author and reader. Especially in *Pale Fire*, the nature of the text/commentary relationship is often presented in terms of sexual desire and abuse. An example

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[29] Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, p. 25.

[30] Jenefer Shute, 'Nabokov and Freud: the Play of Power', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 30.4 (1984), 637-50 (p. 637).

[31] Wilson, 'The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov'.

[32] Wilson, 'The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov'.

[33] Alexander Dolinin, 'Eugene Onegin', in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. by Vladimir E. Alexandrov (New York and London: Garland, 1995), pp. 117-29 (p. 121).

[34] Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, Volume 3*, trans. and with a commentary by Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Bollingen, 1964), p. 169.

of this can be found in the last pages of Kinbote's commentary. Kinbote confesses that he stole Shade's poem, in the hope that – after his assiduous pressures on Shade – he could find in it the commemoration of the glories of his alter-ego Charles II of Zembla. When he finally gains possession of Shade's poem, Kinbote marks this moment of appropriation by likening the poem to a brutally raped young creature (to be noted that this passage is underlined by Manganelli in his copy):

> I now felt a new, pitiful tenderness towards the poem as one has for a fickle young creature who has been stolen and brutally enjoyed by a black giant but now again is safe in our hall and park, whistling with the stableboys, swimming with the tame seal. The spot still hurts, it must hurt, but with strange gratitude we kiss those heavy wet eyelids and caress that polluted flesh.[35]

Kinbote violates not only the poem, but also the old poet's life by acting as an obstinate stalker and voyeur:

> Henceforth I began seeing more and more of my celebrated neighbour. The view from one of my windows kept providing me with first-rate entertainment, especially when I was on the wait for some tardy guest. From the second story of my house the Shade's living room remained clearly visible [...] and almost every evening I could see the poet's slippered foot gently rocking.[36]

It can be noted that also in the passage above the relationship between Kinbote and Shade is made sexual: Kinbote's act of spying on Shade is linked to waiting for one of his lovers: the sexual drive is sublimated into this voyeuristic looking

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[35] Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, p. 233. Ironically, Kinbote is actually referring to the 'violence' perpetrated by Shade: the commentator is outraged when, after stealing the poem, he finds out that Shade has written a story of his own. Rather, Kinbote's simile is revealing of his own abusive behaviour. From the passage, there emerges clearly that Nabokov is associating 'Kinbote's "use" of the poem to an adult's sexual abuse of a helpless ward', as William Monroe points out. See his '"Lords and Owners": Vladimir Nabokov's Sequestered Imagination', in *Power to Hurt: The Virtues of Alienation* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 155-75 (p. 160).

[36] Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, p. 21.

at Shade.[37] Kinbote's obsession for Shade is often coloured in comical tones and Shade always maintains a facetious tolerance for his neighbour's intrusions, even when he is in the toilet – 'Let him in, Sybil, he won't rape me!'.[38] However, it emerges clearly the fact that Kinbote has no human interest in Shade and that, like Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, he tries to accomplish his artistic project 'by the price of total eradication of the freedom of the other'.[39] The example that epitomises this is when Shade gets shot and Kinbote, instead of assisting him, shamelessly steals his poem.

In the next chapters, I will showcase the line of influence that goes from these works by Nabokov to *NC* and *LP*. Manganelli's texts put into practice the idea which was originated but not fully developed by Nabokov in *The Real Life* and *Pale Fire*, that of a work in which, as Nabokov wrote in a 1961 letter referring to *Pale Fire*, 'the commentary *is* the novel'.[40] In *NC*, the commentary turns into a self-sufficient and self-referential universe because it refers to a missing text. In *LP*, a hybrid of commentary and creative rewriting of Collodi's 1881 classic *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, Manganelli accomplishes Kinbote's ambition of writing a commentary that, rather than functioning as a supplement to another text, morphs into an autonomous work of art. Manganelli oversteps normative critical boundaries and – not unlike Nabokov's eccentric commentary on *Eugene Onegin* – usurps Collodi's authority in order to serve his own purpose (that is, the exposition of his own literary views). Although scholars have already examined the intersection between these texts, I will offer a different angle from which to look at it by assessing how Manganelli made use of the questions raised by

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[37] Donald Barton Johnson, *NABOKV-L*, (2003), https://thenabokovian.org/index.php/node/26159 [accessed 07 November 2020].

[38] Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, pp. 207-08.

[39] Mark Lipovetsky, 'War of discourses: Lolita and the failure of a transcendental project' in *Nabokov: Un'eredità letteraria*, ed. by Alide Cagidemetrio and Daniela Rizzi (Venice: Cafoscarina, 2007), pp. 49-65 (p. 62).

[40] Nabokov, *Selected Letters (1940-1977)*, ed. by Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (San Diego: Harcourt, 1989), p. 332.

Nabokov about the relationship between desire, power and hermeneutics to imagine new strategies to relate with his readers.

4.2 Manganelli reads Nabokov: the critical reviews

The fundamental elements of Nabokov's writing style isolated by Manganelli in his reviews become of relevance for my analysis as these may have fed into Manganelli's articulation of a personal aesthetic centred on a sadomasochistic author-reader relationship. It has been acknowledged by many critics that literary criticism was for Manganelli the way to establish the theoretical and stylistic tenets of his own writing, as apparent especially in *Letteratura come menzogna*: a collection of critical essays as well as his literary manifesto. For example, Andrea Cortellessa has noted that nowhere is Manganelli more transparent about his own aesthetic program and strategies as when he comments on works by others.[41]

Probably, Manganelli first read Nabokov only after 1955, that is after *Lolita* was published in Paris and notoriously greeted with international indignation as much as public acclaim. In his thesis about Manganelli's marginalia on Nabokov's texts, Alberto Sertori concludes that Manganelli must have read Nabokov in the early 1960s based on the conspicuous number of texts from that period held in his library and on a review written by Manganelli in 1962 on *La vera vita di Sebastiano Knight* and *Invito a una decapitazione*.[42] Manganelli then had a 'revival' of interest in the 1980s, as suggested by the fact that half of the annotated copies are from this period. In 1980 and 1983, indeed, Manganelli reviewed Nabokov again (focusing once more on *La vera vita* in 1980 and on *Lezioni di letteratura* and *La distruzione dei tiranni: Tyrants Destroyed* in

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[41] See for example his comment on Manganelli's portrait of Edmund Wilson: 'Manga disegna un ritratto che molto tiene dell'autoritratto'. See his *Libri segreti*, p. 202.

[42] Sertori, *Tra i libri di Giorgio Manganelli: Alcuni postillati di Nabokov: trascrizioni e prima analisi* (unpublished bachelor thesis, University of Pavia, 2015-2016), pp. 4-5. Manganelli, 'La scacchiera di Nabokov', first published in *L'illustrazione italiana* (April 1962), now in Manganelli, *De America*, pp. 100-04.

1983).[43] If there was a peak of interest in the 1960s, this suggests that Nabokov became a point of reference for Manganelli during the long process of literary gestation that would finally lead to his literary 'coming out' (*Hilarotragedia*, 1964) and in any case before the publication of *NC* (1969), the text that seems indeed most influenced by Nabokov.

In his 1962 review, Manganelli writes about *La vera vita di Sebastiano Knight* and *Invito a una decapitazione*:

> Di rado mi è accaduto di gustare con tanta divertita ammirazione un gioco letterario di così maestrevole intelligenza, ed eseguito con quella necessaria, virtuosa soperchieria che mi assicura, in ogni momento, che il prestidigitatore sa benissimo quello che sta facendo, e sa che io lo so, anzi lo esige, perché in qualche modo io faccio parte del gioco, sono un affascinato 'compare'; e insieme suggerisce la possibilità – non più di tanto, come conviene ad un uomo di buon gusto – che non di divertimento si tratti, ma di qualcosa di più o di altro. Ciò accade sempre nei grandi e nobili giochi, futili e araldici, valevoli solo se ne vengono rispettati i nessi arbitrari e rigorosissimi.[44]

There are a number of claims here that deserve attention. The first is the insistence on the idea of literature as 'play', in which the reader has to take part yielding to the author's demands: 'lo esige, perchè in qualche modo io faccio parte del gioco'. In Manganelli's rendition of Nabokov's 'gioco letterario', author and reader hold precise roles. The author wears the mask of the master: his 'necessary presumption' is functional to assuring that he fully controls his text: 'mi assicura, in ogni momento, che il prestidigitatore sa benissimo quello che sta facendo, e sa che io lo so, anzi lo esige'. Thus, not only the author makes clear that he knows what he is doing, but also demands the reader to acknowledge his (the master's) superiority. The reader plays the role of the author's enchanted accomplice ('affascinato compare'). However, Manganelli does not say that this partnership allows the reader to know *what* the author is

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[43] Manganelli, 'Giocando a scacchi con il fantasma', first published in *Corriere della sera* (4 September 1980), now in Manganelli, *De America*, pp. 105-11. Manganelli, 'Che nobile corruttore è il nostro Nabokov', first published in *Corriere della sera* (25 January 1983), now in Manganelli, *De America*, pp. 112-16.

[44] Manganelli, 'La scacchiera', p. 100.

doing. The only thing the reader knows is that the author *does* know it, and that 'arbitrary and rigorous mechanisms' must be obeyed.

Following the same logic, for Manganelli the goal of the reader in *Invito a una decapitazione* is to understand what the rules of its 'cryptic' game are, even if, most likely, there are no rules: 'è piuttosto una criptica partita, celebrata secondo regole segrete [...] al lettore, il compito di scoprire le regole, se ci sono'.[45] Sebastian Knight, the fictional novelist of *The Real Life*, acts quite consistently with Nabokov's behaviour, at least in the assessment of one of his fictional readers: 'Knight seemed to him to be constantly playing some game of his own invention, without telling his partners its rules'.[46] Indeed, Nabokov's behavior, as portrayed by Manganelli (but also by Nabokov himself when writing about his *alter ego* Sebastian), is similar to that of Lewis Carroll's irascible Humpty Dumpty who sees speech acts as skill competitions and makes up new linguistic rules in his conversations with Alice, expecting that she follows the rules even if he did not give her any indication on how to do so. By acting like Humpty-Dumpty, Nabokov claims the status of the 'master':

> 'I don't know what you mean by "glory"', Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't- till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'. 'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument"', Alice objected. 'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master- that's all.'[47]

Manganelli also notes that Nabokov constructs his texts as if these were chess problems: 'la partita di Sebastiano Knight (*Knight* è anche il cavallo nel gioco degli scacchi) dovrà essere ricostruita in astratto, come una serie di mosse

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[45] Manganelli, 'La scacchiera', p. 102.

[46] Nabokov, *The Real Life*, p. 152.

[47] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publication, 1999), p. 57.

riconoscibili solo sulle coordinate della scacchiera'.[48] However, Nabokov makes sure that no one will be able to find the solution of the game, as Manganelli acknowledges in his 1983 review, where he likens Nabokov's texts to 'un appartamento che consente molteplici ingressi e esiti, ma che in nessun momento ci dà la certezza di essere nel punto "giusto"'.[49] Also Maurice Couturier observes that Nabokov makes it impossible for the reader to 'escape the black box of the text'.[50] As a consequence, the scholar suggests that the only way to read Nabokov's text is by 'consent[ing] to obey the law of his text' and 'willingly surrender[ing] to his desires, for they kindle our own with an exceptional new vigour'; while readers have to be willing to acknowledge their defeat, at the same time they are offered the opportunity 'to rise, temporarily at least, to a certain level of artistic excellence', what Manganelli describes as being the author's 'affascinato compare'.[51]

Manganelli differs from Couturier because he seems less inclined to acknowledge the frustration and humiliation involved in reading Nabokov (note that Couturier's last words, after mentioning the 'exceptional new vigour' of his desire, are: 'This was, of course, partly an acknowledgment of defeat').[52] However, as we have already mentioned, Manganelli does acknowledge that that the reader never feels 'where they are supposed to be'. He also confesses that the reader will feel 'perplesso' in his 1962 review.[53] In the lead paragraph of the 1980 review, he betrays his fear of inadequacy by anticipating in a pre-emptive move that his reading performance might end in failure because of 'limitazioni [...] radicalmente negative per un lettore di Nabokov':

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[48] Manganelli, 'La scacchiera', p. 102.

[49] Manganelli, 'Che nobile corruttore', p. 113.

[50] Maurice Couturier, '"Which is to be master" *in Pale Fire*' (1998). Retrieved from *Zembla* website https://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/zembla.htm, [n.p.] [accessed 9 November 2020].

[51] Couturier, '"Which is to be master"'.

[52] Couturier, '"Which is to be master"'.

[53] Manganelli, 'La scacchiera', p. 103.

> No, non so giocare a scacchi; sono goffo con le parole crociate che non siano di insultante povertà ('capitale del Portogallo'); e i rebus sono per me, appunto, dei rebus; aggiungerò – la mia onestà critica è patologica – che non so nulla delle farfalle, che provo nei loro confronti un sentimento di ammirazione, di inferiorità, di irritazione.[54]

The passage is rather symptomatic: Manganelli recognises the 'pathological' quality of the 'honesty' with which he discloses his deficiencies, and reveals the sense of inferiority he feels for butterflies – notoriously beloved of Nabokov – which may work as a masking of the sense of inferiority he feels for Nabokov himself.

Manganelli candidly admits that he is a 'Bad reader' in order to free himself from the anxiety that the task of reading Nabokov inspires: he no longer fears being rebuked for his mistakes, he cannot further disappoint 'the master'. As Eric Naiman shows, this response is a characteristic feature of Nabokovian scholarship: it captures 'the anxiety that many readers of Nabokov experience but few scholars dare to put into print. Have I met the Master's expectations?'[55] In what follows, I will detail the techniques through which Nabokov is able to engage the reader in a sado-masochistic game that generates anxiety, shame, and a pleasurable obsession.

4.3 Nabokov's sado-masochistic strategy

Tom Perrin argues that the reading contract proposed by Nabokov's implied author has the characteristics of the Deleuzian masochistic contract. What Manganelli calls 'criptica partita' and Couturier 'black box' is defined by Perrin as a '*puzzle effect*': 'the text rhetorically implies the possibility of a solution to its problems before breaking that implied promise and failing to provide one'.[56] This is the central mechanism of masochistic pleasure, regulated by contracts that 'formalize and verbalize the behaviour of the partners' and that must be at

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[54] Manganelli, 'Giocando a scacchi', p. 105.

[55] Eric Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 110.

[56] Perrin, 'Book Smarts', p. 123.

the same time 'self-canceling'.[57] The mechanism is recognised also by Daniel Ammann, who shows that, since Nabokov's texts are often constructed as detective novels, the reader is tempted into acting as a detective, but is 'led into an abductional abyss and ends up with no solution at all'.[58] As readers, we are haunted by the idea that the text's puzzle 'might be solved if only we are clever enough', but the more we try to prove that we are clever enough, the more we prove to be gullible readers.[59] The reader feels ridiculed by the implied author, hence the feeling of chastisement and humiliation.

As a possible objection to Perrin's interpretation, one can point out that the masochistic contract in Deleuze's model is dictated by the one occupying the submissive position in the masochistic dyad, whereas Nabokov's implied author clearly puts himself in the dominant position. The Deleuzian masochistic contract seems more apt to describe the authorial strategy in Manganelli's texts, where the author frequently points to his lack of control over the text, and apparently renounces authority by stating that there is no difference between the reader's and author's positions.

One might recognise a sadistic inclination in Nabokov's texts, since the author figure consistently asserts his god-like omnipotence over the world he creates while humiliating the reader. David Rampton, analysing the dynamics between the characters in *Laughter in the Dark* (1932), delineates the specific terms in which Nabokov addresses sadism in this text:

> Elaine Scarry suggests that humiliation and not just pain is the ultimate object of the sadist: the torturer sets out to 'unmake the world' of his victim by making him 'do or say things – and if possible, believe and desire

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[57] Perrin, 'Book Smarts', p. 123.

[58] Daniel Ammann, 'Modernist Mysteries: Cracking the Code', in *Aspects of Modernism: Studies in Honour of Max Nänny*, ed. by Andreas Fischer, Martin Heusser (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1997), pp. 3-18 (p. 12).

[59] Perrin, 'Book Smarts', p. 134.

things, think thoughts – which later he will be unable to cope with having done or thought'.[60]

Elaine Scarry's elaboration seems fitting not only for the exchanges between characters, but also for the 'tortures' that Nabokov imposes on his readers.

The mechanism hinging upon shaming and humiliation is observable for example in *Lolita*. Lionel Trilling notoriously remarked how, while reading about Humbert Humbert's abuses of his goddaughter,

> we find ourselves the more shocked when we realize that, in the course of reading the novel, we have come virtually to condone the violation it presents [...] we have been seduced into conniving in the violation, because we have permitted our fantasy to accept what we know to be revolting.[61]

Thus, readers are made to 'think thoughts' they will feel ashamed of and to recognise these thoughts and desires as part of their own. This can be read as a manifestation of Nabokov's desire to 'mess up' the reader's identity.

In his 1962 review, Manganelli seems aware of this mechanism triggering shame and guilt in the reader. Indeed, he associates reading *Invito a una decapitazione* with having obscene dreams which invoke feelings of shame: the novel is inhabited by 'figure di corposità sconcia, come certe visioni oniriche che ci lasciano compromessi e colpevoli'.[62] '[I]l più incorruttibile dei corruttori', this is the final verdict by Manganelli, in the conclusion of his last review on Nabokov, which emphasises how the author is able to 'soil its readers', while coming out of that unscathed.[63]

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[60] David Rampton, 'Studies in Obsession: *The Defense, The Eye, Laughter in the Dark*, and *Despair*', in *Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 34-56 (p. 47).

[61] Lionel Trilling 'The Last Lover: Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*', *Encounter* (1958), 9-18 (p. 14).

[62] Manganelli, 'La scacchiera', p. 104.

[63] These are the words used by Susan Mizruchi to describe her own experience of reading Lolita in her 'Lolita in History', *American Literature*, 75.3 (2003), 629-52, (p. 651).

Another, more ludic, mechanism implemented in Nabokov's texts consists in making the reader not only think or desire, but also *do* what the author wants. This playful stratagem aimed at directing the reader's conduct is still sadistic in the sense outlined before, since humiliation and unmaking of the victim's world are its ultimate objects. This textual device that demands the reader's performative response can be linked to Irene Kacandes' definition of 'literary performative': if Austin's 'performative' consists in 'utterances in which *to say* something is in fact [...] *to do* that something (e.g. 'I promise', 'I bet')', the postmodernist literary performative is realised when '*to read* the address is to perform what one reads'.[64] Kacandes gives an example taken from John Barth's 'Life-Story' ('You've read me this far, then? Even this far?') where 'one [the reader] is doing what the text accuses one of doing' and actually 'one can't help doing what one is told one is doing, as long as they keep reading'. Kacandes circumscribes the phenomenon to those cases where the reader is addressed by means of the second person pronoun and where statements are 'actualized when read by any reader'.[65] However, the principle at the basis of the 'literary performative' can be adapted to other instances where the reader feels addressed.[66]

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[64] Irene Kacandes, 'Are You in the Text?: The "Literary Performative" in Postmodernist Fiction', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 13 (1993), 139-53 (p. 141), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10462939309366039 [accessed 10 December 2018].

[65] Kacandes, 'Are You in the Text', pp. 139-42. Kacandes calls this principle the 'appellative power': the 'irresistible identification of the second person pronoun' which explains why 'in a crowed place when someone yells 'Hey, you!' everyone turns' (p. 139). It might be noted that perhaps this principle is so powerful because it reflects the same mechanism at the base of subjectivity production, as illustrated by Althusser's notion of 'interpellation'. Judith Butler explains that Althusser's 'interpellation' is a model illustrating 'the discursive production of the social subject': 'In the infamous example that Althusser offers, a policeman hails a passerby on the street, and the passerby turns and recognizes himself as the one who is hailed. In the exchange by which that recognition is proferred and accepted, interpellation—the discursive production of the social subject—takes place'. See her *The Psychic Life*, p. 5.

[66] Kacandes, 'Are You in the Text', p. 139.

Kancandes holds that being addressed in a piece of writing solicits a moment of recognition that provides pleasure ('That's me!'), but also 'embarrassment and irritation' because 'the text seems to see what I am doing'.[67] In *Pale Fire*, there are many instances where the reader is directly addressed through performative utterances – Kinbote gives orders ('see, see now my note...') and makes suggestions, for example on the proper way to read *Pale Fire*: first, we should read the notes *before* reading the poem, then re-read them a second time while studying the poem, and finally a third time to 'complete the picture'.[68] However, by the time we read these recommendations we have already understood that Kinbote is an impostor and an unreliable narrator, therefore we tend to disregard them.[69] Another entity emerges here, whose illocutionary force is more powerful than Kinbote's: an omniscient figure that, like us, knows that Kinbote is a poor, untrustworthy scholar: the implied author. The narrator's 'unreliability' is one of the techniques through which Nabokov creates complicity with the reader, since we share with the implied author a higher understanding of what is going on in the novel, thus we feel that 'we share with Nabokov, for a moment, the incomparable eminence of the view from on high'.[70]

Even if we tend to disregard the moments when Kinbote directly addresses us, we are appealed to by more covert textual moments suggesting, indirectly, that there we could find a key to solve the text's puzzle. Although not directly hailed 'hey, you!', we get the sense of being uniquely addressed, because we could be the 'Good Reader' able to make the right connections and spot the text's hidden meanings. By 'Good Reader', I refer to the way in which Nabokov wants to be read, or more accurately, to be 're-read', which is detailed in the introduction

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[67]   Kacandes, 'Are You in the Text', p. 139.

[68]   Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, p. 25.

[69]   In Austin's terms, those are 'unhappy utterances'.

[70]   Richter, '*Pnin* and "Signs and Symbols"', p. 235. On the notion of 'unreliable narrator' see again Booth: the unreliable narrator allows 'the implied author [to] carr[y] the reader with him in judging the narrator', *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p.158.

to his *Lectures on Literature*: 'Good Readers and Good Writers'.[71] Nabokov's 'interpellation' system works exactly because we feel that our performative response is not actualised 'by any reader' as in Kacandes' definition, but only by the 'Good Reader'. And that the 'Good Reader' might be us.

The notion that the good reader is a 're-reader', as we will see, is especially dear to Manganelli, who reviewed *Lectures on Literature* in 1983 and talked about the 'rilettore' in many of his texts, for example in *Il rumore sottile della prosa*: 'Una civiltà letteraria non è fatta di letture, è fatta di riletture [...] Rileggere è un'esperienza che non ha nulla a che fare con il leggere'.[72] As we will see, being a 'rilettore attento' is the first rule given by Manganelli to direct the reader through *LP*. Incidentally, Eric Naiman notes that the concept of 'Good Reader' already implies an infantilisation and thus an humiliation of the reader, this expression being too close to 'good dog'. [73]

A quite simple but still fairly illustrative example of Nabokov's 'sadistic' drive to induce others into error is the 'case' of the hidden crown jewels, to which Kinbote makes several references in his commentary and that the reader foolishly hopes to find in the 'Index'. Here, the entry for 'crown jewels' directs you to 'Hiding place' which leads to other fruitless page-turnings at the end of which you reach the entry: 'Taynik, Russ., secret place; see Crown Jewels.' Readers are punished with the humiliation of 'not having been clever enough to interpret the text's irony'.[74] However, together with the 'embarrassment and irritation' of a text that not only seems to see what I am doing but sees me while I am doing something dumb, readers also derive the pleasure connected with

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[71] Nabokov, 'Good Readers and Good Writers', in *Lectures on Literature*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, intro. by John Updike (San Diego and New York: Harvest, 1982), pp. 1-8.

[72] Manganelli, *Il rumore sottile della prosa*, p. 69.

[73] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, p. 7. Michael Rodgers also notes how, in a passage of 'How to Be a Good Reader', Nabokov repeatedly references to himself as 'the master' and zoomorphises the reader in a 'panting and happy' creature. See his *Nabokov and Nietzsche: Problems and Perspectives* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 49.

[74] Perrin, 'Book Smarts', p. 132.

'appellation' and 'recognition'. If the condition of 'to-be-looked-at-ness', as Laura Mulvey contends, connotes a position of submission and subordination, Nabokov's sadistic gaze does not prevent the reader from deriving enjoyment.[75]

This might explain why many eminent critics have fallen prey to Nabokov's tricks, a condition often described as a sort of paranoia, for example by Couturier: 'It was this near-paranoia, widespread among Nabokovians, which led me to speak of "the tyranny of the author"' and Richter: 'Nabokov has made it unlikely that we can stop hunting for symbols'.[76] According to William Carroll, Nabokov makes sure that the reader succumbs to the 'referential mania' suffered by the protagonist in *Signs and Symbols*: a condition where 'the patient imagines that everything happening around him is a veiled reference to his personality and existence' (very much like Kinbote in *Pale Fire*).[77] In sum, the more one tries to be a 'Good Reader', the more twisted one's interpretations become. By inveigling the reader to 're-read' and 'close read', Nabokov actually pushes the reader to 'over-read'. Nabokov's texts generate in the audience perverse reading practices.[78]

To recapitulate, Nabokov's technique to engage the reader is twofold: his texts belong to the category identified by Eco that first 'lures its Model reader into an excess of cooperation', then 'punishes him for having overdone it'.[79] Unlike other critics, Manganelli seems less bothered by the (intended) humiliating effects of the second stage of the process. Manganelli addresses, although implicitly, Nabokov's technique to trap the reader. Implicitly because, instead of

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[75] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*, ed. by. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 833-44.

