The scene of convalescence is not exclusively Baudelairean territory, nor is the Baudelairean rhetoric of sickness the only, or even the dominant, rhetoric of sickness in D'Annunzio's early prose works. Convalescents appear in *Terra vergine*, *Le novelle della Pescara*, and *L'Innocente*, but theirs are "Lombrosian" convalescences. In the Baudelairean rhetoric, lingering sickness is the ground for artistic creation that cannot be reduced to a mere symptom; the "sick" subject is a reader of his own "symptoms" and reads them as signs. The Lombrosian model, instead, interprets mental and spiritual activity as little more than physiological tics; the "sick" subject produces symptoms but is unable to read them as anything at all. Both rhetorics posit particular relationships between the body and thought, but their symptomatologies and conclusions are so divergent that it would perhaps be more precise to speak of "bodies" rather than "the body." In D'Annunzio's early prose works, different social classes and sexes are presented as so many different bodies, as sites of different relationships of the body to thought. Only the upper-class male appears as a Baudelairean convalescent, while the Lombrosian convalescents are female and/or lower class. These Lombrosian convalescences are the scene not of conversion to artistic creation and ventriloquism but of hysterical conversion, the threshold of dementia, mystic delirium (as Nordau would say), and an introduction to, rather than a taking leave of, perversion. Their
case studies thus constitute countertexts to the convalescences of Andrea Sperelli and the narrator of Notturno.

The very adoption of a rhetoric of sickness, be it Baudelairean or Lombrosian, is a thematization and valorization of the corporeal, which may be construed in various ways. A description of physiological illness may be a mode of presentation of psychic imbalance, an inroad to the unconscious; it may be the most effective strategy for drawing attention to the body per se; it may represent the dark side of a celebration of sexuality. D'Annunzio exploits all three of these possibilities in his novelistic attempts to describe relationships between bodies and thought, between sexuality and psychology. D'Annunzian critics, it seems, deem these questions unworthy of literary and philosophical exploration. Judging from their reactions to the thematization of sexuality in D'Annunzio's works (merged in their minds with lascivious anecdotes concerning their author), one wonders if they also hid Dr. Freud's writings from their daughters.¹

D'Annunzio's adoption of the Lombrosian and Baudelairean rhetorics of sickness is part of his search for a language with which to describe and explain psychological formations, which he describes in the preface to Trionfo della morte:

Uscendo dalle figure, dico che la lingua italiana non ha nulla da invidiare e nulla da chiedere in prestito ad alcun'altra lingua europea non pur nella rappresentazione di tutto il

¹. Lest this judgment seem too malicious, I quote P. Giuseppe Venturini, who, in a 1980 issue of Quaderni del Vittoriale, quotes from one of his earlier articles, a “faithful echo,” as he puts it, of the polemic against D'Annunzio: “Since he wrote under the domination of vanity and lust, which suffocate all true inspiration, his entire opus is neither art nor poetry but merely an 'enormous bamboozling' ['enorme corbellatura']. Thus condemned to a monotonous and oppressive repetition, his is an illusory fecundity. D'Annunzio's heroes, male and female, all have the same flesh, his flesh rotten with lust: false creatures just as their author is false. . . . In their verbose falsity, their maniacal hyperboles and obsessive repetitions, their boundless nullity of useless and sick beings, his heroes are a portrait of D'Annunzio himself, the 'superlative histrion.' This is why D'Annunzian characters of whatever sex, age, and condition all have the same voice, the voice of their author refractory to every idea and every ideal.” P. Giuseppe Venturini, “Spiritualità e religiosità di D'Annunzio,” Quaderni del Vittoriale 4 (July–August 1980): 43.
moderno mondo esteriore ma in quella degli “stati d’animo” più complicati e più rari in cui analista si sia mai compiaciuto da che la scienza della psiche umana è in onore.

E gli psicologi appunto, poiché sembra che i nuovi romanziieri d’Italia inclinano a questa scienza, gli psicologi in ispecie hanno per esporre le loro introversioni un vocabolario d’una ricchezza incomparabile, atto a fermare in una pagina con precisione grafica le più tenui fuggevoli onde del sentimento, del pensiero e fin dell’incoercibile sogno.²

[Leaving figures aside, I assert that the Italian language has nothing to envy and nothing to borrow from any other European language, not even in the representation of the modern external world nor yet in that of the most complicated and unusual “states of mind” that any analyst has ever congratulated himself on since the inauguration of the science of the human psyche.

And it is precisely the psychologists (since the new Italian novelists tend toward this science) who have a vocabulary of an incomparable richness with which to present their introversions, a vocabulary capable of capturing on the page with graphic precision the most tenuous and fleeting waves of feeling, thought, and even irrepressible dream.]