[76] Couturier , "Which is to be master''. Richter, '*Pnin* and "Signs and Symbols"', p. 233.

[77] William Carroll, '*Pnin* and "Signs and Symbols": narrative strategies' in *Anatomy of a Short Story*, pp. 236-50, (p. 245). Nabokov, 'Symbols and Signs', *The New Yorker*, 15 May 1948, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1948/05/15/symbols-and-signs [accessed 13 November 2020].

[78] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, p. 7.

[79] Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 256.

talking about his own 'referential mania', Manganelli identifies the symptoms of the critical perversion in the narrator of *La vera vita*: he notices that 1) V., instead of writing his brother's biography as he is supposed to do, ends up writing an auto-biography and 2) 'dovunque crede di riconoscere una indicazione definitiva, che non può esistere' because 'nessun indizio porta al centro'.[80] Indeed, after a series of misleading clues, at the end of the book, V. is convinced that he has found Sebastian in his death-bed, but in frustrating anti-climax he finds out that he spent the whole night looking after the wrong person and that Sebastian died the day before.

But, if V. clearly suffers from the critical disease, what about the reader (in this case, Manganelli)? The fact that 'nessun indizio porta al centro', that every clue turns out to be a red herring, a trap for credulity, puts the reader in the same position of insecurity and helplessness as the fictional characters. V. functions as a replica of the obsessive reader who is enticed into looking for hidden meanings to solve the mystery of the text, but whose paranoiac pursuit is always doomed to failure. However, Nabokov's tricks seem instead to delight Manganelli. Manganelli does not seem to perceive (or omits) the reader's dismissal from the initial privileged position (being the author's 'compare'). However, my analysis of Manganelli's marginalia on his copies of Nabokov's texts hosted in Pavia suggests a quite different story. As I will show, while Manganelli's approach to *La vera vita* shows an attempt to master – or 'co-author' – the text, his annotations on the margins of *Pale Fire* reveal irritation and frustration at the text's conundrums, showing that he is not immune to the 'downgrading' effects of Nabokov's power strategy.

4.4 Manganelli reads Nabokov: Marginalia

Before starting my exploration of the way in which Manganelli approached the difficult task of being Nabokov's ('Good') reader, it is worth dwelling on Manganelli's reading method. In *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma*, Manganelli

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[80] Manganelli, 'Giocando a scacchi', pp. 107-09.

says that while reading he needs a pencil, which works as a self-protective tool against the aggressive power of literature:

> [Il lettore] per leggere ha bisogno di una matita. [...] La matita è un poverello segnale indicativo, che dice, questo è uno studioso, non è solo un lettore; e in verità egli non è uno studioso, ma ha bisogno di questa difesa, la bacchetta della matita, per poter resistere all'aggressione, al perdimento di sé che egli ben sa imposto dalla letteratura. (*DOS*, 125)

This passage bears on my previous discussion by highlighting how Manganelli shares Nabokov's literary 'agonism'. Manganelli's defence against literature's aggression and the risk of self-loss works by means of a performance that prevents him from looking like *just* a reader. This indicates a self-controlled reading practice. Cristina Faldi depicts Manganelli as more an aggressive than a self-defending reader:

> Manganelli è un lettore invadente: irrompe tra le righe del testo, non accetta l'universo narrativo così come gli viene proposto; ed è anche un lettore impertinente, che, munito dei suoi arnesi da lavoro (le matite), interviene sul testo quasi con prepotenza. [81]

That this was Manganelli's customary reading practice is testified by the numerous copies annotated in Manganelli's library.[82]

Also in the case of *La vera vita*, armed with his pencil, Manganelli dissects the text and submits it to the most accurate scrutiny. Manganelli emulates V's investigation on Sebastian's life and, like a detective, tries to 'cogliere gli indizi' which could solve the text's enigma.[83] He underlines words or passages of particular interest, circles or signals them with a varied selection of crosses, parenthesis and arrows. When a date is missing, he uses textual elements to retrieve it; for example, he infers the date of Sebastian death, 1936. He also

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[81] Cristina Faldi, 'Le matite di Manganelli', *Inchiesta*, 25.110 (1995), 18-21, quoted in Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*, p. 273

[82] For a description of Manganelli's archive in Pavia see Francucci, 'L'archivio Giorgio Manganelli al Fondo Manoscritti dell'Università di Pavia. Le carte, i libri, i quaderni', *Autografo*, 45 (2011), pp. 221-37.

[83] Manganelli, 'Giocando a scacchi', p. 106.

corrects possible misprints: when V. states that he met Sebastian in 1942, Manganelli registers the inconsistency and changes the date into 1932. Manganelli collects and connects data (names of characters and places, dates, recurring motifs): for example, he underlines every occurrence of butterflies in the text, or highlights with an arrow 'Miss Pratt' signalling the page ('65') where the character was first introduced. Links between key words are used to create an internal web of references: Manganelli creates an index at the end of the book, where he lists characters (Bishop, Pratt and Lecerf), titles of works by Sebastian (*Caleidoscopio*, *Successo*, *La Montagna buffa*, *Proprietà perduta* and *Lo Strano asfodelo*), important themes ('scacchiera') and the associated page numbers where the terms can be found in the text.

Manganelli's *modus operandi* is then reflected in his 1962 review, where, as previously mentioned, the text is likened to a chess problem composed by the author that the reader has to re-enact ('la partita [...] dovrà essere ricostruita in astratto, come una serie di mosse riconoscibili solo sulle coordinate della scacchiera). As Carroll notes, to re-enact the composer's moves, the reader/solver 'must become the composer's double, his or her co-author'.[84] This same method is used by Manganelli to assemble his *LP*. It can be argued that the internal web of references in *La vera vita* is a 'parallel book' that Manganelli is not only reading but actually putting together, thus, in a sense, 'writing'.[85] In conclusion, it can be argued that Manganelli not only works as a 'detective' to solve *La vera vita*'s puzzle, but actually appropriates the text and acts as the text's co-author.

Manganelli tries to adopt the same method in reading *Pale Fire*, but this text's intricate network of tautologies, diversions and mirror effects simply does not allow such a reading practice. Here, the most common graphic response is the question mark. Sometimes, Manganelli articulates questions. For example ha asks: 'Why that poem?', referring to the double reference to Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*. He also attempts to draw a connection between Kinbote and

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[84] Carroll, '*Pnin* and "Signs and Symbols", p. 249.

[85] The concept of 'parallel book' will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

the narrator in *My Last Duchess* ('Narra of this one as narra of Brownings?').[86]
Manganelli attempts to give some timid and uncertain answer also next to
Nabokov's 'goethic', where he writes: 'Ghoete Gothic?'.[87] More often,
Manganelli shows his bewilderment with one (sometimes two) question marks,
appearing confused and irritated.

This might be the reason why *Pale Fire* (together with *Ada*) represents the sole
example where Manganelli's intensive engagement with a text by Nabokov did
not precipitate a written response in a critical review. Manganelli does indeed
engage with *Pale Fire*'s game. He does for example signal many moments when
Kinbote gives wildly inappropriate or incongruous opinions, revealing that he
cannot be taken seriously. He solves some of the riddles that Nabokov
disseminates to fool us and waste our hermeneutic energies in trivial exegesis
(for example, Manganelli 'deciphers' the 'mysterious' note sent to Kinbote by a
student: 'You have h . . . . s real bad, chum', i.e. halitosis).[88] In addition, he
falls prey to another strategy disclosed by Naiman: 'Nabokov encourages and
even trains his readers to make 'illicit', seemingly unwarranted, and often
libidinally charged interpretative associations' – a strategy reminiscent of that
spotted by Lionel Trilling. [89] For example, in the scene involving the assassin
Gradus and the tanned fifteen-year-old Gordon, Manganelli underlines all the
changes in Kinbote's description of the swimsuit worn by Gordon: at first the lad
is in 'leopard-spotted loincloth', then 'wreathed about the loins with ivy', then
in 'black bathing trunks' and so on.[90] Manganelli notes the unreliability of
Kinbote as a narrator, but he also notes his obsession for the lad's swimwear.
Manganelli also underlines 'an erection of veined stone' (which is the description
of a mountain range), and words like 'acclivity' and 'penetrating'. Manganelli
signals all the moments where Kinbote's insistence on words related to

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[86] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 194.

[87] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 146.

[88] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 80.

[89] Naiman, *Nabokov , Perversely*, p. 8.

[90] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, pp. 159-60.

masculine genitals expose his homosexuality and by so doing he runs 'the risk – as Naiman put it – of becoming a person that only thinks about *that*'.[91]

However, as noticed before, Manganelli's most frequent marginal mark (with approximately 20 occurrences) is the question mark. The majority of these testify Manganelli's puzzlement over the text's literary allusions, which in many cases hide a trap for the erudite scholar: for example, Manganelli is confused when Kinbote makes reference to 'the famous avenue of all the trees mentioned by Shakespeare'.[92] Manganelli also uses the question mark to register Kinbote's inconsistencies, as exemplified by the suspicious 'when?' that Manganelli affixes next to Kinbote's claim that he had a 'long talk' with Shade's killer.[93] In some cases, Manganelli also openly expresses the feeling that what Kinbote says makes no sense. For example, when Kinbote speculates thus: 'Science tells us, by the way, that the Earth would not merely fall apart, but vanish like a ghost, if Eletricity were suddenly removed from the world', Manganelli annotates: 'makes no sense to say "remove"'.[94] Most of the times, Manganelli does not try to suggest an interpretation and just limits himself to a blunt '?' next to Kinbote's rambling notes (for example when Kinbote mentions a story by Conan Doyle that actually does not exist: 'Case of Reversed Footprints').[95] This suggests another possible interpretation: instead of seeing Manganelli's question mark as a private admission of defeat, we may consider it as the refusal to be 'perverted' by Nabokov's text. Where Nabokov encourages his readers to over-interpret and lose themselves in a referential mania, Manganelli's use of his pencil-wand to sanction the text's incapacity to make sense could have been the only way to keep control over the text, the only possible form of readerly exercise of power.

In conclusion, my exploration of Manganelli's marginalia of Nabokov texts shows that Manganelli, *the reader*, actually looks for meaning in the texts. In *La vera*

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[91] Naiman, *Nabokov , Perversely*, p. 44.

[92] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 76.

[93] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 223.

[94] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 154.

[95] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 65.

vita he acts as a detective and collects all the 'verbal clues' to solve the puzzle, even if there is no solution; in *Pale Fire*, the impossibility to find meaningful connections triggers his readerly discontent. If this aspect of his readerly experience finds no correspondence in his critical reviews it is because for Manganelli, *the writer*, literature has to be meaningless. Nabokov's texts epitomise his idea of literature: what matters is not reaching a meaningful solution, but the game. This is why instead of talking about humiliation and frustration as other critics do, Manganelli is delighted by the text's lack of meaning and reader entrapment. In closing his 1980 review, Manganelli praises Nabokov for discarding the 'low-minded' idea that the author should provide his readers with a 'message' and quotes a famous Nabokovian dictum comparing the socially committed artist to a docile, loyal dog: 'Come tutti i libri di Nabokov, [Lolita] non ha messaggi né idee: "Non sono un cane" aveva scritto una volta "che corre da voi scodinzolando, con una verità in bocca"'.[96]

In this chapter, I have identified the specific sado-masochistic aesthetic features of Nabokov's texts which I argue feature heavily in Manganelli's work. In the following chapters, my focus will no longer be on Manganelli's reaction as a reader of Nabokov, but the impact this experience had in his writings. In chapter 5, I argue that Nabokov's hermeneutic training of 'perverse' readers inspired the performance of critical paranoia in *NC*. Here, the commentator appears as a 'perverse amateur of misshapen or illicit connected words', just like the protagonist of *Vane Sisters*, a short story deemed by Manganelli as 'forse, una delle più belle invenzioni di Nabokov'.[97] The authorial figure in *NC* occupies the role of the perverse, masochist reader that Nabokov designed for his readers. I will examine the implications of this strategic move for the author-reader relationship. In chapter 6, I will instead focus on the 'game' metaphor that Manganelli isolated in Nabokov's work. I will position the way in which Manganelli engages the reader in *LP* alongside the notion of sado-masochistic

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[96]   Manganelli, 'Giocando a scacchi', p. 111.

[97] Nabokov, *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Strories*, trans. by Dmitri Nabokov (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 230. Manganelli, 'Che nobile corruttore', p. 113.

role-play to describe how Manganelli managed to shift from self-referentiality to a more authentic form of relationality.

Chapter 5   The author-reader sadomasochistic relationship in *Nuovo commento*

In what follows, I highlight the distinctive permutations and developments in Manganelli's *oeuvre* of the model of sado-masochistic relations with the reader observed in Nabokov. As we saw in the previous chapter, in Nabokov's sadomasochistic literary games, the author asserts his position as the master, omniscient and god-like, omnipotent over the world of his invention. His novels are based on the author's sadistic drive to induce the readers into error, encouraging them to over-interpret and lose themselves in an hermeneutic mania, thus on a mechanism of shaming and humiliation of the reader. In *Nuovo commento*, Manganelli imagines a literary space where the author puts himself in the humiliated, subordinated position that Nabokov designs for his readers. The author rejects being the master of his speech, denies his phallic position, and wears the mask of the 'perverse reader' lost in an interpretative paranoia.

This is consistent with what emerged in chapter 2 in my discussion on the Moloch tale, where I highlighted Manganelli's tendency to identify the author with a 'sacrificial victim': the author is represented as completely subject to the hegemony of language, which is figured as a barbaric god. A further example of the process of writing being represented as a sacrificial ritual can be found in the blurb of *Sconclusione*, where Manganelli writes that the book was composed after the author's ego had been burnt at the stake: 'messo per iscritto in condizione di umida nebulosità cimmeria, spente le ultime braci del rogo dell'io'.[1] In a 1985 letter to Rebecca West, Manganelli wrote:

> I don't think there is such a thing, an author. Books do happen, quite as dreams do. Impossible to tell in advance what a dream will be, or if we will have any dreams; and of course the dreams we dream are not 'ours'.[2]

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[1]   Manganelli, *Sconclusione* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1976).

[2]   Rebecca West reports these words in her 'Before, Beneath, and Around the Text', p. 285.

By figuring his writings as happening involuntarily as dreams do, Manganelli showcases once more the author's linguistic dispossession. It was precisely the literary avant-garde's challenge to the idea of the speaking subjects as 'owners' and 'master of their speech' that made Julia Kristeva conflate (predominantly male) avant-garde writing with 'feminine' aesthetics, which is characterised by fragmentation, asystematicity, plurality.[3] As Marianne DeKoven explains, for Kristeva, the fact that the avant-garde writers questioned their mastery of language and their phallic position meant the 'eruption into masculine writing of the feminine [...] mode of discourse'.[4] In fact, the male avant-garde practices shared many affinities with notions such as *écriture féminine* (theorised in the 1970s by French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray); notably, both traditions perceived their stylistic practices of fragmentation of the 'phallic' unity of the realist novel as a political act.

Critics like DeKoven and Susan Suleiman agree that the two traditions seem to share a subversive political project, potentially anti-patriarchal.[5] For example, Barthes' notion of text of *jouissance* – that fragmented text that breaks with culture and discomforts the reader, unsettling their sense of identity and coherence – was purposely anti-hierarchical and aimed at challenging the dominant ideologies.[6] However, Suleiman concludes that the two experiences cannot be situated 'in the same camp' because much male avant-garde practice

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[3] Kristeva, 'Oscillation between Power and Denial', p. 165. However, according to Marianne DeKoven, Kristeva's equation actually means that 'écriture féminine *is* the male avant-garde', which has the political effect of 'endorsing the privilege of the male signature', obliterating the many female experimental writers who were really 'too subversive' to receive recognition. Marianne DeKoven, 'Male Signature, Female Aesthetic: The Gender Politics of Experimental Writing' in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, ed. by Ellen G. Friedman, Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 73 and 78.

[4] DeKoven, 'Male Signature', p. 72.

[5] DeKoven, 'Male Signature', p. 78. Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[6] 'The text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father'. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, pp. 14 and 53.

involved an 'eroticisation and aestheticisation of violence, including violence against the female body'.[7]

I am interested in evaluating the implications of Manganelli's rejection of 'being the master of his speech' in terms of the model of relationality that emerges in his texts. My focus on authoriality and author-reader relationality could represent a slightly different perspective from which to look at the model of masculinity invoked by his texts. In particular, I will examine if the author's self-shattering has the potential to deactivate ideas of masculine autonomy and self-sufficiency (what Rebecca Falkoff calls an 'autarchic' model of masculinity).

In what follows, I will explore these themes focusing first on *NC* (1969) and then on *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo* (1977). The separate analysis of the two texts will provide the occasion for highlighting how Manganelli's relationship with the reader changed over time. As Florian Mussgnug notes, there was an evolution in Manganelli's writing starting from the late 1970s moving in the direction of a greater accessibility: 'A partire dalla pubblicazione di *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo* (1977), molti studiosi hanno sottolineato il crescente interesse di Manganelli per le trame narrative e il suo uso di un vocabolario e di una sintassi più accessibili'.[8] In parallel with this shift in readability, we see a shift in Manganelli's elaboration on sado-masochism and on gender issues. *NC* is characterised by an overt verbal violence against the reader and against woman as well as by the split sado-masochistic subjectivity highlighted in chapter 2, which conforms to Freud's definition of 'reflexive masochism', where the ego is split between a sadistic and a masochistic part and 'the object [of violence or power] is given up and replaced by the subject's self'.[9] In Chapter 6, I will show that *LP* mobilises a different model of masochism where the tensions that

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[7] Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 39.

[8] Mussgnug, 'Esercizio, exemplum, testimonianza: i travestimenti del racconto in Giorgio Manganelli', *Bollettino '900 Electronic Journal of '900 Italian Literature*, 1.2 (2005), https://boll900.it/2005-i/W-bol2/Mussgnug/Mussgnugtesto.html [last accessed 15 February 2019].

[9] Freud, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', p. 92.

circulate between self and other are less marked by violence and a new form of collaboration is established between the implied author and reader.

Examining the author-reader relationship in Manganelli, Falkoff has pointed out that Manganelli's absolute submission to the author's death sentence pronounced by Barthes is only apparent. In her view, unlike Barthes, Manganelli does not think that the sacrifice of the author is the precondition for the birth of the reader. In *La letteratura come menzogna*, Manganelli expresses his wish for an audience consisting in already dead or not-yet-born readers.[10] In a way, this betrays the desire to create his own readers and take control over them: if the author is dead, so is the reader. Falkoff concludes that 'Manganelli impedes the birth Barthes celebrates and thus creates [...] an almost necessary critical dependence on the figure of the author'.[11] Expanding upon Falkoff's remarks, I will suggest that only a masochistic model can fully explain the paradox of an author who relinquishes his authorial power albeit only as a strategy to reaffirm his control over the reader. In addition, I will argue that Falkoff overlooks later texts as *LP* where, arguably, Manganelli conceives the author and the reader as interdependent and both taking part in determining the text.

5.1 *Testo*, *commento* and performativity

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *NC* puts into practice Nabokov's idea of a critical commentary as emancipated from its servile, dependent role and achieving the autonomy of a text in its own right. The power struggle between the creative and the critical discourses, each fighting to establish its prominence and incorporate the other discourse, reaches in Manganelli a level of pure abstraction: *NC* is a *commento* on a non-existent *testo*. Finally, after fifty pages or so, the specious commentator admits that there is no text, or rather that the commentary is the only possible textual form:

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[10] 'Scrivere letteratura non è un gesto sociale. Può trovare un pubblico; tuttavia, nella misura in cui è letteratura, esso non ne è che il provvisorio destinatario. Viene creata per lettori imprecisi, nascituri, destinati a non nascere, già nati e morti; anche, lettori impossibili'. Manganelli, *La letteratura come menzogna*, pp. 219-20.

[11] Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 47.

> che, dunque, diciamolo, il commento sia esso stesso testo; ed anzi
> che solo l'esigua zona ove il commento esercita la sua povera autorità
> sia testualmente esistente. (*NC*, 52)

The precondition of *NC* seems to be the idea that the author's words are not self-sufficient but depend on and derive their value from an external source. This precondition is however soon contradicted: given the non-existence of the text commented, paradoxically literary criticism affirms its own self-sufficiency and assumes itself as its own point of origin and value. This inversion is signalled starting from the introduction: the commentator, while mimicking the eloquence of an erudite and meticulous critic, starts with a bizarre 'invocation of the Muse'. This is anomalous as the topos lays down that only the poet participates in divinity and can turn to the Gods to be inspired, whereas the commentator participates in the genius of the poet.[12] Right from the beginning, the commentary ironically ignores hierarchies and usurps prerogatives of other discourses, although this *sui generis* invocation, limited to 'un equivoco, senile tossicolare, ad attrarre l'attenzione di un qualche numen di transito' and 'assestare pacche a qualsivoglia culo, confidando di conseguire le chiappe di una plastica Minerva', ends in failure (*NC*, 10).

The continuity between Manganelli's text and Nabokov's is not merely thematic, but also operates at the structural level. For Manganelli, the 'writing machine' of *NC* is the organization of writing around a central blank: '*Nuovo commento* è nato proprio come un problema tecnico che mi interessava particolarmente: costruire un libro intorno a una "assenza", un "vuoto"'.[13] For Manganelli, the same mechanism underpins *The Real Life*, described almost verbatim in his 1980

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[12] Massimo Fusillo, 'Commentare', in *Il testo letterario: istruzioni per l'uso*, ed. by Mario Lavagetto (Bari: Laterza, 1996), p. 34.

[13] Manganelli, *La penombra mentale*, p. 52.

review: 'il suo [Nabokov's] obiettivo a me sembra quello di costruire un tessuto di parole [...] attorno ad un punto vuoto, una assenza'.[14]

NC also shows striking structural affinities with *Pale Fire*. For example, the idea of Kinbote's notes referring to one another rather than to the poem (sometimes with a certain urgency: 'see, see now my note to lines 993-995') may have inspired the 'Russian dolls' system of notes in *NC*, with its network of 'chiose delle chiose':

> Par pacifico che solo rettamente intendendo le chiose possiamo giungere a interpretare il testo; donde la necessità di chiosare le stesse chiose delle chiose; pertanto graficamente allontanandoci, di altrettanto ci accosteremo al testo; [...] per infinita lontananza conseguendo infinita coincidenza; non ultima delle piacevolezze del presente lavoro. (*NC*, 19)

In addition, the commentator of *NC*, as Sertori notes, shares Kinbote's enthusiasm for digressions, often manifesting in notes that take the form of autonomous literary works.[15] One of Kinbote's notes, for example, turns into a self-contained theatrical piece entitled *The Haunted Barn*. Similarly, in *NC*, three narrative sections are inserted in the commentary, the first and most important of which – 'Il caso del commentatore fortunato' – follows closely the plot of *The Real Life*.

These structural elements point at the priority of the commentary over the text. In addition, they also call attention to the performative nature of the critical practice: the act of interpreting an absent text is pure performance. It should be noted that Manganelli highlights this aspect also in Nabokov's work: in his copy of *La vera vita*, he underlines the final section where V. reveals that he feels like he is performing 'Sebastian's part' on a stage: 'Così – io sono Sebastiano Knight.

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[14] Manganelli, 'Giocando a scacchi', p. 109. Manganelli's comments on *vuoto* and *assenza* warrant a mention of Gustave Flaubert's longing for a book about nothing: 'a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support'. Gustave Flaubert, *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, trans. and ed. by Francis Steegmuller (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), p. 126.

[15] Sertori, *Tra i libri di Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 24 .

Mi sento come se stessi impersonando lui su un palcoscenico illuminato'.[16]
Manganelli also underlines the word 'pantomima' at the end of the novel.[17]

The concept of performance is particularly relevant in contemporary culture, especially in light of analyses such as that of Judith Butler, who highlights the 'performativity' of identities and desires. Adopting Derrida's notions of original, copy and imitation, Butler questioned the priority and originality of the gender binary opposition of heterosexuality. Instead, she proposed that gender and heterosexuality are performative. Only by repeatedly performing the roles assigned by society we come to perceive our identity as a 'deep' essence, an 'original' script that in actual fact – just like *testo* in *NC* and Sebastian in *The Real Life* – is unknowable and unnameable: 'un punto vuoto, una assenza'. In these terms, Manganelli collapses the distinction between original (*testo*) and copy (*commento*). Both are performances, what Manganelli calls 'la recita di scrivere'.[18]

Butler's notion of queering in drag – 'inhabiting the practices of [a norm's] rearticulation' by 'work[ing] through the hyperbolic' – can be applied to *NC*, where Manganelli hyperbolically imitates and disrupts the rules of the literary discourses.[19] Eric Naiman's claim about Nabokov is appropriate also for Manganelli: 'What Butler's drag does by exaggerating and rearticulating the "rules" of gender, Nabokov's novels do with the power dynamics of fiction'. However, according to Naiman, Nabokov's encouragement to perform 'queer' readings of his texts does not imply a subversion of the traditional author-reader power dynamics. Rather, it implies their reaffirmation: 'the only power that interests Nabokov is authorial and aesthetic and this power is *reaffirmed* by queer reading'. Indeed, a queer reading of his texts is authorised and induced by

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[16] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 30, p. 219.

[17] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 30, p. 220.

[18] 'Colui che scrive è convinto in effetti di essere intento a scrivere, mentre è intento alla recita di scrivere'. Manganelli insists repeatedly on the performative nature of writing, and we will see more examples later on. Manganelli, *Il rumore sottile*, p. 15.

[19] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 237.

the author, 'but the interpreter is also placed in a subservient position, for his queer reading is performed with an eye toward authorial approval'.[20] Nabokov experiments with the author's death, but never kills the author.

Here, I will examine the authorial subjectivity articulated in *NC*, gauging it against Nabokov's authorial mastery. I am interested in evaluating if Manganelli's 'queering' of the traditional author-reader power dynamics also meant queering his masculinity. Indeed, in *NC*, the struggle between the reader and the author undergoes a process of gendering that turns it into a struggle between genders, whose categories (just like those of *testo* and *commento*) are manipulated and displaced. Hence the question: was Manganelli's 'perversion' of the norms of literary production and reception joined with the 'perversion' of gender norms? And did this 'perversion' of the norms actually mean their deconstruction? In *NC*, Manganelli challenges literary conventions by suggesting that there is no difference between the author's and reader's functions. For both, the only possible way to approach the text is by yielding to language in ecstatic *jouissance*. At the same time, the author still exercises his power by trapping the reader in a literary labyrinth from which no escape seems possible. Despite the fact that Manganelli's radical critique of identity would draw him close to Butler's positions, I will argue that a 'queer' reading is not fully applicable in *NC*, particularly because in this text Manganelli does not challenge the opposition between genders, nor does he renounce violence against the reader and against woman.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in Nabokov's novels, the characters' relationships thematise sexual perversion and work metafictionally as models of the sado-masochistic exchanges between author and reader. Manganelli's thematisation of sado-masochism differs from Nabokov's as it rests on the relationship between the abstract concepts of *testo* and *commento*, which reiterates Manganelli's particular view of literature's autonomy from the referential world. The absence of characters and plots goes beyond the recognisable neo-avant-garde trend of giving precedence to formal elements. It

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[20] Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely*, pp. 135-37.

is also reflective, as Wladimir Krysinski observes, of Manganelli's peculiar 'Baroque style', understood here in Deleuze's terms: 'The Baroque introduces a new kind of story in which [...] the concept becomes narrative'.[21] Thus, what constitutes the 'story' in *NC* is the abnormal metaphorical expansion of the concepts *testo* and *commento*. As Italo Calvino points out, in *NC* 'sono le metafore a fare la narrazione'.[22]

In *NC*'s figurative system, *testo* and *commento* are systematically turned into gendered entities. In Joan Acker's definition of gendering, to say that an element is gendered means that

> advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine.[23]

Generally, *testo* is coded female, whereas *commento* is coded masculine and the characterisation of the power struggle between the two assumes emphatic erotic overtones. This process of gendering is not limited to the macro elements of the discourse: the text undergoes a process of gendering also at the micro level. For example, Manganelli analyses the presence in the *testo* of a semicolon, divided into the male *punto* ('proiettile seminale') and the female *virgola* ('grembo sleale della virgo virgola'), imagined as two Western movie gunfighters ('ma quale mai sarà il buono?') or two 'eterosessuati disposti all'accoppiamento' (*NC*, 97-98). At other textual moments, the text is coded as male, as when the text is an 'efebo rugoso che ci adesca all'angolo della strada' or is connoted by 'turpi basette' (*NC*, 14-15).

At points when the priority of *testo* over *commento* is acknowledged, and thus its generative function, *testo* signifies maternity and femininity. In these cases,

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[21] Wladimir Krysinski, *Il romanzo e la modernità*, intro. by Francesco Muzzioli (Rome: Armando, 2003), p. 35. Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 127.

[22] Calvino, 'Lettera a Manganelli', p. 149.

[23] Joan Acker, 'Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations' in *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990), 139-58 (p. 146).

the exegetic endeavour is represented by the action of sexual penetration into the text, as shown in the following examples: 'arando le candide pratalia, negro semen inseminarvi grazie a una neologica biro' (where the pen/penis metaphor references the Veronese Riddle, considered the oldest existing document in Italian language); 'casto e gelido punta l'asessuato sesso dell'ingegno a ingravidare del suo morto seme lo sterile e vergine testo' (*NC*, 10).[24]

The association of the text with female traits falls within a more general and, according to Pulce, 'systematic' coincidence of literature and woman in Manganelli.[25] Manganelli reworks the classical homology between literature's rhetorical embellishment and femininity: to access the text, the commentary needs 'virile fervore morale, occhio svelto a svelare senza lascivia dottrinaria le giarrettiere di una artefatta retorica' (*NC*, 10). In classical aesthetic norms, indeed, 'femininity is associated with excessive details, ornamentation' as well as 'fragmentation'.[26] Manganelli draws on the trope of rhetoric as a seductive and dissolute woman brought under control by the virile critical acumen. Since the text is associated with femininity and writing can only stem from the longing to dominate it, it is clear that *NC* mobilises discourses on gender based on the perception of sexual difference and abjection of woman. Just like the woman's abject body 'fascinates desire but must in the interest of self-preservation be repelled', in the same manner the commentator is fascinated by the text but must destroy it in the struggle to become a separate text.[27]

Even as the passages analysed reinforce the binary and oppositional logic of gender, they also subvert it. Indeed, in the sentences above, it can be noted how the figures of sound ironically contradict the content of the commentator's statements. While stating the purpose of avoiding figurative language and its

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[24] 'Boves se pareba/ alba pratalia araba/ et albo versorio teneba/ et negro semen seminaba'. The solution of the riddle is the writer himself who plows white fields (the page) sowing a black seed (black ink).

[25] Graziella Pulce, *Giorgio Manganelli: figure e sistema* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2004), p. 14.

[26] Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 38.

[27] Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, p. 37.

lasciviousness, the commentator binges on an excess of figures of sound, e.g. the figura etymologica 'asessuato sesso' and the alliterative pun 'svelto a svelare'. The repetition of fricatives referring to *commento* (**v**irile **f**er**v**ore, **sv**elto a **sv**elare) and the repetition of the occlusive referring to *testo* (giarre**tt**iere ar**t**efa**tt**a re**t**orica) stress even more the inversion of gender stereotypes: the 'virility' of the 'commentary' is characterised with soft sounds and the 'femininity' of the 'text' with hard ones. As Giuditta Isotti Rosowsky notes, the rhetorical opulence signals that the hermeneutical practice is far from being coldly – and, following the gendered terms set by Manganelli, manfully – immune to drives and emotions.[28] It is in fact subject to these just as, or even more than, fiction. There is no difference between text and meta-text, which also means that the commentary, while being posed as masculine, shows the feminine qualities ascribed to the text.

Commento originates from a love-hatred ambivalence toward *testo*. Similarly to Nabokov, Manganelli emphatically sexualises the text/commentary power struggle: the commentator is fascinated by the 'enchroaching superiority' of the text and is fetishistically attracted by every word of it (*NC*, 49). The commentator takes the text as the object for the direction of sexual drive: for example, he declares that it would be a great pleasure to have dinner with *testo*:

> la soverchiante superiorità del testo ne è anche – come negarlo – il fascino [...] certo tutti, o molti di noi, vorremmo una volta nella vita ci venisse accordato il piacere di cenare con lui, prendere quantomeno un frettoloso caffè, sorbire un liquore di marca. (*NC*, 14)

At the same time, the text's priority over the commentary, its 'maternità sarcastica', also elicits hatred:

> il fastidio, poi la noia, e il disgusto, donde il ribrezzo, infine l'odio, l'astemio, ebro odio del testo, [...] sollecitano ad escogitare l'arguta demistificazione, l'insolente emendamento, la smentita capziosa, l'impudente lectio difficilior. (*NC*, 10)

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[28] Isotti Giuditta Rosowsky, *Giorgio Manganelli, una scrittura dell'eccesso* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2007), p. 69.

As seen in the previous chapter, in a passage of *Pale Fire* underlined by Manganelli, the desire to master the text is likened to sexual abuse. The metaphor of rape to describe the nature of the text/commentary relationship is also present in *NC*. The superiority of the text triggers the sadistic fantasy of destruction: after having infected his member in the frequentation of prostitutes, the anonymous commentator plans to rape and poison the text, turning sex into murder:

> come non straziare d'ira questo testodicazzo [...] come non progettare imboscate, [...] frequentare arditamente le più impestate e affrante puttane, trapiantare nel membro parlamentari repubbliche di spirocheti [...] aggavignare quindi il testo ostinato e casto, stuprarlo di lebbra [...] fare la guardia al decesso del suo signorile distacco, malaugurante benevolenza, maternità sarcastica?'. (*NC*, 14)[29]

In the passages above, it can be observed that Manganelli shares Nabokov's insistence on linking textual interpretation with violence and sexuality. Alfredo Giuliani, already in 1967, recognised these mechanisms in Manganelli's reading and critical practices, described as 'piaceri linguisticamente sadomasochistici'. According to Giuliani, Manganelli's critical essays collected in *La letteratura come menzogna* hinge upon the author's 'desiderio per la scrittura altrui', a desire that manifests in the wish to kill and then piously venerate the other's *scrittura*. Manganelli's critical readings are 'ritual murders' followed by the contemplation with 'perversa umiltà' of the mechanisms of writing:

> Le ghiotte letture di Manganelli sono omicidi rituali compiuti con l'iracondia gioiosa di chi si compiace di [...] contemplare con 'perversa umiltà' i meccanismi orrendamente indifferenti, esatti, sadicamente inutili della scrittura. [30]

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[29] This is reminiscent of Charles Baudelaire's *A celle qui est trop gaie* in *Les Fleurs du mal*, where 'the poet recounts his desire to create a new hole in his mistress's abdomen [...] in which the substance ejected is not life-giving sperm, but fatal poison'. Lisa Drowning, 'Erotic Asphyxiation', in *Encyclopaedia of Erotic Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 1286.

[30] Alfredo Giuliani, 'Le cerimonie sadiche della critica', originally published in *Quindici*, 1 (1967) now in *Quindici: una rivista e il Sessantotto*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini, Andrea Cortellessa (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2008), pp. 11-14.

Here, Giuliani is quoting Manganelli himself, who writes in *La letteratura come menzogna*: 'Lavorare alla letteratura è un atto di perversa umilità', and continues with his customary description of the writer's condition as that of being 'trapped', 'blinded and burned' by words, 'chosen by language'.[31] While Manganelli emphasises the passive condition of the writer, Giuliani's analysis detects the mix of destructive and submissive impulses in Manganelli's critical essays.

Given that, in contrast with the essays in *La letteratura come menzogna*, in *NC* the text is missing, it is possible to hypothesise that the destructive drive manifests in the verbal violence against a part of the self (the 'authorial' self) that is othered and made female. Despite the fact that *NC* exaggerates and re-combines gender stereotypes, we can observe that destruction and ravishing is still metaphorically directed toward the female body or a feminised part of the self.

5.2 The 'referential mania' and the reader as voyeur

In the following section, I will show how Manganelli engages the reader by offering the spectacle of his exhibitionistic enjoyment of self-debasement and submission to language. *NC* is the autobiographical lament of a 'narra-commentator' – the epithet given by Manganelli to Kinbote in his annotations on the margins of *Pale Fire* – indulging in the 'perverse' practice of scrutiny, classification and annotation of every aspect of reality:[32]

> [s]e, in omaggio alla allucinata mitezza del suo [del commentatore] sguardo, rinuncerete a percuoterlo, anche a zittirlo, procederà a catalogare gli affannosi fonemi, le grafie ectoplastiche, i fugaci ideogrammi, enuncerà le sillabe impronunciabili che percorrono instancabili gli ignari limina coeli; e dirà il mondo tempestoso, catastrofico abitacolo di scheggiate grammatiche. (*NC,* 48)

As already mentioned, Nabokov's description of the protagonist of Vane Sisters – 'perverse amateur of misshapen or illicit connected words' – is applicable to the

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[31] Manganelli, *La letteratura come menzogna*, p. 220.

[32] F. MANG. Ingl. Nabokov 20, p. 152.

commentator's figure in *NC*, who describes himself as 'uno schiavo, un feticista di ogni più umile effato', seduced and excited by any 'lettera dubbia' or 'interpunzione inquietante' (*NC*, 48 and 52).[33] Indeed, as we have seen, an entire section of *NC* is devoted to the alarming presence in the *testo* of a semicolon.

The three *exempla* – first-person narratives inserted in the commentary to illustrate the lives of exemplary commentators – can be seen as three variations on Nabokov's theme of the 'referential mania': a condition in which, just like the protagonist of the text 'Symbols and Signs', 'the patient imagines that everything happening around him is a veiled reference to his personality and existence'.[34] The first *exemplum*, 'Il caso del commentatore fortunato', closely follows Nabokov's *The Real Life*, both Manganelli's 'lucky commentator' and Nabokov's V. identifying with the object of their critical commentary – a dead artist – to the point of superimposing their identity on his. Also the third *exemplum* shows an affinity with the protagonist of 'Symbols and Signs', who reads every natural phenomenon as transmitting a message regarding him: 'Everything is a cipher and of everything he is the theme'.[35] Similarly, the 'cledonista' – cledonism was 'a kind of divination, in use among ancients' – intercepts in every natural manifestation a grievous sign assaulting him: 'i significati mi aggredirono [...] Presero a esudare dai sassi, germinarono dal suolo, piovvero dalle nubi' (*NC*, 139).[36] He realises that his own body is a sign

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[33] Nabokov, *Tyrants Destroyed*, p. 230.

[34] Nabokov, 'Symbols and Signs', *The New Yorker*, 15 May 1948. Manganelli explains that the three 'narrative' sections of *NC* were composed following the musical principle of 'variation on a theme': 'La variazione è […] il riassunto della cosa suprema che la musica può fare e che la letteratura non può fare. […] Nel *Nuovo commento* ci sono tre pezzi che […] secondo me dovevano essere intesi in questo modo'. In Paolo Terni, *Giorgio Manganelli, ascoltatore maniacale* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2001), pp. 63-64.

[35] Nabokov, 'Symbols and Signs'.

[36] 'Cledonism' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Or a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Miscellaneous Literature* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1810), p. 186, https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=j_xMAQAAMAAJ [last accessed 11 April 2019].

and, while reading his nails as Tarot cards, he awaits the lightining in whose shape he will foresee the form of his death.

The three narratives, in turn, are actually built upon Manganelli's self-portrait. Rosowsky has demonstrated indeed that 'l'autoritratto [...] è il disegno tematico sul quale si svilupperanno le variazioni narrative', showing that the *exempla* return to the major themes of the self-portrait found at the beginning of *NC*.[37] Here the anonymous commentator describes his 'vocazione commentatoria' starting from when he was a 'bespectacled spermatozoon' till the present moment when he gets ready to 'sostenere la flaccida vecchiaia ad un paracarro orinato dai cani' (*NC*, 13). The calling to be a commentator stems from his ineptitude: unworthy of a central position, he is destined to be at the margins of the *testo*: 'Alloggiati [...] alla periferia di questo luogo ostico e fastoso [...] inetti a farci guide compite' (*NC*, 13). It is no coincidence that this self-defamatory portrayal is offered as an answer to the hypothetical suspicious reader's curiosity as to why this commentator has been chosen and from where his 'authority' comes: '[s]e taluno, losco o pietoso indagatore, volesse chiedercene notizia, risponderemmo, esser stati trascelti, [...] per la miope concentrazione dell'occhio, la tattile pazienza delle dita classificatorie, il gusto torpido dell'ozio' (*NC*, 13). It is worth noting that Nigro similarly extrapolates the thematic constant of the self-portrait in Manganelli's work, and shows how this relies on the Italian literary tradition. Manganelli's self-portrait in *Hilarotragoedia*: 'avverso al mondo, avversi a me gli eventi', and its variations in *Cassio governa a Cipro* (1977): 'pericoloso a sé e agli altri' and in *La Notte*: 'invisibile a chiunque, invisibile a me stesso', are built upon Manzoni's 'poco noto a altrui, poco a me stesso' and Foscolo's 'ingrato agli altri, a me stesso oneroso'.[38]

Returning to *NC*, we can observe that the common trait between the commentators of the three *exempla* and Manganelli's self-portrait spotted by

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[37] Rosowsky, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 65.

[38] Nigro, afterword to Manganelli, *La notte*, p. 236.

Rosowsky consists in their self-deprecating tone.[39] For example, the *profeta*, consulted about the mysterious note (2) for his rare competence in future matters, opens his letter with a self-victimising outburst. He is a 'sventurata creatura' denouncing his 'penosa condizione': being prophets 'null'altro significa che soffrire di analfabetismo temporale' (*NC*, 108-09). The two other illustrious commentators express their desire to strip themselves of their names and to abstain from talking about the self. For example, the lucky commentator's exemplum begins thus:

> Non principierò, come usa nelle narcisistiche autobiografie, col dichiarare il mio nome [...] non già per eludere l'indiscreto lettore, vizioso voyeur – chi più vizioso di un commentatore – ma per denudarmi, per quel che è possibile, di me stesso [...] spegnere finalmente l'inveterata brama di commentarmi. (*NC,* 56)

The cledonist, instead of renouncing his name and auto-biography, declares he will abstain from telling his own horoscope, with a variation which is more appropriate for a narrative focused on the occult art of interpreting signs and omens. The outsets of these short narratives parallel the declarations of self-renunciation made by V. in *The Real Life*. While the narrator is writing a full-fledged auto-biographical account of his quest for the dead brother, he states that he is not writing about his own life:

> As the reader may have noticed, I have tried to put into this book as little of my own self as possible. I have tried not to allude (though a hint now and then might have made the background of my research somewhat clearer) to the circumstances of my life.[40]

In each case above, by obsessively declaring the will to abstain from talking about himself, the first-person narrator ends up obsessively talking about

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[39] The same occurs in *H*, where Mussgnug spots a 'curiosa coincidenza' between the protagonist of the exemplum 'Testimonianza di un giovane solitario' and the author of the treatise: both declare their repulsion for 'le nasali lamentazioni autobiografiche'. Mussgnug concludes that the treatise itself is to be considered 'uno sfogo autobiografico'. Mussgnug, 'Esercizio, exemplum, testimonianza'.

[40] Nabokov, *The Real Life*, p. 117.

himself. Commenting on this, Giorgio Biferali offers an insightful neologism for Manganelli's behaviour- 'negocentrismo'.[41] Also Andrea Gialloreto notes how in Manganelli '[l]e dotte e lambiccate circonlocuzioni, l'erudizione pedantesca e una sintassi sovraeccitata convergono [...] verso il punto di mira consueto: un furore autodenigratorio'.[42] So the central empty spot of *NC*, the point of origin as well as 'punto di mira' of writing, is the subject, repeatedly displayed in its emptiness and negativity:

> ciò che distingue il commentatore è appunto la sua esasperata pochezza [...] isterico e chiassoso esibitore della sua stessa inaudita miseria intellettuale e perfetta inadeguatezza. Insistiamo sulla perfezione della sua negatività. (*NC*, 27)[43]

The commentator loudly exhibits his 'exasperated lack', 'unprecedented intellectual misery and perfect deficiency', but is also keen to point out that his negativity is *perfect*.

As a 'chiassoso esibitore della sua stessa inaudita miseria', the commentator fits Deleuze's theory that the demonstrative quality – 'the particular way in which the masochist exhibits his suffering, embarrassment and humiliation' – is an indispensable feature of masochism.[44] This notion was derived from Theodor Reik:

> [I]n no case of masochism can the fact be overlooked that the suffering, discomfort, humiliation, disgrace are being shown and so to

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[41] Biferali, *Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 46.

[42] Andrea Gialloreto, '"Retore delle tenebre e del fuoco": spazi metaforici e immagini allegoriche in *Amore* di Giorgio Manganelli', in *La metafora da Leopardi ai contemporanei*, ed. by Antonella Del Gatto: *Studi Medievali e Moderni*, *Atti di convegni internazionali*, 20.1 (2016), pp. 255-70 (p. 262).

[43] The perfection of the commentator's identification with the abject is reached when, similarly to the subject in *Dall'inferno*, the commentator equals himself with excrements, as in the following example: 'ci si consideri dunque indegni, clandestini fecalomi, smarriti per le intricate entragne della Geschichte' (p. 12).

[44] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 75.

speak put on display. [...O]ne feels induced to assume a constant connection between masochism and exhibitionism.[45]

Although what is shown about the self is its 'humiliation' and 'disgrace', it is Reik's contention that this results in a victory of the ego. Indeed, as commented before, this 'negative narcissism' inevitably turns into a performance that 'individuates the self it seeks to deny'.[46]

The demonstrative feature of masochism also means that 'gaze comes dramatically into play', because of the need to create a spectator.[47] I closed the previous chapter with the question: what is the role of the reader in Manganelli's texts? A first answer could be that Manganelli reverses the scopic economy employed in Nabokov's novel and installs the reader in the viewer's position. Manganelli explicitly signals this by repeatedly addressing the reader as 'vizioso voyeur' (*NC*, 56): the commentator suggests the proper way in which the reader should respond to the text, that is, by developing an insatiable interest in the commentator himself:

> Il lettore che, racconsolato dalla relativa ma non reticente chiarezza di queste ultime annotazioni, abbia cominciato a distendersi [...] non potrà certamente – è sì gran pettegolo! – non rinuncerà – il ghiotto auscultatore di lascive melodie! – non abdicherà – il voyeur delle ambagi genitali dei lusinghevoli canterini! – non potrà non porre una qualche domanda, come che sia generica, da gentiluomo di gran classe qual è, sul Commentatore. (*NC*, 46)

As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, Nabokov's strategy includes the use of the 'literary perfomative', a device aimed at directing the reader's conduct by exploiting the 'appellative power'. This solicits in the reader a moment of recognition connected to the feeling of being seen by the text. In particular, in Nabokov, the texts seems to subject the reader to a controlling gaze in the

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[45] Theodor Riek, *Masochism in Modern Man*, p.72.

[46] For Butler, this explains the pleasure derived from the performance of self-renunciation. See her *The Psychich Life*, p. 49.

[47] According to Silverman, the need for a spectator 'runs counter the notion that moral masochism is an entirely self-contained system' and represents one of the ways in which 'masochism opens to the world on which it ostensibly forecloses'. See her *Male Subjectivity*, p. 198.

moment when the reader is being humiliated. In Manganelli, the opposite occurs: the writer displays himself in humiliation while the reader is the bearer of the look. This becomes even more evident in *Discorso dell'ombra e dello stemma*, where Manganelli plays more explicitly with the reader's gaze and voyeuristic desire 'to see and make sure of the private and the forbidden'.[48] It is worth looking at this briefly to appreciate how in Manganelli's texts the objectifying gaze observed in Nabokov is turned on the author.

In *DOS*, Manganelli lets us access the writer's *stanzino* and thus enter the *luogo di lavoro*, where the making of the text takes place. The desk of the writer stands out almost materially in front of us, with the description of the books piled in a scenographic (or symptomatic) disorder – 'messi a quel modo, i libri sulla scrivania fanno molto sintomo' (*DOS*, 49). In the collection of essays *Il rumore sottile della prosa*, Manganelli describes his own desk in similar terms while explaining how, when the writing ceremony starts, his desk turns into a theatrical stage:

> Sto scrivendo il testo che a qualcuno accadrà di leggere; e mi accorgo che questo mio scrivere non è, propriamente, scrivere, ma eseguire gesti e movimenti, variamente ritmati, in uno spazio delimitato; questo spazio poi dovrebbe, anzi lessicalmente è la mia scrivania, immersa nel consueto spaurito disordine, in una caotica vessazione; ma sarà bene che io mi renda conto che non tanto di scrivania si tratta, ma di palcoscenico.[49]

This and other elements suggest that, also in *DOS*, the figure of the writer has an autobiographical basis. As Federico Francucci remarks: 'Questo "io" non si nomina mai, tuttavia non è difficile riconoscere le sensibili analogie che lo avvicinano al signor Giorgio Manganelli [...]. Si può dire senza timori che il *Discorso* sia il libro in cui si vede meglio, più in dettaglio, l'esistenza di Manganelli'.[50]

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[48] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 835.

[49] Manganelli, *Il rumore sottile*, p. 15.

[50] Federico Francucci, 'Manganelli e la sua ombra' in *Alfabeta2* (2017), https://www.academia.edu/34723665/Recensione_a_Giorgio_Manganelli_Discorso_dellombra_e_dello_stemma_Alfabeta2_23-9-2017 [last access 19 March 2019].

Here, more than in other works, we gain access to all the tics and habits of 'Manga', both as a writer and as a reader: the 'scrittorelettore' in Manganelli's words (reminiscent of the 'Narra-commentator' coined for Kinbote). The one we see struggling with his old typewriter is Manganelli himself, as well as the one making excuses – 'Non posso. Sto studiando il tibetano' – to avoid budding writers asking for suggestions (*DOS*, 49). The description of the reader is another self-portrait: 'sdraiato, goffamente impanato di abiti trasandati abiti tristemente casalinghi, spettinato, sudaticcio', he has a physical, carnal relation with his books:

> il lettore dà molta importanza al modo di toccare con i polpastrelli il libro [...] e non vuole assolutamente rinunciare al rapporto intimo, carnale, con il libraccio che ha in mano. [...] egli ha, per il libro, un rapporto oscuramente affettivo; anche estetico; soprattutto fisico; è grato alla edizione economica che, con la sua carta rozza e il prezzo modico, gli consente di essere sciatto e villano, come si può essere con un partner usato e abusato. (*DOS*, 123-24)

In the excerpt above, we might note the recurrence of the simile comparing the relationship with the text to the one with an 'used and abused' sexual partner.

The reader is placed in the position of observing every detail of Manganelli's intimate relationship with the text: as we have seen in the previous chapter, Manganelli minutely describes here his reading method, which requires the equipment of sharpened pencils to break in the text and leave his marks, while non-satisfactory dull or short pencils are thrown away: 'la matita che si fa tonda di punta e si logora e fa segno piatto e largo, questa matita considera sleale, ostile [...] e l'ha in ira [...] La matita troppo corta non l'ama, la sospetta vittimistica e la butta'. As shown in the previous chapter, this reading method functions as a defence against literature's aggression: 'ha bisogno di questa difesa, la bacchetta della matita, per poter resistere all'aggressione, al perdimento di sé che egli ben sa imposto dalla letteratura' (*DOS*, 125).

Manganelli also plays with the reader's desire to see the writer at work. Indeed, the reader also testifies to the process of writing, by accessing the place of origin of the text like a child witnessing the primal scene. This illusion is promoted through various techniques that simulate synchronicity between the act of reading and the act of writing, a sort of 'live' effect. The optical illusion

is that the rite of writing is being performed in front of us: the writer writes as the reader reads:

> I lunghi millenni – oggi è un giorno morbidamente invernale, ornato dalle tenere gramaglie di una luce nordica – in cui – questa luce non mi consola ma palesemente cerca di farlo, e questo mi interisce e intenerisce – non esisté letteratura – il cielo ha un sapore di sconfitta che mi esorta a rispettarlo – furono gli anni della follia inutile.
> (*DOS*, 37)

As Mussgnug notes, 'Manganelli's narrative oscillates between two different levels of desciption', drawing attention to what seems to be the authentic moment of writing.[51] Not only do we look out of the *stanzino*'s window to check the weather, we are also interrupted by sudden private phone calls received by the writer, whose content is then grafted onto the previous train of thoughts, contributing to determine the 'accadimento' of writing.[52] Sometimes, the writer asks us to wait because he has to go and look for a quotation in some book.[53] The empirical author is more tangible than ever, and yet, we are warned, this is only a performance: the theatricality is emphasised when chapter 7 ends with 'Grazie. Grazie. Grazie', which is only a prelude to the last chapter's final applauses and the last 'Grazie' to the public while curtains fall (*DOS*, 49 and 169).

The authorial desire to be watched while writing is an expression of the subject's desire to be objectified and 'to imagine himself as the object of the Other's desire'.[54] One might note that since writing is depicted by Manganelli as a 'supplizio', the fantasy of 'being watched while I write' translates the masochist's fantasy of 'being watched while I suffer'. Indeed, in the case of *NC*,

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[51] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts*, p. 177.

[52] '[D]ue telefonate mi hanno interrotto'; 'credevo che questo capitoletto fosse finito, ma una telefonata casuale lo fa ripartire', *DOS*. 46 and 53.

[53] 'Se aspettate un momento, vado a prenderlo per trascriverlo', *DOS*, 95.

[54] Simon Gaunt, 'Love's Martyrdom and the Ethical Subject' in *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 33.

we watch the narra-commentator caught in the pleasurable affliction he derives from his hermeneutical obsession. In contrast with the patterns highlighted in Nabokov, in Manganelli, the 'scrittorelettore' connotes to-be-looked-at-ness and objectification, bearing the burden of characteristics that, according to the principles of patriarchy, should be displaced onto the female.[55]

5.3 Illegibility and readerly masochism

In *NC*, the speaking subject's self-display in humiliation and passive role in the system of looks coexists with verbal aggressiveness. The text seems thus to produce a sado-masochistic subjectivity that, similarly to the subject in *Un libro*, is articulated in 'a passive and humiliated self and an active and violent self'.[56] As Susan Suleiman has noted, the aggressive posture is a fundamental element of the avant-garde. Aggressiveness is indeed already 'inscribed in the military connotations of the term: the avant-garde is the most daring, most fearless group within a fighting force'.[57] Suleiman links this logic of rupture and violence to sadism.[58] According to Suleiman, in writers associated with the *nouveau roman* and *Tel Quel* and Americans of first wave postmodernist fiction, assault against readers takes the form of an assault against their 'sense-making ability': the hallmark of this fiction is that it 'defies, aggressively and provocatively, the traditional criteria of narrative intelligibility'.[59]

Although Manganelli has always maintained a marginal position inside Gruppo 63, stating that his literary output is classifiable as rear-guard rather than avant-garde, in this phase of his literary career he shares with his group fellows an

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[55] Laura Mulvey has famously argued in her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' that the female figure connotes 'to-be-looked-at-ness', while the active watcher of an objectified other is male, as 'the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification'. See 'Visual Pleasure', pp. 837-38.

[56] Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 185.

[57] Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 33.

[58] See especially her chapter 'Reading Robbe-Grillet: Sadism and Text in *Projet pour une révolution à New York*', pp. 51-71.

[59] Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 36.

aggressive posture against the reader, as well as against woman. It has to be noted that although linguistic experimentalism and inaccessibility was a common feature in all Gruppo 63 artists, Manganelli represents an extreme case. As Borelli states, '[s]iamo qui al limite massimo di intransitività (intransitabilità) espresso dalla teoria anti-romanzesca del Gruppo'.[60] This 'impracticability' of the text also means an extremely aggressive posture towards the reader.

This means that despite the fact that the author is placed in a submissive and passive position, *NC* does not allow the reader to assume total control over the text. In keeping with my previous chapter, where I suggested that Manganelli's relationship with the reader should be read against the backdrop of the challenges to the literary foundations posed between the 1960s and the 1970s and the related changes in the hierarchy of author-reader dynamics, I read Manganelli's elusive writing as a technique to limit the reader's power. The text's impracticability functions as a shield against the arbitrariness of the reader's interpretation and represents a response to the anxieties regarding reception.[61]

By frustrating the reader's expectations and by refusing to give immediate pleasure, Manganelli suggests that *NC* is 'readable' only by embracing its fragmentariness, surrendering to language in a sort of masochistic bliss. In this sense, Manganelli's text conforms to the paradigm of Barthes' text of *jouissance*. With this notion, Barthes theorises, as Suleiman explains:

> a kind of reader who makes no attempt to 'make sense' of what he reads – whose ecstasy (*jouissance*) comes, in fact, precisely from his having abandoned the attempt to make sense or to create order, from letting himself go, rudderless.[62]

This is confirmed by the kind of critical response that Manganelli's texts still continue to elicit: in a recent account of Manganelli's work, Micol Argento

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[60] Borelli, *Prose dal dissesto*, p. 42.

[61] On Manganelli's anxiety of reception see Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts*, pp. 168-80.

[62] Suleiman, 'The Question of Readability in Avant-Garde Fiction', *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, 6.1 (1981), 17-35 (p. 23).

depicts the experience of reading Manganelli by making an explicit reference to the title of Barthes' text and by adopting terms such as 'self-loss' ('compiacendosi di perdersi nel gioco delle parole'), 'surrender' and 'abject dependency': 'resa ad una abietta dipendenza (il piacere del testo)'.[63]

As anticipated in chapter 1, the monstrously long sentences of *NC*, refusing to reach either an end or a single meaning, seem to be governed by the essential formal trait of the masochistic aesthetic identified by Deleuze: the suspense factor. For this reason, the tensions produced by text can be linked to a sado-masochistic sexual game that impedes the attainment of a liberating end, an orgasmic release of tension. Incidentally, Alberto Moravia and Manganelli in their literary controversy on illegibility posed the question in these figural terms, connecting unreadability with an anorgasmic sexual intercourse between the reader and the writer.

In his essay 'Illeggibilità e potere', Moravia exposed the fact that beyond the neo-avant-garde's unreadable texts rested an exercise of power over readers comparable to what Latin represented for plebs.[64] As Falkoff notes: 'The most important aspect of the exchange between Moravia and Manganelli, however, is the way in which legibility and illegibility are made to participate in a gendering of reader, writer, and text'.[65] Indeed, for Moravia illegible authors are like women unaware of orgasm: 'come certe donne che non hanno ancora incontrato l'uomo capace di procurare loro l'orgasmo e credono in buona fede che l'amore sia un rapporto puramente meccanico' and 'non si rendono conto che, come si dice, manca il meglio'.[66] Falkoff notes that the simile is a reversal of the traditional metaphor of the active male writer and passive female reader, however it is motivated by the unoriginal move of 'taunting an opponent by feminizing him'.[67] Manganelli accepts the gendering terms set by Moravia and

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[63] Argento, *Giorgio Manganelli*, pp. 44-46.

[64] Alberto Moravia, 'Illeggibilità e potere', *Nuovi argomenti*, 7.8 (1967), 3-12.

[65] Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 50.

[66] Moravia, 'Illeggibilità e potere', p. 11.

[67] Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 50.

has only one objection: orgasm is overrated: 'non sarà sfuggita la bella similitudine della donna ignara di orgasmo, sebbene a mio avviso il Moravia un poco sopravvaluti l'importanza filosofica e pedagogica di un buon coito'.[68] Although this comment is evidently ironic, we might take at face value the image of writing as a feminine sexual experience not teleologically oriented towards orgasm, an image indicative of the kind of sexual pleasure that in Manganelli's mind is associated with literary practice.

As Mussgnug demonstrates, the specific feature that makes *NC* an 'illegible' text is its 'paradoxical surplus of signification'.[69] The image of the 'black hole', used by Manganelli in referring to his text *Centuria*, can illustrate this form of obscurity:

> un po' come i 'buchi neri', in cui la massa è così concentrata che niente può uscirne e niente può passarci attraverso. Ecco: credo di aver cercato di costruire [...] una massa in qualche modo intransitabile, tale comunque da rendere il testo, se non proprio oscuro, senz'altro profondamente ambiguo, per l'autore ancor prima che per il lettore.[70]

The surplus of signification in *NC* is caused by the fact that the commentary attempts to leave no aspect of the 'text' uncommented: 'il commento accoglieva tutto, con divina indifferenza: difetti di pronunzia, epidemie di influenza, morti violente, rumorosi spettacoli di zingari, fole senili' (*NC,* 61). As we have seen, in *NC*'s *mise-en-scène*, the author performs the role of a commentator affected by a critical paranoia, which translates, as Mussgnug shows, into a mode of writing that ignores the notions of relevance and proportion on which linguistic exchanges are based: 'to subvert these boundaries by attempting to say everything – by leaving no aspect of the discourse undetermined – means to engage in nonsense'.[71]

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[68] Manganelli, 'La letteratura come mafia', in *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2008), pp. 206-10 (p. 208).

[69] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 143.

[70] Manganelli, *La penombra mentale*, p. 46.

[71] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 146.

Manganelli caricatures the rigorous and well-ordered formulations of academic treatises. However, as the reader is informed by Manganelli on the cover flap of *NC*'s first edition, the text only feigns to collaborate with the reader. The companionship between reader and author is associated with the company enjoyed by dead bodies whose destiny is to rest next to each other in their graves: 'i segni si dispongono in bell'ordine, ma [...] la collaborazione sintattica non è che una frode, come la compagnevole vicinanza dei sepolcri' (*NC,* 144). Indeed, as Mariarosa Bricchi observes, syntax is reduced to the role of a scaffolding for the mechanism of 'seriazione nominale': Manganelli writes by filling all the arguments a word's valency can attract.[72] The text unfolds modulated by enumerations and series which, according to Manganelli, make sense as much as 'il frigido elenco alfabetico, la scostante serie dei numeri' (*NC,* 144). Reading is not guided through hypotactic structures making explicit temporal or causal relations between the different parts of the discourse. In doing so, Manganelli 'disrupts the hierarchical sentence' – to use Barthes' formulation.

Figures of accumulation are the engine producing the verbal material.[73] Manganelli suggests that his principle of composition consists in giving free rein to language, watching hypnotised the spontaneous association of words on the page. Similarly to the process described by the *commentatore fortunato,* the text seems to develop autonomously around words, like concentric circles around a stone thrown in a lake: 'attorno al fiondato sasso di una parola si dilatavano un primo cerchio [...] poi un secondo [...] poi un terzo' (*NC,* 63-64).

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[72] Mariarosa Bricchi, 'Note sulla sintassi di *Nuovo Commento*', in *La "*scommemorazione*": Giorgio Manganelli a vent'anni dalla scomparsa. Atti della giornata di studi, Pavia 2010*, ed. by Maria Antonietta Grignani: *Autografo*, 45 (Novara: Interlinea , 2011), pp. 101-16 (p. 104).

[73] Series can either be synonymic ('la insistita denuncia dell'omicidio come empio, dell'uccisione come rea, infine dell'assassinio come peccaminoso, è lungi dall'apparire del tutto ortodossa') or oxymoronic ('ma questo [testo] di cui ora si discorre non rifiuta, non accetta, non resiste, né donnescamente si schermisce, sebbene non alletti'). Manganelli gives the best description of his own constructions by describing his literary model, *Della dissimulazione onesta* by Torquato Accetto: 'Il periodo viene articolato, ad esempio – non è l'unico modo, naturalmente – in membri paralleli, talora congruenti, talora opposti'. Manganelli, *Laboriose inezie*, pp. 146-47.

The proliferation of words depends on their sounds, which for Manganelli 'blackmail' the writer:

> 'scrittore', termine con cui intendo chi venga ricattato dalle parole. Come lo scrittore, il ricattato sa – è nozione ovvia, ma negletta – che le parole hanno un suono; e più parole disegnano una linea fonica e ritmica.[74]

The page is assaulted by potentially endless enumerations where the highest level of stratification of figures of repetition of sounds is reached.[75] See the following example (my emphasis):

> Nondimeno: le eSIgENZE della scuola, le inSIstENZE dei COlleghi, la lunga CONsueTUDINe CON la mATeria, l'INfondATa STiMA degli AMici, l'aSTuta DEferenza DEi DiscepOLi, la SOLleciTUDINE per le pubbliche SOrti, la FAstidITA SOavITÁ FAmiliare, il teDIo pomeriDIANo, la fANtasiosa iracONdia delle NOtti, l'ImPrecisione della PIoggia, le fERme denunce del CLERO, le CaLde mozioni degli affetTI dei poliTIci, la PatErNa PENsosità PEi PuPattoli del futuRO, ci hanno PErsuaso a titillARe l'ARcaica PEnNA, e tra lANguidi e distraTTI, o forse ineTTI e consci, apprestare quel che ora qui si offre, Nuovo Commento. (*NC*, 9)[76]

It can be noted how repetitions pile up progressively, every word seems to be prompted by the previous and to prompt the following ('eSIgENZE' leads to 'inSistENZE dei colleghi'; in turn, 'COlleghi' elicits 'CONsuetudine con la materia'; 'mATeria' give rises to 'infondATa stima' and so on).

In this regard, it is appropriate to apply the notion of the 'self-engendering' text utilised by Suleiman to describe Robbe-Grillet's novels. Self-creation is indeed at the core of *NC*'s figural system: self-generating sentences would be the smallest units forming the self-engendering (because text-less) metatext. Robbe-Grillet rejected the notion of self-engendered text because it implies a 'paradise rediscovered where words would mate in liberty, not responsible, not situated, innocent', independent of the writer's 'will to intervention', with the

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[74] Manganelli, *Laboriose inezie*, p. 147.

[75] Valentina Cajani, *Per Giorgio Manganelli*, p. 240.

[76] I owe here to Cajani in her use of the upper case to highlight Manganelli's alliterative patterns.

consequence of 'an idealization, sacralization or naturalization of language itself'.[77] Manganelli endorses this principle exactly for the reasons why Robbe-Grillet rejected it: the fantasy of the self-engendered text fosters the idea of an absolutely passive and powerless author.

On a deeper level, Suleiman demonstrates that this fantasy feeds on the 'ultimate masculine fantasy' of being 'one's mother' and making the mother's role in reproduction irrelevant.[78] Indeed, as Harold Bloom asks in *The Anxiety of Influence*: 'what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create himself?', the realization of his 'lack of priority'? [79] Suleiman connects this desire to sadism, as according to Deleuze, negation of the mother is the Sadean founding fantasy. Manganelli's eroticisation of the writerly activity translates into the fantasy of being penetrated by language and giving birth (producing language and representation). Following Suleiman's analysis, we can suggest that underpinning Manganelli's illegibility there is a figurative economy of self-engenderment which implies the appropriation or suppression of the mother's generative role- in Bloom's words, the mother's 'priority'.

It has to be noted that the self-engenderment fantasy, conflating the author's 'passive role' and 'maternal role', can only be the product of a patriarchal ideology, in which motherhood is equated with passivity. Commenting on Freud, Irigaray exposes how in the phallogocentric discourse 'the woman's job is to tend the seed man "gives" her, to watch over the interests of this "gift" deposited with her and to return it to its owner in due course'.[80] Thus, in Freud's mind 'maternal activity is always passive, decentered, marginalized, granted

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[77] Suleiman's translation of Robbe-Grillet, 'Sur le choix des générateurs'. See her *Subversive Intent*, p. 57.

[78] Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 71.

[79] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 5.

[80] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 75.

neither priority nor authority'.[81] The metaphor of writing as gestation, implying a 'passive' feminine role for the male writer, has a long tradition in Western thought. As Christine Brook-Rose reminds us, in Western literary tradition, genius belongs to men in two ways. Literary creation can be represented by the pen/penis metaphor, the author's pen having the generative power of the penis (we have seen how Manganelli plays with this metaphor at the beginning of this chapter). Alternatively, 'genius belongs to men in a strangely passive role. He is possessed. He is pregnant'.[82]

Manganelli endlessly repeats, manipulates and recombines these two metaphors, as, ultimately, *NC* is a commentary on the act of writing itself (as signalled by the presence of the Veronese Riddle at the beginning of the text, whose solution self-reflexively points at the act of writing). For example, Manganelli plays with the idea of the commentary providing a 'lettura pregnante' of the text, from which follows the metaphor of the commentary as a 'gravido, ingravidante testicolo' (*NC*, 11). It is worth mentioning that in the first draft of *NC*, this figure was different: 'quasi fosse, codesto, non testo ma testicolo in qualche modo gravidante'.[83] Thus, in the first version, the sequence of tropes confines the commentary to the impregnating role, whereas in the final version Manganelli prefers the commentary to be a simultaneously pregnant and impregnating testicle. Manganelli always prefers the ambiguity of images where the author is both male and female, both possessed and possessing, producing and produced.

Finally, it is worth recalling again that, in *NC*, verbal violence is ultimately turned against the self. As Mussgnug comments: '[l]ike the ouroboros – the

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[81] Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 87. This is the reason for Freud's thoughtless identification between masochistic passivity and the feminine, especially when he theorises the 'feminine masochism': a male subject 'in a characteristically female situation; [...] that is, being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby'. See his 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', p. 277.

[82] Christine Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 255.

[83] University of Pavia, Centro Manoscritti, MAN-01-0058.

mythological serpent biting its own tale – Manganelli's aggressive, rebellious notes sink their teeth in the same (textual) body that gives origin to their subversive violence'.[84] The commentator underlines how, in the very process of its making, the commentary unravels: 'la materia frammentata che si raduna sotto una effimera sigla sociale si sviluppa e prolifica, […] in codesto processo continuamente disfacendosi' (*NC*, 73). The commentator also explicitly likens the aggression of the commentary against itself to a self-inflicted wound in his own body:

> Si prenda il presente commento: non sarà esso simile alla coltellata che affonda nel ventre obeso di *taluno la cui esistenza è affatto alternativa alla nostra* …? (*NC*, 26)[85]

In part, the double movement of aggression and self-aggression is a structural element of the avant-garde. As Francesco Muzzioli puts it, the avant-garde 'procede accompagnata dalla propria morte'.[86] Illegibility and inaccessibility, as pointed out by Massimiliano Borelli, are risky and detrimental to the writer, as they reduce the possibility of communicating, being read, thus surviving. At the same time, the opposite is also a risk, namely the neo-avant-garde's destiny to become readable. Indeed, any avant-garde is 'fatalmente sottoposta al rischio di istituzionalizzazione del proprio 'codice' eversivo'.[87] Suleiman comments on this that the systematic transgression of a code is susceptible of becoming a code itself: 'the very procedures […] which function most clearly as transgressions of the code of realistic narrative have gradually come to constitute a 'familiar' and therefore highly readable set of devices. In a word, they have gradually moved from transgression to convention'.[88] Reducing a subversive, fragmented, unreadable text to the institutionalised, to the familiar and canonical, means in a sense the destruction of the subversive text itself.

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[84] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 148.

[85] My emphasis.

[86] Muzzioli, *Teoria e critica della letteratura*, p. 34.

[87] Borelli, *Prose dal dissesto*, pp. 20 and 45.

[88] Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, pp. 41-42.

5.4 Further perspectives on the figure of the author as victim:

In this chapter, I have argued that sado-masochism can illuminate the way in which Manganelli negotiated questions of authority, dominance and subjection invested in the figure of the writer in light of the transformations in the conditions of power within the contemporary literary and cultural field. It is necessary to specify that I read sado-masochism as a power strategy aimed not only at restoring the authorial power in response to the perception of powerlessness and irrelevancy of art in the consumer capitalist society. The real problem was what to do with the power that intellectuals and writers *did* wield, or, as Eco put it, 'were forced to wield', in the context of mass culture and the culture industry. In other words, the problem that Manganelli shared with other members of the Gruppo 63 was the awareness of being complicit with the system and of his position at 'the very centres of cultural power'.[89]

Umberto Eco, in his 'funeral eulogy' of the Gruppo 63, addresses the question thus:

> The majority of the group's members were already inside the system and shared in its power right from the opening meeting at Palermo in 1963. Their problem was precisely the definition and analysis of this power which they had been forced to wield.[90]

Eco regards the Italian avant-garde as 'the cultural sickness of the generation of consumer prosperity', and acknowledges that this position did not come without 'a sense of contagion and shame'.[91] The members of the Neo-avant-garde were aware from the very beginning of the impossibility for the movement to present itself as 'anti-Establishment'. As Lucia Re reminds us, 'the neo-avant-garde gained considerable media exposure', and the members of the group were employed by 'the very institutions and institutional sites through which discourse

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[89] Re, 'Language, Gender, and Sexuality', p. 142.

[90] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni, intro. by David Robey (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 238.

[91] Eco, *The Open Work*, p. 239.

and subjectivities are moulded by power' (major publishers, the Italian state television network- RAI, academia, etc.).[92]

Similarly to the other members of Gruppo 63, as Francucci points out, 'Giorgio Manganelli si trov[ò] a ricoprire istituzionalmente diversi incarichi: scrittore di libri, professore universitario (fino a una certa data), reporter, corsivista, autore radiofonico, e così via' and this made Manganelli's identification of himself with the 'victim', the 'marginal', the 'non-existent' increasingly untenable.[93] Manganelli's power disavowal and the assumption of a position of symbolic exile can be viewed as a form of 'resistance' and a way to distance himself from the reality of the commodification of literature, seen as a force of anti-art.[94] Arguably, one of the aims of Manganelli's identification with the victim was the neutralisation of his speaking position at the centre of cultural power.

Sado-masochism and the figure of the self-sacrificing author could have represented for Manganelli a way to maintain the 'oppositional' value of his writings in a context where resistance was possible only 'from within'. This is a common theme in contemporary discussions about the postmodern age: the consumer society, contemporary biopolitics and globalisation contribute to the

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[92] Re, 'Language, Gender and Sexuality', pp. 142-43.

[93] Federico Francucci, 'Lo scrittore-buffone s'inventa il suo editore: su *Encomio del Tiranno* di Giorgio Manganelli' in *Autori, Lettori e Mercato nella Modernità Letteraria*, vol. 2, ed. by Ilaria Crotti , Enza Del Tedesco, MOD 26 (Pisa: ETS, 2011), pp. 511-18 (p. 513).

[94] This emerges from the discussion between Manganelli and other neo-avant-garde members that can be found in the journal *Grammatica*, of which Manganelli was one of the founders and editors: 'Il problema è quello del consumo. […] non si può operare non tenendo conto del rapido consumo. Io credo che noi operiamo per un consumo lentissimo, il più lento possibile. […] Noi non siamo della teoria che il libro si fa, lo si stampa e poi lo si butta via: Cioè, proprio il contrario, proprio l'opposto. Noi siamo per un libro un quadro che si fa, si mette da parte e si continua a leggere. Questa è la nostra scommessa. L'avanguardia come "resistenza"'. This leads to the hypothesis that illegibility serves the purpose of forcing a 'slow consumption' and of preventing literature from becoming a short-lived, disposable product. 'La carne è l'uomo che crede al rapido consumo', *Grammatica*, 1 (1964), retrieved in Ada De Pirro 'Giorgio Manganelli e Gastone Novelli: Parole alle immagini e immagini alle parole', *Tèchne* (2012), http://www.nuovatechne.it/Grammatica.html [accessed 24 November 2020].

perception of a closed spatial dimension where 'there is no longer an outside' and it is no longer possible to be 'against'.[95] According to Matteo Pasquinelli, sado-masochistic emotional and political practices are related to this new closed spatial condition of the postmodern age.[96] Because of the claustrophobic perception of a 'space without escape', the spatial coordinates of conflict are sado-masochistically turned inwards: 'if there is no longer an outside, conflicts are internalized and become intestine wars', and 'the resistance can install itself only *inside* and *against*, being no longer possible to fight the system from *outside*'.[97]

'Altre centurie' is probably the collection of texts where Manganelli most explicitly thematises this spatial condition and the related asphyxiating feeling of being 'sempre dentro'.[98] The setting of ten out of twenty of these new 'centurie' – that Manganelli published in the magazine *Caffè* in 1980 – is the prison. In particular, 'Tre' revolves around a prisoner who passionately desires

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[95] According to Raffaele Donnarumma, for whom it is possible to talk about an Italian postmodern culture starting from the mid-1960s, the postmodern was born as an anwser to this feeling of a closed horizon: 'il postmoderno nasce in Italia anche come un tentativo di rispondere al disagio della postmodernità per maturare, quasi subito, la convinzione che non è possibile uscire dalle sue contraddizioni, e che l'orizzonte si è chiuso'. For the scholar, Manganelli's *H* is one of the first Italian postmodern works together with Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia* (1963). Donnarumma, 'Postmoderno italiano: Un'introduzione', in *Il Romanzo Contemporaneo: Voci Italiane*, ed. by Franca Pellegrini, Elisabetta Tarantino (Leicester: Troubador, 2006), pp. 1-29 (p. 4).

[96] Matteo Pasquinelli, 'If there is no longer an outside, masochism is the new *love from afar*', (2010), http://matteopasquinelli.com/docs/Pasquinelli_masochism_love.pdf [accessed 19 September 2017].

[97] Pasquinelli, 'If there is no longer an outside'. Manganelli reflected on these questions starting from his Bachelor thesis, whose significance for understanding his work was first signalled by Giorgio Agamben. Here, Manganelli expresses the view that politics is an intimate fact that determines the relationship between the contradictory parts and desires of the individual: 'la politica è anche nelle sue forme più schematiche parte del mondo interiore dell'uomo, e di infinite interiorità in reciproco rapporto'. See Manganelli, *Contributo critico*, p. 25. Agamben suggests that Manganelli's political reflections anticipated Foucault's notion of bio-power.

[98] Manganelli, 'Altre centurie' in *Centuria: cento piccoli romanzi fiume*, intro. by Italo Calvino (Milan: Adelphi, 1995), pp. 217-58 (p. 224).

his condition of captivity as if it was a 'catena amorosa'; indeed, given that there is no outside, captivity coincides with freedom:

> la condizione del carcerato supremo comportava una sorta di cupa e costante letizia, dalla quale, come da una catena amorosa, egli non voleva liberarsi in alcun modo. In verità, se teniamo presente l'ipotesi secondo cui per chi è dentro il carcere è formato solo di un interno, è possibile che un carcerato abbia la sensazione, forse esatta, di essere contemporaneamente rinchiuso e libero, giacchè non gli è consentito di conoscere il fuori, e dovunque verrà a trovarsi, anche dopo lunghi viaggi, egli sarà sempre dentro.[99]

Although less explicitly, the tension between destruction and self-destruction in *NC*, and more in general Manganelli's poetic of illegibility, can also be read against the backdrop of this spatial condition of introjected conflicts.

To clarify my point here, I would like to turn to *Encomio del tiranno: Scritto all'unico scopo di fare dei soldi* (1990),the last volume published during Manganelli's lifetime, because in this text these dynamics become even more evident. Here, through the exploration of the twin relationship between the Tyrant (the publisher) and the Fool (the writer), Manganelli expresses the impossibility of denying or deactivating his position of power.[100] The text stages the dialectic between centre and margin, power and resistance, to show that these are parts of the same substance ('Dovrei dire che la tirannia è contenuta nella buffoneria come questa in quella', *ET*, 29).[101]

The figure of the Fool can be seen as one of the many masks worn by Manganelli having at their basis a self-sacrificial logic. Indeed, it is aimed at the sabotage of the authorial figure and the self-divestiture from the authority and power

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[99] Manganelli, 'Altre centurie', p. 224.

[100] Francucci, 'Lo Scrittore-Buffone', p. 513.

[101] Mussgnug likens Manganelli's reflections on language to Foucault's analysis of the 'complicity of power and subversion' according to which 'resistance is heterogeneous and intrinsic to power'. See his *The Eloquence*, pp. 63-64.

connected to this institution.[102] It should be noted that this figure, as Mussgnug has demonstrated, makes its appearance at an early stage of Manganelli's literary activity, and it does so in connection to the questions discussed thus far: in the 1950s, when he was still a 'sbiadito e consumato professore', Manganelli was realising the irremediable contradiction between his aspiration to have 'an outside point of view from which to contemplate society' and his hegemonic social position.[103] In his diaries, Manganelli registers his self-awareness of being a 'bourgeois intellectual' and thus 'a member of the social class which, according to his analysis, cannot contribute to a genuine transformation of society'.[104] Mussgnug observes that the only political answer that appeared viable to Manganelli already in the 1950s prefigures that of his later literary writings: a 'private utopia', consisting in solipsism and folly ('una forma di follia relativamente onesta, privata').[105]

In response to the debate at the end of the 1980s concerning whether art can still have a critical function or if it achieves legitimisation only in the market as entertainment, Manganelli approaches the issue by denouncing himself as a servant of the market.[106] In *ET*, a writer addresses his publisher as his Lord, the 'Tyrant' to whom he offers his services of entertainment and celebration, solemnly declaring that his sole purpose, as indicated in the title, is that of

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[102] As Manganelli wrote in the inside cover flap of *DOS*, what is said in the text should not be taken seriously, as it is the work of a *buffone* who does not write the text but rather 'copies' it like an amanuensis: 'Il presente libro è stato trascritto da un fool; preghiamo i lettori, ove ve ne siano, di non distrarsi mai da questa figura di vago, vacuo, vagellante e anche vile amanuense' (p. 175). Maurizio Teroni makes reference to Jean Starobinski's *Portrait of the Artist as Clown* to situate the mask worn by Manganelli within a long tradition based on two literary topoi: 'da una parte su una figura socialmente istituita, il buffone di corte, […] e su un'altrettanto fondata figura, di tradizione letteraria, che possiede i connotati dello scrittore borghese, il quale si identifica, avendo perduto la sua funzione sociale, nel buffone, nel clown, nel saltimbanco'. See his 'Le Menzogne del Buffone', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 24.53 (1997), 75-98 (p. 76).

[103] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, pp. 39-40.

[104] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, pp. 39-40.

[105] Mussgnug, *The Eloquence*, p. 40. Manganelli, *Diario 2E*, 8th July 1955, in *Riga*, p. 86.

[106] See Donnarumma, 'Il Postmoderno italiano', p. 11.

making money: 'Egregio editore, eccomi davanti alla macchina da scrivere, intento a realizzare un mio antico sogno; scrivere un libro il cui scopo è esattamente indicato nel titolo' (*ET*, 9). The text posits that the Tyrant is a creation of the Fool: 'basterebbe che io mi rifiutassi di continuare a far codesti giochi servili, e lei, egregio editore, non comincerebbe mai e poi mai ad esistere' (*ET*, 14). The writer, indeed, is perfectly aware of being part of the cultural institution which he calls 'the Tyrant'. Arguably, the only path open to the Fool/Tyrant is a masochistic strategy of self-sabotage, where all the stories that the Fool invents to celebrate the ritual of literature are aborted, and where writing results in, as Francucci puts it, 'un nulla di fatto'.[107]

Indeed, as anticipated in chapter 1, the narrative economy underlying *ET* is ruled by a sadomasochistic aesthetics of suspension: the Fool hints at a number of potential stories (some examples are: the story about 'un personaggio che sogna, e sogna se stesso come personaggio di una storia', p. 64; 'storia della storia interrotta', p. 68; 'storia di spie'; 'storia allegorica', p. 71; the story of the 'agatosauro, un dinosauro che fu soprattutto famoso per le opere buone', p. 73) that are never told, repeatedly fueling and frustrating the Tyrant's and the reader's desire for narrative.[108] Some passages in the text illustrate this process clearly. At the end of page 67 the *buffone* seduces the Tyrant (and thus the reader) by promising a story:

> Ad esempio ne sto pensando una, una storia dico, che forse ti incuriosirà. Ma ti prego, non dirmi poi 'scrivila'. È non scrivendola che la scrivo. [...] Non posso negarlo, debbo supporre che qui si nasconda una ipotesi di storia. Potrei provare. (*ET*, 67)

However, at page 68 the expectations are frustrated: 'No; non ti racconterò la storia'. A similar dynamic of making and breaking the promise is observed at

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[107] Fracucci, 'Lo scrittore-buffone', p. 516.

[108] A similar operation is found in *Centuria*, where as Grazia Menechella observes: 'Manganelli [...] si rifiuta di 'impolpare l'ossa' e di fare 'd'uno scheletro un corpo'. Non ci viene dato il sunto ma lo scheletro, la radiografia, la possibilità del romanzo; più che storie, i testi sono accenni di storie di ipotetici romanzi'. See her '*Centuria*: Manganelli aspirante sonettiere', *MNL*, 117.1 (2002), 207-26 (p. 213).

page 89, where once more the buffoon gets the Tyrant to swallow his bait: 'Tiranno, vuoi tu, in quanto editore, che io mi cimenti in un riassunto moral-pastorale?'. Again, the Tyrant is 'fooled': 'Ma non mi va nemmeno di riassumer[e la storia]: vi ho dato i pezzi, fatela da voi' (*ET*, 74).[109]

Manganelli's suspension of the text's meaning, both in *ET* and in *NC*, follows a logic of non-productivity that, as Falkoff has shown, parallels that of 'perverse' sexualities not finalized to procreation. According to Volker Woltersdorff, the fact that masochism is devoid of productivity or use value challenges the hegemonic patterns of the capitalistic economy, governed by the opposite principles of usefulness and productivity.[110] It is indeed already with Freud that masochism is presented as an 'economic problem': in his 1924 essay, Freud describes masochism as 'mysterious from the economic point of view', tacitly assuming capitalism as the economic reference model.[111] We can conclude that, in Manganelli, the author's self-obstruction, related to the ideas of literature's

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[109] The sadistic figure of the Fool finds an obvious literary antecedent in the Shakespearian Fool of *King Lear*. Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca has shown that the Fool 'represents the sadistic and perverse voice of Lear'. For Speziale-Bagliacca, in the play there is an 'overturning of the master-servant relationship: the servant captures and dominates the former master'. See his *The King & the Adulteress: A Psychoanalytical and Literary Reinterpretation of Madame Bovary and King Lear*, ed. by Colin Rice, intro. by Frank Kermode (London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 98 and 109.

[110] Volker Woltersdorff, 'Masochistic Self-shattering between Destructiveness and Productivity', in *Destruction in the Performative*, ed. and intro by Alice Lagaay and Michael Lorber (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 133-51. However, Woltersdorff is not persuaded by 'the conflation of queerness and the death drive on the one hand, and of capitalism and productivity on the other' as he argues that 'capitalism relies as much on a drive for production as on a drive for destruction [...] although this destructiveness necessarily needs to be negated (or repressed) by capitalistic economy. This drive becomes particularly evident in the destruction of workforce, workplaces, the environment, commodities'. Rather, Woltersdorff concludes that '[m]asochistic self-shattering may therefore point at the negated, yet constitutive, "Other" of capitalist economy' (pp. 136-37).

[111] Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', p. 274. Woltersdorff points out that masochism can be considered problematic to economy only if we posit, as Freud did, a capitalistic logic defined by productivity and efficiency.

'uselessness' and 'nonproductivity', potentially represents an anti-capitalistic technique.

However, as Francucci notes, the negation of capitalism is impossible to fully achieve in this way as, although the Fool abstains from telling stories, there is always a residual production of words, that the editor will turn into a commodity and monetise (as, in fact, Manganelli postulates in the title).[112] As Francucci observes, what Manganelli wants to pursue, that is, placing literature totally outside/against culture, would only be reached by positing an editor who does not publish books, but once and for all, destroys them:

> io credo che Manganelli [...] sia arrivato nell'*Encomio* a sognare disperatamente una sovranità così potente, così assoluta, da essere in grado di sacrificarsi completamente, di annichilirsi senza rimanenze.[113]

Indeed, if we take Manganelli's self-sacrificing logic to extremes, it would result in total (self)annihilation.

According to Francucci, Manganelli's radical negation of his (authorial) self and of society leads to two outcomes, which he finds equally reductive. On the one hand, the theme of 'nothingness' in Manganelli lends itself to be read in a sort of 'mystic' way, a reading in which many critics have indulged but that Francucci finds unsatisfying and with reactionary implications ('un pasticcio esoterico dagli evidenti, peraltro, caratteri reazionari'). On the other hand, he notes:

> può darsi che Manganelli non sia più un autore, può darsi che abbia mortificato ambizioni e pretese del suo io, ma si sarà sempre riservato un ruolo molto preciso e, si badi bene, inattaccabile: quello del cerimoniere. La sua sarebbe dunque una finta profanazione che arriva invece, e nemmeno troppo celatamente, a sacralizzare l'attività di

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[112] In this respect, Francucci mentions Franco Fortini's comment about a 'Manganelli DOC': Fortini notes that Manganelli's idiolect has been reduced to a sort of brand: 'sembra che Manganelli voglia che l'acquirente non abbia sorprese: gli garantisce sempre un Manganelli di origine controllata'. According to Fortini, this is the mechanism through which Manganelli's work is reabsorbed by capitalism. See Fortini, *Breve secondo Novecento* (Lecce: Manni, 1998), p. 43.

[113] Francucci, 'Lo scrittore-buffone', p. 516.

> uno scrittore a cui non è rimasto nulla da scrivere che non sia il nulla: approdo logoro e ormai intenibile.[114]

The conclusion reached by Francucci here harmonises with what I have suggested in this chapter, namely that Manganelli's mortification of the author's function serves the goal of restoring the author's prestige and powerful, even 'sacralised', position. Francucci raises again the issue of the self-contained economy of Manganelli's texts, and leaves the question open by adding that it would be reductive to relegate 'una lingua e una sintassi tanto eccezionali' to the performance of a 'fool' who talks solely to himself about nothing.[115] In the next chapter, I will start again from this question, asking if Manganelli's self-shattering has the potential to develop another economy of the self: one that both foregoes the risk of total self-annihilation (and/or capitulation to a commodifying process) and fractures the idea of an isolated self.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter started by showing how Manganelli developed his own, original version of Nabokov's sado-masochistic strategy to relate with the reader. Both authors shaped artistically their anxieties regarding transformations in the contemporary literary and cultural field and contributed to a refashioning of the author and reader functions, putting great emphasis on the link between textual and sexual pleasures. From the comparison, it emerges that both Nabokov's and Manganelli's works obsessively figure readers (or commentators) and authors acting out the power dynamics involved in the literary field, transforming these into sado-masochistic exchanges based on violence and desire.

I have shown that in *NC*, the author rejects the position held by Nabokov's authorial figure, that of the master, and installs himself in the subordinated position of the 'perverse reader' lost in an interpretative paranoia. I have shown how the author's partly ironic self-display in humiliation installs the reader in the position of the voyeur, the bearer of a controlling gaze over the objectified

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[114] Francucci, 'Lo scrittore-buffone', p. 517.

[115] Francucci, 'Lo scrittore-buffone', p. 517.

author. This reverses Nabokov's scopic economy, where the reader is the object of the author's gaze and will and is sadistically punished with shame for their failures in interpreting the text. At the same time, we have once more drawn the attention on the fact that situating the author in a passive and objectified position allows it to indulge in a Kinbotean 'ego trip', a self-referential mania, which – as we have frequently pointed out in the previous chapters – paradoxically secures the one's centrality.

The analysis of *NC* has also exposed the gendering of the power dynamics between text and commentary, so that the power struggle also becomes a gender struggle. From the analysis emerged how verbal aggression against the female body and the positioning of the author in a passive and feminised role occur simultaneously, revealing a masochistic split subjectivity being at the same time self and Other, feminine and masculine, producer and produced, author and commentator. Just as the battle between *testo* and *commento* proves to be a battle of the same against the same, similarly the subject tortures a part of the self, more precisely, it produces a feminised part of the self and brutalises it.[116] What emerges, in addition to the persistence of aggression against femininity, is a closed model of the self, mirrored by a closed text hinging upon the notions of 'illegibility' and 'self-engenderment'.

In this chapter, I have analysed the implications of Manganelli's sense of the shortcomings of patriarchal models of creative engagement, related to notions of subjectivity as characterised by mastery, domination, autonomy. I have argued that Manganelli's dealing with the limits of the authorial function can be read as a masochistic strategy, because it entails a surrender of authorial power that allows him to maintain it in another form. It can be seen as a way around and a triumph over authorial limits which ultimately leads to a re-definition of authoriality and subjectivity still fully within terms of power and self-sufficiency. In conclusion, the sado-masochistic authorial subjectivity articulated in *NC* does not seems to represent a challenge to traditional masculinity, despite

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[116] See Savran, *Taking It Like a Man*, p. 190.

Manganelli's reversal of Nabokov's model and renunciation of phallic mastery, as well as his complication of gender binarisms.

Chapter 6   'Nessun colloquio dunque?': finding a way out from the self in *Libro Parallelo*

In this thesis, I have repeatedly underlined the *impasse* reached by Manganelli in his identification of the writer as self-sacrificing, marginalised and 'out of place'. Manganelli's self-sacrificing logic situates his works in a vicious circle and always in a contradictory position determined by the contrasting tensions towards openness and closedness.[1] The angle from which I have examined this issue is the model of selfhood (and the related model of authoriality) constructed in the texts, leading to the hypothesis that relegating the self to the role of the victim seems to leave no way out from subjectivity and to hinder the shift from the subject to relationality.

In chapter 2, I highlighted how, especially in the first phase of Manganelli's work, the figure of the male victim and the related feeling of a threatened masculine identity result in abjection of woman. In chapter 3, I showed that in later works by Manganelli, masochist victimhood functions as an elaborate route to self-affirmation, although outright patriarchal models are set aside. The radical openness to the outside world of the masochistic 'subject in becoming' outlined in chapter 3 has proved to amount more to an appropriation of the other rather than a real dialogue, resulting in a collapse of the subject back into himself. Finally, chapter 5 has confirmed this sense of a closed horizon: the reader is induced to believe that the text is not only self-referential, but also self-generating. The 'closed space' in *Nuovo commento* is also reflected in the structure of the text, its circular and labyrinthine organisation and its vicious circles. This circularity has also affected the structure of my chapters, where I have constantly tried to highlight the ways in which Manganelli opened to alterity in a 'queer' way, retracing then a substantially unchanging return to a closed model of selfhood.

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[1]   On 'openess' and 'closedness' in Manganelli see Arianna Marelli, 'Giorgio Manganelli tra "opera aperta" e "opera chiusa"', and Andrea Cortellessa, 'Manganelli-Calvino: Dentro o fuori' in *Libri segreti*, pp. 297-316.

Manganelli seems to behave with his readers like the Italian quick-change artist Leopoldo Fregoli does in one of Manganelli's 'impossible interviews' collected in *Interviste impossibili*. To the interviewer's question: 'ma allora che cosa è il nostro colloquio?', Fregoli replies thus:

> B. Ma quale colloquio, mio caro? Forse non hai capito niente, eppure è semplice. Non c'è stato nessun colloquio, nessuna intervista. Fregoli ha parlato con Fregoli, il nulla col nulla.
> A. Nessun colloquio, dunque?
> B. Nessun colloquio, mio caro; ora te ne puoi accorgere; silenzio, nient'altro che silenzio.[2]

My findings are thus in keeping with Rebecca Falkoff's contention that Manganelli reproduces the prototype of the self-contained masculine subject, which she links to a masturbatory sexuality and to a fascist politics. According to Theodor Reik, the psychic economy of the masochist is not distant from the self-contained logic of masturbation. Reik remarks that the 'masochist character behaves almost autoerotically' as the external object for the masochist 'remains in the twilight where it merges into the ego'.[3] However, I believe that in the light of a sado-masochistic approach, a more compound and conflicted masculine subject position emerges, as this framework enables us to capture the complex dialectic between openness and closedness, disorder and reorganisation in Manganelli's work. Even so, I highlighted how often the male victim self-reflexivity invalidates the potential for change in Manganelli's construction of a fragmented male subjectivity.

I believe that in *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo* (1977), a text that dialogues with Carlo Collodi's 1881 children's literature classic *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, Manganelli managed to find a way out from the solipsistic, closed horizon that the victim logic so often entails. In this text, one perceives a tension towards alterity and the search for a more authentic relationship with otherness. This yearning can be found also in other texts by Manganelli, expressed as an almost

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[2] Manganelli, 'Fregoli' in *Interviste impossibili* (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), pp. 120-29 (p. 129). 'Fregoli' was orginally published in Manganelli, *A e B* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975).

[3] Reik, *Masochism*, p. 333.

desperate want especially when it clashes against the impossibility of its fulfilment. For example, in the travel book *Esperimento con l'India* (1992), the writer realises during his staying in Madras that his attempt to leave behind his Eurocentric identity and the 'aggressività occidentale' resulted again in an implosion inside himself, generating a profound malaise of what he calls his 'soul'.[4] Manganelli feels locked inside his self:

> La mia aggressività occidentale è caduta verso l'interno, ho conosciuto una implosione [...] Non conosco più la combinazione per uscire da me stesso. Qualcuno mi ha chiuso a chiave?[5]

In contrast with the majority of Manganelli's work, where the escape from the self seems impossible, I contend that in *LP* Manganelli manages to avoid the entrapment of the self by suggesting a model of relationship which differs from that analysed so far.

As we have mentioned in the previous chapter, scholars have noted an evolution in Manganelli's writing moving in the direction of a greater accessibility. Florian Mussgnug has singled out *LP* (1977) as the text that marked this turning point, whereas Donnarumma has backdated this change to 1972: 'con *Agli dei ulteriori* (1972) la scrittura di Manganelli prende una via meno impervia'.[6] Also Cortellessa notes that in some passages of *LP*, Manganelli shows a certain urgency to withdraw from the domain of nonsense and pastime: 'Fa quasi specie che il Manga non consegni la sua ennesima laboriosa inezia al dominio della perdita di tempo; si vede che l'operazione in corso gli deve stare davvero a cuore'.[7] One might even suspect that in *LP* Manganelli has 'something to say', which represents the worst possible quality for a writer ('aveva "qualcosa da

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[4] Manganelli, *Esperimento con l'India* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013), p. 94. This book, published after Manganelli's death in 1992, contains some articles written during his journey in India in 1975 for the newspaper *Il Mondo.*

[5] Manganelli, *Esperimento con l'India*, p. 94.

[6] Mussgnug, 'Esercizio, exemplum, testimonianza'. Donnarumma, 'Postmoderno italiano', p. 10.

[7] Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*, p. 280.

dire": per uno scrittore, inizio rovinoso' as Manganelli once said).[8] This change in readability parallels a shift in Manganelli's elaborations on gender relations: as I will show in this chapter, *LP* establishes a new form of collaboration between the implied author and reader and registers the shift from a model of selfhood based on woman's exclusion and/or appropriation to one based on mutual recognition.

While it is true that *NC* and *LP* are marked by a considerable continuity in terms of themes and in the conceptualisation of the author/reader functions, there are also some differences worthy of notice. First, the fact that *LP* establishes a discursive exchange with another text is in itself highly significant, especially when compared to the idea of self-sufficiency of the 'commentary' in *NC*. This seems to suggest a shift from the monological to the dialogical form. *LP* replicates this view of literature as a shared practice in the kind of response the text elicits from the reader. In the previous chapter, I have shown that in *NC* sado-masochism represents a strategy to reassert the authorial control and autonomy, while notions of illegibility and self-engenderment contribute to the sense of a 'closed' text. In contrast, in *LP*, the author and the reader are conceived as interdependent and both taking part in determining the text.

In this chapter, I will explore the further developments in Manganelli of the 'game' metaphor that I have traced in Nabokov's writing and I will build on the previous chapters' engagement with issues of readerly masochism. The emphasis on 'game' and 'theatre' in *LP* points to the possibility of arguing that this text encourages the reader to participate in a role-play that finds an analogue in scripted sado-masochistic activities. Indeed, the nature of the game involves the (apparent) surrender of the text to the reader's will and desire and a 'contract' giving instructions to the reader on the kind of reactions the text expects by them. As previously mentioned, this kind of complicity between the author and the reader in *LP* has many points of contact with Deleuze's masochistic contract. However, given the gendered limitations repeatedly signalled in Deleuze's model, in this chapter I will integrate it with another useful framing. Sociological studies of practitioners of sadomasochism portray s/m activities as

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[8] Manganelli, *La letteratura come menzogna*, p. 77.

fantasy play and power exchanges based on consent, mutuality and cooperation. I will draw parallels between these accounts of sadomasochistic acts and linguistic practices and the author/reader power exchanges activated in *LP*. While the author gives us rules and instructions on the way in which the text expects to be 'beaten into submission', we also witness the textual interactions between Manganelli's and Collodi's texts, which might be read as offering the opportunity to learn to play at roles.[9] Arguably, the text offers several layers of sado-masochistic interaction and explores the pragmatic possibilities offered by this form of play.[10]

6.1 Pedagogues and persecutors

After publishing in 1968 and 1970 two articles on the story of Pinocchio, in 1977 Manganelli dedicated an entire book to Collodi's wooden puppet, a beloved figure since the author was a child.[11] The extent to which the story of Pinocchio resonated with Manganelli and fascinated him is testified by the fact that the author's study in Rome was dominated by various statues of the puppet, which Manganelli considered his 'nume tutelare'.[12] Equally telling is the fact that Manganelli regarded Pinocchio's transformation into a 'bambino vero' 'come tutti gli altri' as his 'primo trauma intellettuale'.[13] In *LP*, Manganelli provides a

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[9] I am indebted for these ideas to Kara K. Manning's article '"Pleasure and Pain in Exquisite Extremes": Sexual/Textual S/M in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*', *Feral Feminisms: Feminist Un/Pleasure: Reflections upon Perversity, BDSM, and Desire*, 2 (2014), 49-65.

[10] See Manning's '"Pleasure and Pain"' on how texts can 'explor[e] the pragmatic actualities of S/M play', p. 53.

[11] Giorgio Manganelli, 'Carlo Collodi: Pinocchio' in *Corriere della sera* (1968) and 'La morte di Pinocchio', in *L'Espresso* (1970), both in Manganelli, *Laboriose inezie*, pp. 309-12 and 313-15.

[12] Interview with Daniele Del Giudice, *Paese Sera*, 1981.

[13] Manganelli, 'La morte di Pinocchio', p. 313.

new, antiphrastic reading of the puppet's adventures.[14] In this text, Manganelli subverts the traditional pedagogical interpretation of the fable: Pinocchio is not driven by the desire of becoming human so much as by the desire for pain and self-annihilation, culminating in the puppet's suicide. Pinocchio is 'sottoposto a una impersonale coazione', and is propelled by his 'totale vocazione alla sofferenza' (*LP*, 51-52).

In Collodi's *Avventure*, Pinocchio is a 'wicked boy' who must be punished in order to grow: he is a 'naughty', 'wretched son', with a 'cheeky and mocking behaviour' which drives his putative parent to despair.[15] Collodi's novel wishes to instruct its young addressee: by identifying with the puppet and following his mischief, children were provided with advice, rules of behaviour and admonitions. The readers followed the despair of Geppetto, ridiculed and teased by the wooden piece who makes Geppetto wipe away a tear and feel 'very sad and downcast, more so than he had ever been in his entire life'.[16] In *Avventure*, Pinocchio is responsible for Geppetto's four months imprisonment, uses the money Geppetto gained by selling his only coat to go to the theatre instead of going to school, does not come back to his father who decides to look for him in the sea and gets swallowed by the Dogfish. Instead, Manganelli offers an antiphrastic pedagogical reflection, in which the marionette shifts from being a naughty boy harassing his father to being a victim who lives in 'un mondo di cacciatori e padroni' (*LP*, 31). Manganelli denaturalises the didactic content of

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[14] This is not the only experiment of rewriting undertaken by Manganelli: in the same year he publishes *Cassio Governa a Cipro*, a meta-literary theatrical work inspired by Shakespeare's *Othello*: Giorgio Manganelli, *Cassio governa a Cipro* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1977). These two works were preceded by the 1972 adaptation of Luigi Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore.* See Manganelli, *Un'allucinazione fiamminga: Il 'Morgante Maggiore' raccontato da Manganelli*, ed. and intro. by Graziella Pulce (Rome: Socrates, 2006).

[15] Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, trans. by p. M. D. Panton (Pescia: National Carlo Collodi Foundation, 2014), pp. 4-6. The National Carlo Collodi Foundation makes this text available on its web site https://www.pinocchio.it/Download/Testo_ufficiale_Inglese_LeAvventure_di_Pinocchio.pdf. [accessed 28 November 2020].

[16] Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, p. 5.

Avventure and shows how the pedagogue's essence is that of the torturer: 'il seviziatore è essere elaboratamente civile, ha nobili scopi e una vocazione moralmente impeccabile' (*LP*, 50).

Manganelli stresses that the characters around Pinocchio talk and behave as both pedagogues and persecutors, starting from the first we encounter, Mastro Ciliegia. According to Manganelli, Mastro Ciliegia, who wants to 'fix' the piece of wood, 'ha un'intima vocazione pedagogica': he is unequivocally a school teacher (*LP*, 15). Manganelli directs our attention to the language used by the carpenter, for example his intention to 'strip off the bark' of the log, revealing the violence inherent in metaphors used to express the idea of 'fixing' children's behaviors:

> E sentite il suo linguaggio: a quel legno egli vuole "levargli la scorza"
> e "digrossarlo"; metafore che non abbiamo dimenticato. (*LP*, 15-16)

While the Cricket represents the quintessential educator – 'essere instancabilmente pedagogico' (*LP*, 34) –, the ones that most cruelly abuse their educational role on Pinocchio are his parental figures, Geppetto and the Fairy. Manganelli notes how both Geppetto and the Fairy use food withdrawal and bodily impairments as pedagogical strategies. For example, Manganelli juxtaposes the scene where Geppetto lets Pinocchio cry and despair for half a day for his burned feet to the scene where the Fairy lets Pinocchio cry for half an hour for his long nose, grown as punishment. Manganelli concludes: 'si tortura solo per motivi morali, filosofici, sociali e estetici' (*LP*, 50).

Deprived of the pedagogical element, the standard reading of Pinocchio's misadventures as series of challenges and punishments that the puppet has to experience in order to become a human being is substituted by a quite different and diverted path. In *LP*, the focus is no longer on the lies and whims of the puppet; the one that is mendacious and capricious par excellence is the Fairy. It is not Pinocchio who abandons his objects of love, rather, the latter forsake him. More precisely:

> L'angoscia di Pinocchio non è tanto essere abbandonato, quanto di proporsi come burattino da abbandonare per le sue 'scapataggini' e 'cattivi portamenti'. (*LP*, 181)[17]

What propels the puppet's repetition compulsion is the push towards self-annihilation, ultimately reached only in the last chapter. Thus, all the various fragments of Pinocchio's story are framed by Manganelli into the same rigid interpretation, which anticipates and reformulates in various guises the final scene in which death is finally accomplished.

The figure of the self-sacrificing victim outlined in the chapters above is central also in *LP*. Manganelli shapes the marionette into the model of the victim in search of persecutors that I have examined in so many of Manganelli's texts, a figure that Manganelli delineates each time Pinocchio interacts with other characters. These dominate Pinocchio, literally towering over him: 'tutti lo sovrastano' (*LP*, 51) – from Geppetto to the blue Fairy, from Mangiafuoco to the Cat and the Fox, but also the Carabinieri and various *padroni* (the Farmer who makes Pinocchio act as his watchdog, the manager of the circus who makes Pinocchio dance and jump through hoops, the man who buys Pinocchio to use his hide to make a drum). While being interested in the power differential between the characters of Collodi's novel, Manganelli is even more intrigued by the possibility of role reversals and exchanges of power, turning Pinocchio's masters into his slaves:

> Quanto più sono 'alti', e dunque sproporzionati e potenti, tanto più sono ambigui: non solo seviziatori e protettori, anche tiranni e schiavi. (*LP*, 52)

Manganelli notes how Pinocchio is hanged, chased, put to death, trapped in a marten snare, turned into a dog and a donkey, drowned and concludes:

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[17] In Manganelli's reading, Pinocchio seems to embody Freud's 'moral masochism', described as creating: 'a temptation to perform "sinful actions" which must then be expiated by the reproaches of the sadistic conscience […] or by chastisement from the great parental power of Destiny. In order to provoke punishment from this last representative of the parents, the masochist must do what is inexpedient, must act against his own interests, […] and must, perhaps, destroy his own real existence'. Freud, 'The Economic Problem', p. 283.

'Apparentemente il burattino è sottoposto a una serie continuata di sevizie, parte amorose, parte aggressive' (*LP*, 51). Manganelli explains that Pinocchio's powerless condition is only an appearance as, coherently with the figure of the masochistic victim to which we are by now accustomed, those are 'sevizie che egli stesso si è propiziato' (*LP*, 52). Willingly – for Pinocchio is 'invaghito della propria sofferenza' – 'il seviziato si consegna al seviziatore con devozione' (*LP*, 52 and 154).

A clear example is the episode involving the Fox and the Cat, where Manganelli describes Pinocchio as 'fermamente deciso a farsi derubare' by them: 'Malgrado le apparenze, Pinocchio li "adopera"' (*LP*, 106). Another example is the relationship between Pinocchio and the Fairy, repeatedly described as a torturer by Manganelli: 'le torture della madre Strega' (*LP*, 155), 'gesto di sevizia', 'seviziatore' (*LP*, 154), 'la fata ricorre alle sue pie sevizie' (*LP*, 170) are just some examples.[18] However, Manganelli senses that she is hopelessly impotent without Pinocchio, and needs him exactly as much as he needs her: 'tutta codesta storia parallela si accorda con la sensazione che la Fata abbia bisogno di Pinocchio' (*LP*, 101). She exercises a power, but only in the hallucinatory fantasies of Pinocchio: 'malgrado la sua potenza [...] essa è anche una allucinazione di Pinocchio, dominata dal terrore di essere abbandonata, perduta' (*LP*, 104).

A further observation is that the figure of the wooden marionette in itself presents some fundamental features that are relevant for a sado-masochistic analysis. In particular, the idea of the puppet that has no strings is of great significance as it raises a pivotal question posed by masochism: the problem of agency. The indistinguishability of who pulls the strings, of who is in charge, obsesses Manganelli. He dwells on each interaction in order to determine: 'chi

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[18] This relationship resembles that between the protagonist of *Dall'inferno* and the Doll. This also suggests that the mythical puppet provided a model for the protagonist of *INF* (which is also defined 'fantoccio').

detta legge e chi è dominato?'.[19] Another fundamental sadomasochistic feature that we find in Pinocchio is the puppet's intrinsic theatricality. Manganelli often underlines the fact that when Pinocchio offers himself in the hands of his persecutors as a victim or a passive object, he is acting, pretending, performing rituals and scenes. Here are some examples: in the scene in which Geppetto re-builds Pinocchio's burned feet, Pinocchio 'si consegna come passività, come mutilazione e morte' but 'finge solamente. Recita. Insomma, esegue una cerimonia' (*LP*, 54); Pinocchio's death by hanging is a 'commedia' and the subsequent 'morte da "febbrone"' is a 'farsa' (*LP*, 94); in the Great Puppet Theatre, Pinocchio has to 'recitare la supplica' and perform a 'sacrificio teatrale' (*LP*, 70).

Manganelli's insistence on the theatrical and playful quality of the power exchanges between Pinocchio and the other characters suggests the possibility of reading these interactions as role play in sado-masochistic scenarios. In an operation that is consonant with Nabokov's meta-textual devices, Manganelli orchestrates the distribution of power among characters so as to provide a meta-literary canvas on which to propose a new procedure of participation in literary reception and production. A notable example of this is the bond between Pinocchio and Geppetto. While apparently the nature of the relationship is creator/creature, Manganelli underlines that it is Pinocchio who made Geppetto his father, by choosing him as such: 'scelta da Pinocchio, la sua paternità è filiale, per delega' (*LP*, 30). There is another scene in which Geppetto is working to rebuild Pinocchio's burnt feet, while Pinocchio pretends to sleep and abandons himself completely in the hand of the creator. This is characterised by Manganelli as a moment of artistic creation: the new feet are Geppetto's 'dono "d'autore"' (*LP*, 53). However, Manganelli emphasises that Pinocchio *pretends*: it is a fiction, in which the puppet is collaborating with the creator, becoming the

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[19] Manganelli wonders here about the dynamics between the Fox and the Cat. In *LP*, Manganelli suggests that the Cat may subjugate the Fox, but the Cat is also impotent without the Fox because he cannot speak, he only echoes the last words of his accomplice (p. 107). Manganelli is not satisfied with this, and in an interview about *LP*, he keeps wondering about how their relationship works when they are not busy with their criminal activities: 'ci sarà un'aggressività reciproca: […] chi detta legge e chi è dominato?'. See his *La penombra mentale*, p. 111.

'creatore del creatore' (*LP,* 54). Manganelli is then able to reiterate his paradoxical idea of literature, which diametrically inverts author/text relations.[20] Just as, to quote Deleuze, 'it is the victim that speaks thorough the mouth of his torturer', in the same manner it is the son that makes the father such, and the text that produces the author, not vice versa.[21]

6.2 What is a *libro parallelo*?

Before examining how Manganelli makes the reader participate in sadomasochistic scenes, it is necessary to detail the genesis and structure of this text. In *LP*, Manganelli introduces us to the new figure of the *parallelista*, a combination of author and reader moulded on the basis of the 'autore-lettore' prototype encountered in the previous chapters. This book was initially commissioned as a commentary on Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, and subsequently as a paraphrase; but Manganelli did not manage to accomplish either.[22] Andrea Maiello observes that the text 'nasce in negativo, negandosi prima al commento e poi alla parafrasi' , and fluctuates between these two

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[20] For a reading of the Fairy and Pinocchio as the representatives of the author and the text, see Raffaello Palumbo Mosca: 'Pinocchio sembra essere, in definitiva, il testo stesso (qualsiasi testo), o per lo meno sembra condividerne alcune caratteristiche fondamentali […]Se Pinocchio è il testo, la Fata cosa rappresenterà? Essa vive un rapporto di dipendenza dal burattino, essa è perché Pinocchio è […] ma quando Pinocchio ha ormai compiuto il suo destino - quando il testo è scritto - essa, come l'autore, deve scomparire. Ci sia concesso avere un dubbio un po' bizzarro: e se la Fata [… non] nascondesse altri che il Parallelista, Manganelli stesso?'. Raffaello Palumbo Mosca, 'Pinocchio: la lettura metafisica di Giorgio Manganelli', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 33.71 (2006), 155-64 (p. 164).

[21] Deleuze, *Masochism*, p. 22.

[22] Livia Giustolisi, 'Povero burattino diventato ragazzo', in *La penombra mentale*, p. 111. Manganelli's daughter Lietta also recounts this episode in an interview with Alessandra Pigliaru, telling us that when Mondadori asked Manganelli to write a commentary on Pinocchio, he was at first very excited, but had then to acknowledge: 'Non ci riesco'. When they asked him to then make a paraphrasis he exclaimed: 'O mi lasciate fare quello che so fare o non se ne fa niente!'. Alessandra Pigliaru, 'La parola sediziosa' in Francesco Marotta, 'Omaggio a Giorgio Manganelli (I)', *La dimora del tempo sospeso*, 5 May 2010, https://rebstein.wordpress.com/2010/05/05/omaggio-a-giorgio-manganelli-i/ [accessed 30 June 2020].

poles.[23] Indeed, in the prologue of *LP*, Manganelli describes the book as a text that 'ha del commento ma da questo si distingue per la continuità atteggiata a parafrasi' (*LP*, 7). Another fundamental element for understanding the genesis of *LP* is revealed in an interview collected in *La penombra mentale*, where Manganelli explains that what fascinates him in Pinocchio are all the untold stories.[24] We should not forget that the conclusion of *Avventure* is deeply unsatisfactory, ⸢traumatic⸣ for Manganelli: the specific intention of *LP* is therefore to unearth all the potential narratives that Collodi rejected in order to reach that conclusion.

The book is organised in the same number of chapters as Collodi's book, each developing its discourse by focusing on its equivalent in *Avventure*. Segments more properly ascribable to literary criticism break the continuity of the text; in those grafts, Manganelli establishes the rules of the parallel writing method. These pieces are based on two typical structures of Manganelli's texts: the squared commentary (as these could be read as a commentary upon the commentary) and the division between 'theory' and 'practice' (for the mentioned segments represent the 'theory' of the parallel method, as opposed to the 'practice' which consists in the interaction with Collodi's text).[25]

'What is a *libro parallelo*?' is the question that has absorbed a great deal of previous research on *LP*. It is indeed difficult to disentangle *LP*'s textual amalgam, whose register shifts from descriptive, to argumentative, to narrative. According to Clelia Martignoni, *LP* is not (only) a commentary, even if it is able to bring to light archetypes, deep structures and problematic issues of Collodi's book.[26] Matteo di Gesù argues that it is a postmodernist and parodic rewriting, but Gianfranco Marrone notes that many operations of Manganelli are not

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[23] Andrea Maiello, 'Pinocchio', in *Riga*, p. 459.

[24] Manganelli, *La penombra mentale*, p. 111.

[25] The latter is a recurrent structure that can also be found in *H* (divided in 'Morfologia' and 'Esercizi') and *NC* (divided in 'Teoria' and 'Exempla').

[26] Clelia Martignoni, 'Sulla genesi del *Pinocchio: Un libro parallelo*', in *La "scommemorazione": Giorgio Manganelli a vent'anni dalla scomparsa*, Autografo, 45 (2011), p. 35.

parodistic, as 'i parallelismi rilevati dal meta-testo di Manganelli sono interni al testo di Collodi'.[27] Marrone suggests we should look at *LP* as a deconstructionist reading, and argues that it could also be classified as an interdiscursive translation, that is, a translation between two literary discourses instead of between two languages: Manganelli simultaneously states the rules of a new literary genre – the 'parallel book' – and translates the novel *Le avventure di Pinocchio* into this new genre.[28] Fabrizio Scrivano concludes that it is more appropriate to call *LP* an 'overwriting', since Manganelli actually needs to create new narrative trajectories to sustain his interpretations.[29]

Let us see how the leading authority on *libri paralleli*, that is, the *parallelista* himself, defines his operation. First, he warns us that we should not think of a parallel book as being 'next to' the pre-existing text, but already 'inside' it (*LP,* 7). Another definition of the parallel book that subverts our commonsensical ideas on literary practices is: 'È un libro che ne adopera un altro per esistere, è una forma di simbiosi'.[30] Manganelli does not use, as one would expect, the metaphor of parasitism and talks about 'symbiosis' instead, implying a mutual dependence between the two texts. This is because, in his view, all the virtual narratives left unsaid in Pinocchio's story depend on *LP* to be actualised.[31]

Another metaphor that describes the parallel work pertains to the semantic area of hunting: the *libro parallelo* 'insegue' and 'persegue' the hypotext. It is worth noticing that 'perseguire' does not only mean 'to hunt' but also 'to persecute',

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[27]   Matteo di Gesù, *Palinsesti del moderno: canoni, generi, forme nella postmodernità letteraria* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005), p. 90.

[28]   Marrone, 'Parallelismi', p. 10.

[29]   Fabrizio Scrivano, 'Pinocchio criticato, Pinocchio commentato' in Variazioni Pinocchio: 7 letture sulla riscrittura del mito, ed. by Fabrizio Scrivano, (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2010), p. 48.

[30]   Manganelli, *La penombra mentale*, p. 38.

[31]   When Manganelli wrote this text in 1977, the theoretical interest in the role of the reader reached its apogee and the idea that the role of reader is to 'actualize' or 'realize' the text was broadly accepted. See Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco: Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 120.

'to harass'. It also means 'prosecute', because clearly a murder has been committed: the author is dead. The author is nothing but an 'indizio, una macchia di sangue, un giornale strappato, un urlo nella notte che nessuno ha sentito, eccetto un signore anziano che l'ha scambiato con il fischio di un treno' (*LP*, 43). The *parallelista*'s task is thus to unearth parallel stories by working as detective: ['n]el caso del Pinocchio, per esempio, io mi trovo dinanzi ad un testo in cui, senza aggiungere nulla di mio, posso combinare infinitamente gli elementi che mi vengono incontro. Posso usare il testo come un detective userebbe il delitto'.[32]

In this detective story, the skilful investigator and the culprit merge, as it is through the work of discovery and connecting verbal clues ,'tracce', 'indizi', 'orme', that the *parallelista*-detective develops new narrative sequences, thus performing the killing of the author:

> Insomma, diciamo che la distruzione – teatralmente, l'uccisione dell'autore – è una esigenza elementare della lettura. (*LP*, 71)

Every element of the hypotext is able to arouse suspicion in the *parallelista* and is subject to the most vigilant scrutinising: who painted the *trompe-l'oeil* in Geppetto's house? Why does Mastro Ciliegia have an 'armadio che stava sempre chiuso' and what is inside this disturbing wardrobe? The *parallelista*'s operation of retrieving evidence from marginal details and of developing new narrative sequences out of their combination can find an analogue in Carlo Ginzburg's *paradigma indiziario*, an epistemological method consisting in 'the ability to construct from apparently insignificant experimental data a complex reality'.[33] Indeed, the idea of narrative that Manganelli has in mind strongly resonates with Ginzburg's hypothesis that 'perhaps the actual idea of narration [...] may have originated in a hunting society'. For Ginzburg, the deciphering of tracks entails

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[32] Carlo Rafele, 'Conversazione con Giorgio Manganelli', in Don Chisciotte, 2 (1980), pp. 69-76. Now in Giorgio Manganelli, *La penombra mentale,* pp. 51-62.

[33] Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. by John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 103.

their organization in a narrative: the data collected 'is always arranged by the observer in such a way as to produce a narrative sequence'.[34]

As shown in chapter 4 of this thesis, the idea of equating the reading practice to the work of a detective also pays homage to Nabokov, as well as the implication that reading amounts to a creative process not unlike the actual writing (co-authoring) of the text. The difference between Nabokov and Manganelli is that while Nabokov's texts trap the reader into believing that there is *one* solution to the puzzle of the text (one legitimate interpretation) which the reader can find if they are clever enough (a strategy aimed at humiliating the reader and reassert the authorial mastery over the text), Manganelli declares in the preface that the text is open to an infinity of possible interpretations, and invites the reader to write their own *libro parallelo*:

> Si immagini che il libro di cui si vuol disporre la struttura parallela sia […] un cubo: ora, se il libro è cubico, e dunque a tre dimensioni, esso è percorribile non solo secondo il sentiero delle parole sulla pagina, coatto e grammaticalmente garantito, ma secondo altri itinerari, diversamente usando i modi per collegare parole e interpunzioni, lacune e 'a capo'. […] Un libro, rettamente inteso nella sua mappa cubica, diventa così minutamente infinito da proporsi, distrattamente, come comprensivo di tutti i possibili libri paralleli, che in conclusione finiranno con l'essere tutti i libri possibili. (*LP*, 8)[35]

I believe that *LP* is the text where Manganelli most explicitly makes us appreciate the possibilities of what he calls the 'gioco letterario'. As discussed in chapter 4, Manganelli was particularly interested in this aspect of Nabokov's work: in his review of Nabokov's *Invito a una Decapitazione*, Manganelli clarified how this text engages the reader in a role-play. The author takes on the role of the master, sustaining the illusion that he is in full control of the text. The reader must play the role of the author's 'affascinato compare' who recognises

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[34] Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues*, p. 103.

[35] Pietro Citati, following the publishing of *LP*, wrote on *Corriere delle Sera*: 'Quando abbiamo finito di leggere questo libro parallelo, ci sorprendiamo a immaginare quanti libri paralleli potremmo scrivere. Abbiamo già davanti a noi tutte le trame, tutti i personaggi, tutti i destini possibili'. See 'Questo Pinocchio è un vero fantasma', now in *Riga*, p. 240.

the author's superiority. According to Manganelli, the reader's task is finding out the rules of the text, 'if there are any'. The reader's entrapment depends precisely on the fact that Nabokov demands that the reader follow the rules of the game, but without telling what the rules are. Instead, in *LP*, Manganelli states the rules and the kind of reader that the text 'desires', which makes the reader's engagement with the text more explicitly 'consensual'.

LP involves the reader in a textual interaction (that for Manganelli is always libidinally charged to a certain degree, as it always involves the 'sadolanguori' and 'masodelizie' offered by playing with language) that can find an analogue in sadomasochistic role-play.[36] Shared characteristics include: the fact that both involve a power dialectic, the significance of playing roles, the fact that both *LP*'s linguistic play and sadomasochistic play are contract- and rule-bound.[37] Another point of similarity lies in the fact that both practices are shaped by and develop narratives.[38] The segments where Manganelli sets 'the rules' of the 'game' can be read as a sado-masochistic contract in which readers are told what they can do with the text, how the text 'wants to be beaten'. Meanwhile, Manganelli exemplifies how to carry out the parallel work, showing how Collodi's text is beaten into submission. This can be linked to the concept of scripting in sado-masochistic practices, defined as 'premeditated sequence[s] of intentional actions'.[39] As Eileen L. Zurbriggen and Megan R. Yost illustrate, 'sadomasochistic

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[36] *Sadolanguori e masodelizie* is the title of a 1981 article by Manganelli on the *Dizionario dei sinonimi* by Niccolò Tommaseo, now in Manganelli, *Il rumore sottile*, pp. 171-72.

[37] Martin Weinberg, Colin Williams and Charles Moser enlist the five integral components to constructing most BDSM interactions: dominance and submission, role playing, consensuality, a sexual context, and mutual definition. See 'The social constituents of sadomasochism', *Social Problems*, 31.4 (1984), pp. 379–89.

[38] On the narrative quality of masochism see Carol Siegel, *Male Masochism.* On sado-masochism and narrativity see also J. Tuomas Harviainen, 'Scripting beloved discomfort: Narratives, fantasies and authenticity in online sadomasochism' in *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media: Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds*, ed. by Mari Hatavara, Matti Hyvärinen (New York, London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 106-22.

[39] Pekka Santtila et al., 'Investigating the underlying structure in sadomasochistically oriented behavior', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 31.2 (2002), 185-96 (p. 185).

activities which require consent of the partner, are generally scripted or well-planned out scenarios'.[40] I will thus explore Kara M. Manning's idea that 'scripting' 'links the consensual practices of S/M with the composition of texts'.[41]

6.3 'Sul modo di leggere i libri'

Starting from the first pages of *LP*, Manganelli flags up that the intention of the text is to construct a fantasy to be enacted by the reader. Manganelli addresses the reader with a *captatio benevolentiae* in which, in addition to justifying himself for such an unusual practice as the writing of a 'parallel' book ('[n]on è impossibile che il candido e, fin qui, cortese lettore, si domandi se non sia per essere, la lettura del presente Libro Parallelo, una sterminata (exterminata) dilapidazione di tempo'), he emphasises that '[s]otto questo scartafaccio sta una fantasia sul modo di leggere i libri, cui non mi negherò affettuoso' (*LP,* 18). In the fantasy framed by Manganelli, the reader has to match a precise identikit: first, they should be a 'rilettore attento', which according to Nabokov is the first criterion to be a 'Good Reader' (*LP,* 18). Second, the reader should be willing to be invaded, occupied and transformed by the text: '[d]a una sillaba all'altra procede, affranto pellegrino, il lettore; unico che tenga insieme la dispersa famiglia delle parole che lo frastornano, lo invadono, lo occupano, e trasformano' (*LP,* 10). At the same time, the reader should also delight in rending, fragmenting and scrutinising the text, treating it as a dead body on which to perform an autopsy.

Furthermore, Manganelli sets out a number of rules: 1-'tutto arbitrario, tutto documentato'; 2- 'sfogliare una parola, leggere un bianco'; 3- 'non parlare delle parole che si leggono ma di quelle che si nascondono'; 4- 'uso di un refuso come indizio interpretativo'. In the preface of *LP*, the reader is provided with the 'regola aurea' of the parallel practice: 'tutto arbitrario, tutto documentato'

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[40] Eileen L. Zurbriggen and Megan R. Yost, 'Power, Desire, and Pleasure in Sexual Fantasies', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41.3 (2004), 288-300 (p. 300).

[41] Kara M. Manning, 'Pleasure and Pain', p. 52.

(*LP,* 8).[42] This oxymoronic pair should guide the reader in the discovery of new paths of reading 'diversamente usando i modi per collegare parole e interpunzioni, lacune e "a capo"' (*LP,* 8). The reader should join together different domains of signs retrieved in different parts of the text, exploiting its 'cubic', three-dimensional structure. This combinatory operation can be repeated an infinite number of times, corroborating another theoretical standpoint of the parallel practice: the infinity of the text: 'Nessun libro finisce [...] Il libro finito è infinito' (*LP,* 192). To understand the structure that Manganelli has in mind, we could think of the category of the hypertext, a term introduced by Theodor Nelson in the 1960s to describe a 'non-sequential writing-text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read as an interactive screen'.[43] In the hypertext, like in the 'parallel' text, words are links to other distant words, connected in signifying webs, and the reader has the choice to 'activate' a plot or not. The possibility of the reader to make choices and interact with the text is reiterated in other instructions such as:

> Posso sfogliare una parola, [...] leggere un bianco, tacere un suono, di ogni lettera fare un'iniziale. (*LP,* 19)

The reader can 'leaf through' the words, thus ignore them and instead read a blank space. This is reminiscent of Wolfgang Iser's 'blanks', spaces of indeterminacy that stimulate the participation of the reader.[44]

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[42] As we have seen, Manganelli used similar words ('arbitrari' and 'rigorosissimi') in describing Nabokov's literary game in his review 'La scacchiera' (p. 100).

[43] The hypertext, as George Landow argues, is the best approximation of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, a model of discourse freed from binarisms, genealogies, hierarchies. They used the arborescent structure of the rhizome as a metaphor to represent a system that – unlike the tree-like structures – 'connects any point to any other point' and joins 'very different regimes of signs, even non-signs states'. Just as Manganelli, so Deleuze and Guattari 'find ruptures as important as the link', because they value principles as 'unpredictability and discontinuity' more than 'hierarchical modes of communication and pre-established paths'. George p. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 58-60.

[44] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

The reader should follow the *parallelista*'s example and be very suspicious of every blank and every absence in the text: the first, 'catastrophic', absence registered by the *parallelista* is that of the King in Pinocchio's fable. Manganelli opens his text magnifying this absence, which he understands as a clear provocation and fraud to the reader:

> C'era una volta…
> 'Un Re…'
> No…
> Quale catastrofico inizio, quanto laconico e aspro, una provocazione, se si tiene conto che i destinatari sono i 'piccoli lettori', i 'ragazzi', soli competenti di fiabe e regole fiabesche. […] Il 'c'era una volta' è, sappiamo, la strada maestra, il cartello segnaletico, la parola d'ordine del mondo della fiaba. E tuttavia in questo caso la strada è ingannevole, il cartello mente […] Infatti, varcata la soglia di quel regno, ci si avvede che non esiste il Re. È difficile sopravvalutare l'importanza di questa frode iniziale. (*LP*, 11)

From the absence of the King, linked to the absence of the author, originates one of the parallel stories, consisting in the discovery of all the places in which the King/author is hiding.

It is indeed very important not to talk about the words that are actually written, but of all those that are hidden. The reader who wants to become a *parallelista* should be alerted by every word, because it could be clandestine and disguised:

> Questa sorta di commentatore non parlerà delle parole che si leggono, ma di tutte quelle che vi si nascondono; giacché ogni parola è stata scritta in un certo punto per nascondere altre, innumerevoli parole. Cercherà le parole clandestine […] perché queste sono parole che fanno contrabbando di altre parole, sono travestite. (*LP*, 19-20)

For example, the fact that Geppetto wears a yellow wig is in all probability a receptacle of clandestine words. *Why* does Geppetto wear this eccentric, golden wig? Has it something to do with the absence of the King in the fable?

The idea that the reader should look for other senses that run parallel to the literal and explicit message of texts is furthered by the self-satisfaction that Manganelli shows when he spots a typo – 'agevole quanto difficile da riconoscere' – in collating different editions of Collodi's text:

> Era per l'appunto una nottataccia d'inverno': due dei tre testi che adopero – giacché carte diverse e diversi inchiostri raccontano fole diverse – hanno la frase d'apertura a questo modo, come certamente venne scritto a suo tempo. Ma un'altra ha inserito un refuso, agevole quanto difficile da riconoscere, 'una nottataccia d'inferno'. (*LP,* 40)

The *parallelista* claims the hermeneutic value of this typo, showing that 'inferno' can be linked to other clues in the text – the lighting that makes the sky look like 'pigliasse fuoco' and the seemingly abandoned village that 'pareva il paese dei morti' – generating a new network of significance related to the semantic areas of hell, fire and death.[45] Fire represents Pinocchio's death, his 'costante incubo', because 'Pinocchio è irreparabilmente combustibile' (*LP,* 59). This web of meanings is confirmed by the fact that when Pinocchio recounts the events of that fatal night to Geppetto, he says: 'È stata una nottata d'inferno', and here Manganelli gloats: 'una frase che spiega e ribadisce il precedente refuso' (*LP,* 48).[46] Although the *parallelista* acknowledges that, without any doubt, 'l'uso di un refuso come indizio interpretativo sia, dal punto di vista della corretta filologia, assolutamente mostruoso', he nonetheless defends his unorthodox use of a typo in light of the ampler economy of the text, which actually sustains an interpretation of the puppets vicissitudes linked to the

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[45]   The use of a misprint for interpretation is another idea that owes to Nabokov. See for example *Pale Fire*'s poet Shade who believes he can find the meaning of life and death through odd coincidences like the misprint fountain/mountain he reads in an article. In his published lecture on 'The Art of Literature and Commonsense', Nabokov describes the act of wondering at typographical errors and details as the 'highest forms of consciousness': 'This capacity to wonder at trifles [...] these asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness, and it is in this childishly speculative state of mind, so different from commonsense and its logic, that we know the world to be good'. *Lectures on Literature*, p. 374.

[46]   Andrea Cortellessa specifies that 'inferno' is not a typo. On the contrary, it represents the last choice of the author among two different versions of the text. See his *Libri segreti*, p. 265.

semantic areas of hell and death.[47] As Guido Maria Gallerani points out, indeed, the peculiarity of *LP* is that it extends narrative contents that actually *exist* in Collodi.[48]

Manganelli grapples again with the dialectic between textual openness and closedness in the form of the most fundamental and vexing hermeneutical problem: are there limits to the interpretation? The assumption of the 'infinity' of the text seems to suggest that texts are open to any interpretation, but the discussion presented so far suggests that in *LP* limits to interpretation are flexed, deformed, but not broken. As the *regola aurea* prescribes, all the links and connections made by the *parallelista* are to be verified and documented in the text: 'all documented' is later explained thus: 'le parentele delle parole passano per quei nervi del lettore: eppure han da essere verificabili, rintracciabili nel testo' (*LP*, 18). The reader is asked to hang in the balance, and endure the related tension, between devoted exegesis and explosive fantasy.

The 'regola aurea' and its numerous corollaries could be seen as the paradoxical rule of breaking all the rules of orthodox philology. The reader's role here postulated is to perform a creative task: reading between the lines, between the typographical signs, or focusing on the most negligible and least perceptible details, can stimulate conjectures and generate a new narrative. The reader, through this technique of creative re-writing of the text, becomes its new

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[47] Alessandra Diazzi, 'A Lapsus, My Little Readers: The Presence of Psychoanalysis in Giorgio Manganelli's *Pinocchio: Un libro parallelo*', *The Italianist*, 39.1 (2019), 64-88 (p. 70). Diazzi suggests that Manganelli's hermeneutic use of typos can be linked to Freud's interpretation of lapsus as the irruption of the unconscious: '[*LP*'s] idea that any element of a rationally oriented discourse may bring with it "additional" sense beyond the conscious significance reveals an overt debt to a Freudian understanding of "meaning" and, consequently, of "interpretation"'. This typos is thus one of the 'symptoms' pointing at the fact that 'the interpretative method that Manganelli adopted to reread – and rewrite – Collodi's book takes the shape of a psychoanalytic approach to the text itself' (pp. 69-70).

[48] Guido Mattia Gallerani, 'Libri paralleli: saggi critici e ibridazione narrativa (Barthes, Manganelli, Lavagetto, Deresiewicz)', *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, 5 (2016), 67-88 (p. 76).

author, one of its – potentially infinite – authors.[49] As already mentioned, this means for Manganelli that the reader has to perform the 'teatrale uccisione dell'autore'. On the other hand, this does not imply complete freedom for the reader, who is rather conceived as 'acting out' Manganelli's scripted fantasy. In Manganelli's terms, since the murder of the author is carefully planned by the author himself, it is rather identifiable as a case of 'suicidio per interposta persona' (*LP*, 70).

Manganelli explains this concept when he discusses the role of the puppet-master Mangiafoco, 'l'unico personaggio a lui congeniale', as Lietta Manganelli argues.[50] Manganelli makes several allusions to the idea that Mangiafoco is an author in disguise, betrayed by the ink black colour of his beard ('come uno scarabocchio d'inchiostro', *LP*, 64) and gives two readings of this figure. In the first interpretation, Mangiafoco is an 'Orco fallito', who lives an internal dichotomy. On the one hand, he wants to be perceived as terribly powerful: '[n]on sappiamo se sia potente, ma certo vuol passare per tale. Sui burattini sembra avere un dominio tirannico e spietato [...] un potere illimitato e degradante' and, to this end, he displays all the necessary paraphernalia like a whip 'di serpenti e code di volpe' (*LP*, 65). On the other hand, Mangiafoco is easily moved to compassion, which he expresses by sneezing. Manganelli approaches thus this 'caso clinico teatrale':

> Come Orco non può decorosamente mendicare tenerezze; dovrà pertanto inventare un percorso sapientemente indiretto. Come Orco dà ordini terribili, gli ordini terribili generano suppliche, le suppliche gli consentono di concedere la grazia senza cessare di essere tirannico, la grazia concessa gli guadagna devozione ed evviva. (*LP*, 68)

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[49] María Antonia Yélamos Martínez, 'La Escritura de la "Sombra" en el "Libro Paralelo" de Giorgio Manganelli', *Tonos digital: Revista de estudios filológicos*, 19 (2010).

[50] A privileged bond with this character is confirmed by the fact that Manganelli will script an 'interview' with Mangiafoco for a short movie directed by Mario Monicelli, *Conoscete veramente Mangiafoco?* (1981), with Manganelli playing the interviewer and Vittorio Gassman in the role of the Ogre (available on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OY4jrb1oPI).

This 'masterfully indirect route' is actualised when Arlecchino is sentenced to death in Pinocchio's place: this terrible sentence pushes the puppet to 'recitare la supplica' and 'esegu[ire] la grande scena' of self-sacrifice, which in turn makes Mangiafoco sneeze and grant Pinocchio a pardon. In this indirect way, Mangiafoco is able to obtain by Pinocchio a loving kiss on the tip of his nose – 'luogo sommamente pinocchiesco', as Manganelli comments.

The second reading given by Manganelli of the puppeteer's role comes from the observation that:

> Non v'è dubbio che, al momento del sacrificio teatrale di Pinocchio, egli sia dalla parte del burattino. Ma se è con Pinocchio, non può che essere contro quella canaglia di se stesso. Si tratta di un vero regicidio complottato e portato avanti con sottigliezza da Mangiafoco. Ma un complotto inteso alla distruzione di sé partecipa del suicidio per interposta persona. (*LP*, 70)

Manganelli notices that through this theatrical game of self-destruction 'ognuno dei personaggi vuol cessare di essere quell'altra cosa che la sua condizione teatrale gli impone di essere' (*LP*, 70). This is probably the reason why the *parallelista* is distinctly 'congenial' with Mangiafoco: like the puppet-master, the *parallelista*'s condition is dichotomic, for he plays two roles at the same time (reader and writer). Like Mangiafoco, the *parallelista* conspires the killing of his authorial self, 'quell'altra cosa che la condizione teatrale gli impone di essere', and 'uses' the reader to this purpose.[51]

LP displays Manganelli's evolving ideas on the problem of authorship and textual ownership already analysed in the previous chapter. This reflection takes to the extreme the theories of Umberto Eco in *Opera aperta* (1962), the 'theoretical

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[51] A reflection on the fact that authoriality is in itself a theatrical, fictional role to be played in society is found in Manganelli's description of his participation in the mentioned television programme with Gassman: 'Nota questo, io non ero truccato, Gassman sì; e tuttavia io sapevo di essere truccato, sapevo di essermi trasformato in quella 'cosa' ignota che è un me stesso nell'universo del gioco. A una giornalista che mi chiedeva se avrei accettato di farmi truccare risposi che ero già truccato; ero truccato da Giorgio Manganelli'. See Manganelli, 'Faccio l'attore in TV', in *Antologia privata* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989), pp. 222-23.

bible for the Neo-avant-garde'.[52] 'Openness' meant for Eco a text conceived to produce a multiplicity of readings and promote a more 'active' involvement of the reader in the (re)construction of the text.[53] Manganelli, to dismantle once and for all the humanist model of the isolated artist in possession of the text as property, radicalises Eco's propositions and seems to go as far as to suggest that texts are collectively produced.

In *LP*, we find some of the most memorable formulations on the idea of the author's language dispossession. For example, Manganelli argues that the author's main functions are giving names to streets and making people meet, and possibly marry or fornicate, at congresses dedicated to their work. However, these elements are not sufficient to prove the author's existence:

> Tuttavia, a mio avviso, tutto ciò non prova con sicurezza che l'autore esista. [...] come quando si fanno stare a casa i bambini da scuola in onore della Patria o della Vittoria, che ovviamente non esistono. [...] Sotto ogni punto di vista, l'autore è una ipotesi innecessaria, come è stato acutamente affermato di Dio, altro grande anonimo. (*LP*, 43)

Manganelli defines as 'risibile' the idea of textual property and also the idea of a humanist, 'anthropocentric' model of authorship:

> Aggiungerò che l'autore non può esserci, giacché la definizione dell'autore, essere umano che scrive parole al fine di raccontare una storia o incollare una poesia presuppone che ci sia un uomo fermo e che le parole, dolci satelliti senza misteri, gli girino attorno, ed egli le catturi e disponga in un sistema verbostellare che chiama "la mia opera". Risibile, risibile. (*LP*, 44-45)

Instead of a 'Ptolemaic' author-centric model, Manganelli proposes an opposed system in which, given a certain text, a 'constellation' of authors gravitates around it. In Manganelli's view, the text produces 'innumerevoli autori':

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[52] Caesar, *Umberto Eco*, p. 32.

[53] This assumed a political significance for the Italian Neo-avant-garde as it 'promote[d] a more active critical stand towards all texts and codes of contemporary culture'. Lucia Re, 'Language, Gender, and Sexuality', p. 148.

> Consideriamo che sia il testo a produrre l'autore: dopotutto non è il figlio a far sì che il padre sia tale? Non possiamo supporre che il testo sia un tuorlo che può produrre innumerevoli autori, e che anzi io stesso altro non sia che uno degli innumerevoli autori del testo? (*LP,* 44)

6.4 A 'pedagogical' Manganelli?

Let us move on to consider a practical example of a parallel story. The parallel itineraries indicated by Manganelli are countless, although many are only suggested in the form of allusions or questions that remain unanswered. In these cases, the *parallelista* resembles the despotic *buffone* in *Encomio del tiranno* who, when asked to tell a story, sketches some options and then abruptly breaks off communication: 'vi ho dato i pezzi, fatela da voi' (*ET,* 92). However, the *parallelista* also explicitly provides instructions on the art of parallelism by drawing our attention to an exemplary parallel story he has traced: the case of the little coffin.

Investigating the vicissitudes involving Pinocchio and the Fairy, the *parallelista* detects in *Le Avventure* two highly suspicious *piccole bare da morto,* one in chapter XV and the other in chapter XVII. Although seemingly unrelated, the *parallelista* becomes convinced that these are instead the clues of an 'obvious' parallel story, which even the most mediocre detective would have spotted:

> Il caso della 'piccola bara da morto' può dare qualche suggerimento sul modo adeguato di commentare, o piuttosto di scrivere in parallelo. In realtà questa storia parallela della piccola bara non è raccontata direttamente, ma è di tale evidenza che solo un critico malevolo potrebbe considerarla come inadeguatamente immotivata. Il più modesto detective non potrebbe evitare di annotare nel suo taccuino la pregnante apparizione di due 'piccole bare' nel giro di poche ore; ma che tanto non sia concesso al più umile e umiliato chiosatore, pare intollerabile vessazione. (*LP,* 99)

The first coffin is encountered in chapter XV, when Pinocchio meets the Fairy for the first time. Hunted by the assassins, Pinocchio implores a 'beautiful young girl', with 'deep-blue' hair and a face 'white as wax' to let him inside her white

house.[54] 'Gelida, ignara, indifferente', the Fairy rejects the puppet, consigning him to the assassins.[55] By way of explanation, she claims to be dead and to be waiting for her coffin: 'sono morta anch'io [...] Aspetto la bara che venga a portarmi via' (*LP*, 86-87). The second coffin appears in chapter XVII of *Avventure*, when Pinocchio refuses to take the medicine prescribed by the Fairy declaring that he would rather die. The Fairy indulges in one her moments of cruelty: 'la sua crudeltà consiste nel prendere alla lettera Pinocchio': immediately, a little coffin appears, ready to take Pinocchio away (*LP*, 97). Manganelli correlates this with the previous coffin and concludes that these two must be the same little coffin, because they appear in the same place.

This flimsy evidence illuminates for Manganelli an important aspect of the connection between the two characters: if they share the same coffin, this means that they also have 'una sola morte in due [...], oscuramente la loro parentela si rivela' (*LP*, 97). Here starts the parallel story that runs throughout the whole book, correlating remote events and objects in light of the relationship of 'reciproco morirsi' that binds the two characters (*LP*, 104). From this moment onwards, as Andrea Maiello points out, 'tutti gli eventi successivi, disubbidienze e pentimenti, cadute e riabilitazioni, sono inquadrabili in una precisa dimensione rituale'.[56]

Just as the case of the little coffin is not 'directly told' in Collodi's text, Manganelli also abstains from straightforwardly relating the story. Rather, the reader has to infer a narrative thanks to the analogies and parallelisms between the various 'clues' tracked down by Manganelli in Collodi's book. As noted before, the reader, while focusing on the single episode as such, has also to read it as simultaneously participating in the discourse at multiple levels and as propagating its effects and significance in various parts of the book:

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[54]   Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, p. 20.

[55]   'Icy coldness' is also the feminine ideal of Masoch, the most important characteristic of the woman torturer according to Deleuze. See Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 51.

[56]   Maiello, 'Pinocchio', p. 464.

> L'operazione di scoperta di una storia parallela all'interno di una storia è alimentata dalla convinzione che il testo sia da considerare come un luogo fondo, penetrando nel quale noi siamo inseguiti dagli echi delle parole pronunciate all'entrata. (*LP,* 99)

The 'parallel' narrative thus depends on echoes, repetitions and recovery, thus on the reader's ability to read backwards as well as forward. For example, the word 'cemiteriale' used by the *parallelista* in chapter XV to describe the green of the wood surrounding the little white house of the Fairy anticipates the episode in chapter XXIII when the place actually turns into a cemetery: Pinocchio comes back to the little white house of the Fairy, finding it transformed in a little white gravestone. Here, the importance of the little coffin is confirmed: Manganelli concludes that there must certainly be the little coffin underground. The 'piccola lapide' announces that there rests the 'the lovely fairy with blue hair who died of grief when abandoned by her little brother Pinocchio'.[57] The inscription on the tombstone confirms Manganelli's idea that the Fairy, without Pinocchio's recognition, cannot exist: 'sebbene Fata, essa non può esistere se non viene riconosciuta' (*LP,* 125).

From the analysis of a 'parallel narrative' it emerges that the role of the reader, as it is scripted, is not to passively consume the text's words, but to participate in a linguistic play, turning into a parallel writer. Manganelli indeed beckons the reader to interfere and dissect the textual body of *LP* in order to submit it to their will and compose their own 'parallel work'. However, as we have seen, this 'killing of the author' is rather a 'suicide through a third party', since the parallel work of the reader is scripted by the text and is an enactment of the scenarios designed and desired by the author. Tuomas Harviainen discusses the kind of narratives found in sadomasochist activities and describes these as growing starting from the script. The script provides scenarios and a set of imperatives and instructions on which participants in the s/m play construct sequences of actions: 'As event-action sequences by active agents, which are in their way 'written', and can be later 'read' [...], narratives build up as the play takes place'. These narratives can be 'properly perceived only in retrospect, but

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[57] Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, p. 33.

[...] may also be consciously constructed during play'.[58] Similarly to the scripting of sadomasochist sessions, the *parallelista* disseminates 'story seeds' from which 'grows the activity' of the reader, while also 'providing rules and instructions to guide to what directions it grows'.[59]

The nature of the reader's response elicited in *LP* seems to differ from the other works by Manganelli analysed thus far. It might be noted that the structuring principle of *ET* is similar to that of *LP*: it could be viewed as another combinatory game that provides the reader with elements of possible plots left suspended, a sort of 'do it yourself' novel ('fatevela da voi'). This idea is ironically entertained by Manganelli starting from *Hilarotragoedia*, presented in the inside cover flap as a 'do it yourself' handbook about suicide: 'pare[...] cosa stravagante, che, tra tanti completi e dilettosi do it yourself, quello appunto si sia trascurato, che ha attinenza con la propria morte'. However, just like in *H* also in *ET*, the suggestion of a 'diy novel' is clearly a joke: actually the suspended text does not seem to elicit the participation of the reader, who rather, as Francucci notes, follows the 'story of the interrupted story' (note that this is the 'title' of one of the *buffone*'s untold stories): 'La storia, alla fine, sarà costituita, inevitabilmente, da tutti i tentativi compiuti per abortirla'.[60] Also in the case of *NC* one might argue that the aesthetic of suspension governing the text might call for a more active participation of the reader; however, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the tension towards closedness seems to prevail:

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[58] Harviainen, 'Scripting beloved discomfort', p. 107.

[59] Harviainen, 'Scripting beloved discomfort', p. 111. Interestingly, Harviainen links the kind of narrativity of sadomasochistic session to Allan Kaprow's idea of Chance (1966): 'Chance artworks are things that are allowed to change (or even be changed by people who come in contact with them), and whatever is the result of the process is to be treated as if that were what the artwork was supposed to become all along. In narrativist terms, a Chance piece is given its primary narrative only post de facto, but that narrative is to be seen as fully intentional and pre-planned' (p. 111). Manganelli conceives the text *Le avventure di Pinocchio* in a similar fashion, as a work that already comprises all the infinite possible stories that may originate from the interaction with the text.

[60] Francucci, 'Lo scrittore-buffone', p. 516.

the text expects a reader who gives up with the attempt to 'make sense' and abandon themselves to a masochistic bliss.

In contrast, it might be argued that *LP*'s 'partly aggressive, partly loving' game – to borrow Manganelli's words – has an educational, didactic purpose: Manganelli provides instructions on what he means by 'reading', 'writing' and 'literature'. Lavinia Torti maintains that there is a dialogical dimension in Manganelli's works based on a 'componente "normativa"'.[61] Although her main argument is that the 'dialogismo' in Manganelli concerns the debate and interaction between different texts of the author written in different periods and contexts, the scholar also argues that 'la comunicazione tra l'autore e il lettore avviene, e colui che scrive dà di frequente istruzioni su come leggere un testo. […] dà sistematicamente delle direttive su come dovrebbe essere la letteratura e su ciò di cui dovrebbe trattare'.[62] It emerges that, paradoxically, while in *LP* Manganelli dismisses the pedagogical element in the fable of Pinocchio, he is driven by a pedagogical mandate, subtly disguised as a *gioco*. It seems to me that it is in *LP* that Manganelli fully assumes the role of 'umile pedagogo', which is how he sneeringly presented himself in the inside cover flap of *H*. If, in the end, after Manganelli's training (inspired in turn by Nabokov's training) it is still not very clear what literature is and what function it might serve, at least we can reach the conclusion that, as Barthes says: 'Literature is what gets taught'.[63]

6.5 Mutual recognition

Thus far, I have argued that *LP* offers a mode of relationality with the reader based on consent, mutuality and cooperation. In the following section, I will focus on the fact that in *LP* Manganelli describes relationships in terms of 'mutual recognition', something that can hardly be found in any other text by

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[61] Lavinia Torti, 'Il dialogismo di Giorgio Manganelli: coerenze tematiche e lessicali dal laboratorio pre-ilarotragico alle ultime prose', *Diacritica*, 3.21 (2018), 61-73 (p. 62).

[62] Torti, 'Il dialogismo', pp. 61-62.

[63] Quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction Second Edition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 172.

the author. Literature on sadomasochistic practices reveals that the meaning instilled in these forms of interaction by practitioners includes mutual recognition and heightened self-awareness. For example, Volker Woltersdorff addresses the relational dimension of masochistic self-shattering in terms of mutual recognition.[64] Also the kind of sado-masochistic relations Lynda Hart has in mind represents an 'acting out of commitment, a willingness to be transformed through the recognition of the other'.[65]

From the case of the little coffin, Manganelli extrapolates an economy of relations based on 'reciproco morirsi' and 'riconoscimento'. These enigmatic definitions make sense if read through a sadomasochistic lens. 'Reciproco morirsi' implies that existence is possible only if recognised by the other: as we have already seen, the Fairy 'non può esistere se non viene riconosciuta' and 'deve un'altra volta seviziare Pinocchio per cessare di essere morta' (*LP*, 137). Pinocchio as well has to sacrifice himself, to experience total loss ('perdita totale'), in order to be recognised by the objects of his love (the Fairy and Geppetto). In Manganelli's words:

> Con loro [Geppetto and the Fairy] egli sperimenta una perdita totale, che piedi bruciati e naso lungo possono solo rappresentare come caricatura. Egli viene continuamente rifiutato, e infine nuovamente accolto: ma nel momento in cui viene accolto, egli fugge di nuovo. Egli deve perdersi per essere trovato, deve essere trovato per perdersi. Egli ama colui o colei che gli dà la disperazione. (*LP*, 102)

Hence, the story of Pinocchio is a story of repeated attempts to deal with the 'perdita totale', what Lacan calls the Thing: 'the unimaginable, unrepresentable

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[64] Volker Woltersdorff, 'Masochistic Self-Shattering'. Woltersdorff rethinks Jessica Benjamin's hetero-normative model of recognition (in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, 1988) and suggests instead a queer model involving the partner's mutual undoing of their selves.

[65] Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 80.

reality of loss'.[66] Pinocchio's burned feet and long nose caricaturise loss, which is otherwise unrepresentable.

If, as Lacan maintains, love is the desire to find self-recognition in the love of the other, self-sacrifice is a way to conceal the trauma that the other person cannot provide recognition. As Simon Gaunt explains:

> The trauma that the logic of sacrifice conceals, then, is the possibility that the other does not have the power the subject imagines to confer recognition, the trauma that the other itself may be lacking. Sacrifice denies this trauma because it presupposes that the other *does* exists and lacks nothing.[67]

The ritual identified by Andrea Maiello in *LP* assumes the traits of a sadomasochistic performance, a rigid theatrical protocol that entails self-loss and whose reward is the other's gaze, acknowledgment, recognition.

Both Pinocchio and the Fairy have to perform and suffer 'death' to generate an encounter, mutually acting as a guide for the other in this transformative process:

> entrambe le morti vengono recitate e patite; [...] quasi essi disponessero d'un'unica morte in due, e solo attraversandola, e agendo reciprocamente da guida, si possono incontrare e iniziare il lento e instabile riconoscimento. (*LP,* 92)

When Pinocchio looks for the Fairy, she is always inaccessible to him: she pretends to be dead ('I am dead too'), buried ('here lies the lovely Fairy'), sleeping ('the Fairy is asleep and does not wish to be awakened'), lying sick at the hospital ('the Fairy is bedridden in a hospital').[68] Pinocchio has to perform the waiting (often outside the door of the Fairy's house) and to experience death, abandoning himself to the tortures of the Fairy: 'toccherà a Pinocchio salvare se stesso e la Fata, una prima volta con la morte, ora perdendo i sensi,

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[66]   Bailly, *Lacan*, p. 57.

[67]   Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 30.

[68]   Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, pp. 20, 33, 47, 69.

sotto le torture della madre Strega' (*LP*, 154). Finally, the puppet finds regeneration and recognition in the Fairy's gaze and vice versa: 'in mezzo alla folla, in mezzo a coloro che non hanno nome [...] Pinocchio ha ritrovato colei che lo conosce [...] È stato "visto" ed ha "visto"', (*LP*, 177).

From the fantasised nature of recognition derives the need to endlessly reiterate it. According to Deleuze, the masochist contract generates the ritual, which is 'essential to [the masochist], since it epitomizes the world of fantasy'.[69] Hence, by means of repetition, the reality of the impossibility of recognition is dimmed. This dialectic of recognition marks also Pinocchio's bond with Geppetto: after each abandonment, Pinocchio and Geppeto always recognise each other: in chapter XXIII ('Reciprocamente irraggiungibili e perduti, Pinocchio e Geppetto si riconoscono', *LP*, 128) and in chapter XXXV (although they are 'personaggi cui è negata ogni possibilità d'incontro' there are signs of 'una alleanza': 'Pinocchio e Geppetto si riconoscono', *LP*, 188).

The opposite is found when Maganelli describes the marvellous 'Land of Toys' in chapter XXXI. Also in this instance, Manganelli's understanding of the dynamics between characters pivots on the concepts of play and recognition. This particular place stands out for the solitary nature of the boys' games and for the impossibility of knowing and recognising each other:

> Tutti i giochi dei ragazzi sembrano avere questa caratteristica: di essere solitari ('chi gioca alle noci, chi alle piastrelle, chi alla palla, chi andava in velocipede...'); il furore del gioco non consente dialoghi [...] Tutti sono amici, ma nessuno si conosce. (*LP*, 166)

Manganelli notes that the isolated condition of the boys is heightened by the fact that they are all males: '[l]a città accoglie solo maschi: essa è fatta a misura della loro fantasia aggressiva e frustrata' (*LP*, 166). Commenting on the all-maleness of the *Paese dei Balocchi* Manganelli writes:

> In questa metropoli dell'euforia non c'è gioia; veramente, avevo scritto matropoli: e non so se questa città sia più notevole per il

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[69] Deleuze, *Coldness*, p. 94.

> rifiuto di accesso a tutte le madri, o per la loro continua presenza negativa. (*LP,* 165)

Manganelli returns here to the hermeneutical and epiphanic value of typos: the fact that he wrote 'matropoli' instead of 'metropoli' leads him to the hypothesis that this city is populated only by males because of a principle of exclusion of the maternal: 'ogni Bambina custodisce il progetto di una mamma' (*LP,* 166). The Land of Toys represents the isolated economy of the self that I have plotted in other texts by Manganelli, which is based on the exclusion of women and on solipsistic, self-centred games. In *LP,* Manganelli seems to advocate the overcoming of this model, by contrasting Pinocchio's experience in the Land of Toys with the puppet's yearning for passionate bonds of love in other chapters. According to Manganelli, Pinocchio becomes progressively ready to 'sperimenta[re] la vergogna liberatrice, la vergogna cui sempre ritorna e donde sempre fugge, di essere oggetto e soggetto d'amore' and to 'vivere e interpretare non solo il proprio ma altrui destini'(*LP,* 136)

I would like to make one final consideration concerning the connection that Manganelli forges between 'mutual recognition' and 'death', which Manganelli develops in discussing the relationship with the most important female presence in the fable – the Fairy. By linking 'riconoscersi' and 'morirsi', Manganelli might be suggesting that the acknowledgement of one's finitude can constitute the foundation for a new form of relationality. Mutual recognition, for an author 'tanatocentrico' like Manganelli, has to be based on the acknowledgment of sharing a common destiny, that of mortality.[70] This could represent a step towards a rethinking of relationality between genders based on analogy rather than difference or abolition of differences. As mentioned in chapter 1, this view resonates with Kaja Silverman's argument in *Flesh of My Flesh* that death is 'the most capacious and enabling of all analogies', because it is what 'connects us to

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[70] The adjective 'tanatocentrico' was used by Manganelli to refer to *H* in a letter to the painter Gastone Novelli, available in Mariarosa Bricchi, *Manganelli e la menzogna*, pp. 85-86 and now also in Andrea Cortellessa, *Il libro è altrove: Ventisei piccole monografie su Giorgio Manganelli* (Milano-Bologna: Sossella, 2020).

every other being'.[71] For this reason, taking cognisance of our mortality can constitute the bedrock for an analogical view of gender relations. In particular, Silverman highlights the need for a reconfiguration of the 'Western imagination' and its cultural constructs on masculinity, which are predicated upon the repudiation of the masculine subject's share in mortality through the projection of death onto woman, like Orpheus that returns to earth leaving Eurydice behind and 'attempts to rid himself of his mortality by feminizing it'.[72] For this reason, according to Silverman:

> Until we learn to live in a way that takes cognisance of our mortality –
> to be oriented 'towards death' – all of our attempts to devise a more
> equitable society will end in failure.[73]

On closer inspection, perhaps Manganelli is more faithful to *Avventure* than appears at first sight. His version of the story of Pinocchio still involves a puppet without strings who wants to become 'a real boy': 'il minuscolo burattino [...] è corrotto ed esaltato dal suo sogno di trasmutazione umana' (*LP*, 52). However, for Manganelli, becoming human means becoming mortal, hence the only way in which Pinocchio can reach his goal is by 'learning' to die. This line of reading is supported by a number of remarks made by Manganelli. For example, Manganelli comments the scene in the Great Marionette Theatre, when Mangiafuoco demands that Pinocchio be burned as firewood for his roasted mutton, thus:

> [Pinocchio] con la sua voce disperata, urla la verità del mondo di
> fuori: 'Non voglio morire!....'. [...] Pinocchio ha orrore della morte
> perché non saprebbe recitarla. Per poter 'morire' egli ora ha ancora
> bisogno di 'vivere'. (*LP*, 65-66)

The truth of human condition, the truth which lies outside the theatre ('il mondo di fuori'), is finitude, but Pinocchio is still not ready to 'play' it. Every

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[71] Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, pp. 180 and 4.

[72] Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, p. 5.

[73] Silverman, *Flesh of my Flesh*, pp. 180-81.

step of Pinocchio's journey consists in a 'gioco' or a 'recita' through which Pinocchio learns 'the lessons of death as the fundamental facts of existence'.[74]

Falkoff, in concluding her discussion on male subjectivity in Manganelli, also turns to Silverman's revaluation in *Flesh of my Flesh* of the principles of analogy and likeness as the starting point for a new form of human relations that does not exclude woman but that is based on 'a recognition of an ontological sameness shared by all'.[75] However, she does so to show instead that Manganelli is still bound up with patriarchal masculinity, with the legacy of Orpheus' 'banishing gaze'.[76] Indeed, my account of *LP* must be approached with some caution as this text is highly ambiguous: on one hand, it is true that all the characters participate in Pinocchio's initiation towards death; on the other, the Fairy is portrayed as the Queen of this realm:

> In questo libro senza Re, essa è la Regina [...] Ma quello che regge nelle sue mani mai descritte è la morte, il Transito per sé e per gli altri. (*LP*, 178)

The figure of the Fairy, like any other feminine presences in Manganelli's work, can be read against the archetype of the Great Mediterranean Mother: the Fairy is a powerful and dangerous maternal figure which connects once more the mother with the bringer of both life and death. It might be concluded that this text perpetuates, just like the rest of Manganelli's opus, the feminisation of death pervading Western society, which, as Silverman shows, has far reaching consequences in terms of gender equality.

However, another reading of *LP* is possible, as the text also foregrounds Pinocchio's gradual embracing of finitude as an inevitable part of human life. Here emerges again how Manganelli, while criticising the pedagogical and moral institutions which try to turn the puppet into a 'good' boy, seems to offer an oblique pedagogical reflection, one that would be consistent with the ethical

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[74] Brintnall, *Ecce Homo*, p. 99.

[75] Falkoff, *After Autharchy*, p. 117.

[76] Falkoff, *After Autarchy*, p. 117.

project of making room for death in Western conceptions of subjectivity which can be found in other texts by Manganelli. Cristiano Bedin holds for example that in *Esperimento con l'India,*

> the writer-traveler feels relieved – nearly reassured – that in India death, decomposition and monstrosity are considered as an inescapable part of human life. [...] Manganelli's experiment is a kind of escape from the hygienic comfort of opulent western bourgeoisie, which has forgotten its corporeality, its excrements, its cadavers.[77]

Arguably, reconciling the subject with its own mortality is given extra weight in *LP*, as it is posited as the foundation of a new way of experiencing self and other, based on ontological kinship instead of separation.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, emphasis has been laid on Manganelli's concern with the 'placement' of the subject, by connecting the ideas of the author as victim – which is related to the spatial condition of marginalisation and exclusion – to the dialectic between openness and closedness that informs Manganelli's work. Delving further into the question of whether a masochistic economy of the self has the potential to override the closed, 'a-relational' model of male subjectivity that has emerged in the previous chapters, I have shown that in *LP* Manganelli seems able to shift from monologue – or 'ventriloquio' – to dialogue.[78]

I have explored the sado-masochistic relationship that Manganelli establishes with the reader building on the idea of role play and game. Placing *LP* within the framework of sociological studies on sado-masochistic role play has helped me highlight that in this text the relationship with the reader is based on consensual and collaborative fantasy play and power exchanges. By linking the concept of scripting in s/m practices to the writing of texts, I have demonstrated that the

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[77] Cristiano Bedin, 'An experimental meta-travel to "the headquarter of the Absolute": the India of Giorgio Manganelli', *DTCF Dergisi:* The *Journal of Languages and History-Geography of Ankara University*, 58.2 (2018), 1535-1556 (pp. 1548-49).

[78] Cortellessa, *Il libro è altrove*, p. 54.

text stages a fantasy to be enacted by the reader, providing scenarios, rules and 'story seeds' from which the reader's intervention on the text can grow.

The investigation of this second part of the thesis, which started with Nabokov's hermeneutical training, has led me to draw out an educational, instructive dimension in Manganelli, which in the other texts discussed was hidden behind the armour of facetious masks: the 'guide through Hell' in *Dall'inferno* and the 'guid[a] compit[a]' to the text in *NC*. Finally, shifting the focus onto the gender variable, we notice a move toward a notion of gender relations based on the recognition of the other and on analogy, which fractures both of the paradigms emerged in the previous chapters of difference and abolition of differences.

Conclusion

My use here of sado-masochism as a framework has provided a distinctive approach to questions of gender, sexuality and subjectivity in Manganelli's work. The existing literature on Manganelli has paid little attention to these areas, with the exception of recent studies by Falkoff and Cianfoni, who have discussed the significance of masturbation and sadism as motifs in the author's work. Falkoff highlights the continuity between the autarchic economic policy of fascist Italy and the autarchich model of virility in Manganelli's work. This model is based on the assertion of male autonomy and exclusion of women. Cianfoni shows that in Manganelli's early poetic experiments, his sense of impotence and frustration for the tragedy of the human destiny is taken out sadistically on the female body. These studies have not addressed in depth Manganelli's self-negation and self-aggression. My discussion in this thesis supplements and complicates these approaches to the place of sexuality in Manganelli by his emphasising his sado-masochistic posture. Linking the model of masculinity constructed in Manganelli's texts to a sado-masochistic sexuality and aesthetic as well as to the figure of the 'victimised male' serves to add many layers to previous comment and to illuminate some of the perhaps hitherto unacknowledged and unconsidered political implications of Manganelli's work.

Sado-masochism is a multi-faceted phenomenon and, as it has been shown, it manifests pre-eminently in literary discourse and form. As I have shown, applying cultural and literary theories on sado-masochism to Manganelli's work facilitates an investigation of the contradictions inherent in his texts, aspects which reflected the complexity and paradoxes of his contemporary Italian and transnational landscapes. This framework also allows us to expand our investigation beyond the first phases of Manganelli's literary output – this being the central focus for Falkoff's and Cianfoni's studies – and thereby to explore the author's evolving engagement with notions of identity, masculinity and (sexual) deviance.

My examination in chapter 2 of the figure of the figure of the sacrificial victim in *Un libro* has confirmed Falkoff's and Cianfoni's arguments that Manganelli's representations of masculinity are based on a horror of the feminine and on

(patriarchal) exclusionary dynamics. However, the other chapters of this thesis foreground hybridised and multi-directional representations of male subjectivity. The sado-masochistic approach provides a means of sidestepping interpretations of Manganelli's texts that either simply characterise his work as misogynistic or rush to proclaim his openness to a dialogue with the 'altro da sè'.[1] By contrast, my approach here highlights a conflicted subject position that has developed out of a series of competing cultural scripts. Among these we can identify various key elements. We have the notion of a 'weak' Italian masculinity in the influential theories of Bernhard, as well as the notion of 'crisis of masculinity' associated with post-war cultural and socioeconomic discourses. These elements are compounded by counter-cultural tropes hinging on concepts such as the 'subject-in-becoming', whose intent is to attack the core of Western philosophical conceptions of subjectivity.

An appreciation of this greater complexity is helpful for two reasons. First, because it is important to differentiate between straightforwardly exclusionary strategies and other, more subtle and circuitous, tactics of power. Such a consideration is especially timely in contemporary contexts where men's answers to the shifting terrain of gender have become more and more sophisticated and ambiguous.[2] The question raised in this thesis regarding the contradictoriness of male sado-masochism is an open one. The adaptability of the sado-masochistic play with gender and sexual categories to both progressive and regressive political agendas reminds us of the importance of discerning different forms of nonbinarism and recognising those that work towards the consolidation of male power and privilege.

For example, in *Nuovo commento*, Manganelli's engagement with notions of copy, original, imitation and performance highlights the performativity of

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[1] Luca Scarlini, 'Dialogo notturno: un palcoscenico per Giorgio Manganelli', in Manganelli, *Tragedie da leggere*, ed. by Scarlini (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), pp. ix-xi.

[2] See Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, 'Men and Postfeminism', in *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 198-215.

identity and gender categories. However, it does not overcome the opposition and hostility between genders and does not liberate male identity from patriarchal values such as violence and self-sufficiency. *Dall'inferno* seems to challenge a model of subjectivity predicated upon the suppression and othering of woman and to radically rethink male subjectivity as the space of multiple becomings, of the abject and the undifferentiated. However, I have shown that the final goal of this process of desubjectification is a reassertion of the self as limitless. In this process, the subject finds in femininity an object of appropriation for its own maximisation and substantially replicates the monologic economy of phallocentrism. Subsequently, chapters 3 and 5 suggest that an assertion of an alternative masculinity in the works discussed is disabled by a patriarchal residue. The masochistic 'total subject' in *INF* and the split subjectivity in *NC* do not mark any clear break from patriarchal versions of masculinity.

Rhetorics of male victimhood and male 'crisis' often function as strategies to satisfy the desire for male centredness and control. Although they have assumed very different guises and meanings, these tropes are still operating today, to the point that, according to some scholars, the male victim has become one of the hegemonic forms of masculinity. For example, Martin Fradley has commented that, 'white masculine crisis has become – to borrow Kaja Silverman's phrase – the "dominant fiction" of the US cultural imaginary in recent years'.[3] Today, the myth of male victimhood seems to have reached a new peak.[4] The fact that these cultural fantasies continue to re-appear with regularity makes studies like this one relevant both in an Italian context and beyond.

The second reason why I find the flexibility of the sado-masochistic framework productive is that it allows me to isolate those moments in Manganelli's work which do seemingly enable new and different meanings on gender to be

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[3]   Fradley, 'Maximus Melodramaticus', p. 240.

[4]   Headlines like 'White Male Victimization Anxiety' (*The New York Times*, 2018) and 'False Victimhood is Driving Young White Men to Murder' (*BuzzFeed*, 2019) testify the relevance of the topic in today's public debates.

articulated. Chapter 6 led me to extrapolate from *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo* notions of authoriality that pierce the illusion of the isolated author and implicitly reject the patriarchal view of normative masculinity as defined by negation and autonomy. In *LP*, Manganelli develops notions of authoriality and subjectivity that depend on the relationship with the other. *LP* is 'un libro che ne adopera un altro per esistere' and in turn scripts a fantasy that depends upon another 'autore-lettore' for its realisation.[5] In particular, my discussion foregrounds a productive aspect of Manganelli's research on death: the link established between death and 'mutual recognition' in *LP* suggests that the recognition of the frailty and limitation of self and other can constitute a common ground that makes communication possible. It might be concluded that Manganelli realises the truly 'dissident' potential of his reflection on the limits of the authorial function and his representations of a fragmented and suffering male subject when this operation, instead of resulting in a problematic appropriation of the victim status, allows vulnerability and limitation to be posed as a common ground shared among genders/sexes and the opportunity of a genuine encounter.

The shift of focus onto the model of relationality with the reader in the second part of the thesis adds a further perspective to my analysis by highlighting the nexus between the figure of the author as a 'victim' and the new challenges posed to literature by mass culture and consumerism. On the one hand, the perception of being a 'slave' of the market situates the writer in a position of powerlessness and delegitimisation; on the other, Manganelli is aware of being part of the cultural institutions that he opposes. Manganelli's poetic of illegibility and his self-reclusion into social irrelevance can be thus seen as a masochistic act of self-sabotage aimed at neutralising his speaking position at the very centre of cultural power. This masochistic strategy of turning opposition inwards against the self appears to be the only possible way to maintain the critical, oppositional value of art. However, as Francucci argues, if Manganelli's mortification of his (authorial) self is limited to the staging of a 'cerimonia' about nothing, such self-mortification has the opposite effect of a 'sacralisation'

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[5]   Manganelli, *La penombra mentale*, p. 38

and institutionalisation of the authorial figure. My analysis identifies a possible 'exit strategy' from the impasse of this 'nulla istituzionalizzato' in the sado-masochistic model of relationship established in *LP,* which is based on the idea of literature as a shared practice. By linking the concept of scripting in sado-masochistic linguistic practices to the writing of texts, my analysis highlights that in *LP* the relationship with the reader is based on collaborative role-play, where 'narratives build up as the play takes place'.[6] My analysis of *LP* also exposes a subtle educational and instructive dimension in Manganelli's work, which can be gauged against Nabokov's 'perverse' hermeneutical training of the reader.

It would be valuable for future research to expand on these trajectories, or to deepen the study of Manganelli by exploring other implications of the sado-masochistic dimension in his work. Further research can be carried out on how the sado-masochistic subjectivity constructed in Manganelli's texts addresses social inequity rooted in different power dynamics than that of gender. For example, it would be worthwhile to examine the relationship between masochism, race and post-colonialism in Manganelli's travel writings. Various literary studies have indeed shown how masochism can be complicit with colonialism.[7] We have seen an example of reproduction of the classic schema of masochism in *Esperimento con l'India,* when the author states that in India, the traveller turned his 'Western aggressiveness' against the self. In this text, Manganelli combines and manipulates sexualised stereotypes of the colonial discourse (like the troping of his arrival in Bombay as an act of anal penetration)

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[6] Harviainen, 'Scripting beloved discomfort', p. 107.

[7] See Silverman's chapter on T. E. Lawrence, masochism and colonialism in her *Male Subjectivity*, pp. 299-338. See also Fantina on the union of masochism and colonialism in Hemingway in his *Ernest Hemingway*, pp. 129-52.

and constructions of the Western traveller as a 'victim' of India.[8] More in general, investigation could be carried out on formal implications of literary sado-masochism, exploring further the possibilities of relating desire, dominance and submission to themes of authority, readership and language (dis)possession in the work of other contemporary artists whose texts, similarly to Manganelli's ones, are pervaded by 'deviant' tensions and fraught with contradictions.

On ambiguities and contradictions, Manganelli wrote: 'Un prete vestito da mummia non è né prete né mummia, ma forse ci sta raccontando qualcosa su entrambi gli affascinanti argomenti' (*LP*, 11). This thesis argues that investigating the ambiguities and intricacies of the figure of the sado-masochistic male victim in Manganelli's work opens a space for multiple possibilities. On the one hand, my exploration of Manganelli's construction of a 'deviant' model of subjectivity and authoriality has illuminated his ever greater self-consciousness with regard to the limits of the patriarchal models of creative engagement and his attempt to release masculinity from oppressive norms. On the other, it has also highlighted the regressive potential of male self-victimisation.

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[8]   'Entrare a Bombay provenendo dall'aeroporto dà la sensazione di conoscere un qualche grande corpo penetrandolo dallo sfintere' (Manganelli, *Esperimento con l'India*, p. 24). Grazia Menechella depicts Manganelli as 'vittima dell'India' in her 'Manganelli e la geocritica' in *Foglie messaggere*, pp. 131-44 (p. 142). Also Bedin notes that the distinctive quality of Manganelli's account of his journey in India resides in the experience of the 'traveller's total self-loss [...] in the Indian reality'. Bedin, 'An Experimental Meta-Travel', p. 1535.

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