My project, in this chapter, is to take seriously the extensive D’Annunzian project, which touches upon and distinguishes between different classes and sexes. The distinction that results from the copresence of Baudelairian and Lombrosian rhetorics is not, however, between upper and lower classes, male and female protagonists as, respectively, mind and body. The coupling of a Lombrosian rhetoric with women and the lower classes is not simply the result of a denial of the body by the upper classes and its consequent displacement onto the “other.” The two rhetorics of sickness cannot be neatly labeled “Baudelairian upper-class male” and “Lombrosian lower-class female,” for while the Baudelairian rhetoric of convalescence seems not to be employed in the service of female characters,

the Lombrosian rhetoric is extended to all the classes and sexes studied by Lombroso himself. The peasants of *Terra vergine* and *Le novelle della Pescara*, the virgins Orsola and Anna of *Le novelle della Pescara*, Tullio Hermil of *L’Innocente* can all be included under the Lombrosian label. The last character—upper-class male—does indeed belong to a special category, for it is the Lombrosian etiology of genius which characterizes him or, rather, with which he, as narrator, characterizes himself. What is at stake in these D’Annunzian texts is the invention of several different bodies and physiologies, as we shall see.

The problem of “class bodies” has occupied both Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault, whose hypotheses may help clarify D’Annunzio’s position not because either explains D’Annunzio’s texts but because neither is adequate to do so. In relation to the ideology of D’Annunzio’s novels and novellas, Sartre’s hypothesis regarding the bourgeoisie’s denial of the body appears to be ancient history. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre analyzes the suppression of the body, its denial and constraint through dress, as an essential part of the bourgeoisie’s constitution of itself as a class. The body, according to Sartre, stands as “the presence in the oppressor of the oppressed in person,” and is thus negated and enslaved just as the proletariat is oppressed and enslaved by the bourgeoisie:

Lastly, more directly and more profoundly, the act of social oppression is itself repeated here together with all its significations: he is really oppressing the workers when he subjects the universality of his own body to countless constraints; it is the worker as the universal class that he destroys within himself or conceals under artificially produced particularities; and it is the repression of the workers’ revolt against hunger, cold, fatigue, etc., which he exercises here against fatigue, cold and hunger as revolts of his body.3

D’Annunzio’s texts do not, of course, sing the praises of hunger and fatigue, but they do explore and magnify different bodies,

celebrate and mourn them. It is as though the denial of the universality of the body has been so effective as to give rise to entirely different bodies belonging to different classes. Were Sartre's hypothesis directly complementary to D'Annunzio's texts, one would expect the combination of the Lombrosian rhetoric with an upper-class protagonist to be avoided at all costs, for it is the Lombrosian rhetoric that characterizes, for example, the swarming peasant mob of Trionfo della morte, as well as the bestial peasants of Terra vergine. But instead, the assiduously avoided combination is that of the Baudelairean rhetoric applied to female and lower-class characters. Those characters appear to be "all body" because of the type of consciousness attributed them, rather than because the body has been expelled tout court from the experience of the upper-class male protagonist.

Foucault, in The History of Sexuality, presents a thesis that is the inverse of Sartre's and equally problematic. Arguing against the doxa according to which sexuality has only recently emerged from the depths of repression, Foucault locates the body and sexuality on the other side of the barricades: "There is little question that one of the primordial forms of class consciousness is the affirmation of the body; at least, this was the case for the bourgeoisie during the eighteenth century. It converted the blue blood of the nobles into a sound organism and a healthy sexuality. One understands why it took such a long time and was so unwilling to acknowledge that other classes had a body and a sex—precisely those classes it was exploiting." According to Foucault, it was necessary to deny that laboring classes had a body in order to instrumentalize that body and, at the same time, to distinguish social classes by producing sexuality as a distinctive feature that the lower classes lacked. Sexuality as discourse becomes the property of the upper classes, that which the lower classes have not, rather than a common bond between classes. Still, as with Sartre's thesis, Foucault's hypothesis is only partly pertinent to D'Annunzio's texts, where we find both upper- and lower-class bodies, both upper- and lower-class sexualities. The lower-class body participates not in sexuality as

discourse but in a sort of mute bestiality that seems little more than an instinctive urge to copulate. Eros in the lower-class body retains no relative autonomy from other bodily functions. The upper-class body, on the other hand, participates in a sexuality that is nothing other than an amalgamation of "perversions," of turnings from the path of that urge. The upper classes have a physiological psychology; the lower, a physiology. Woman occupies an intermediary position in this schema, for she shares in both bestiality and sexuality; her psychology is continually threatened by her physiology.

Flora and Fauna of the Virgin Terrain

The atavism of *Terra vergine* approaches the extremes of Lombroso's evolutionary delirium and zoological scenarios. Indeed, it is difficult to claim that the physiologies and physiognomies that populate this virgin terrain, unviolated by consciousness, are aberrant. They are socially and physically atavistic, and behavior occurs naturally, that is to say, in the absence of thought. The otherness of the lower-class body is marked not by contrast to an upper-class character (for none appear in *Terra vergine*), but by similitude to animals: the characters of *Terra vergine*, without exception analogized to animals, are arguably not even "human." Such an attribution of bestiality to human beings appears to be almost a personification of animals, an elevation rather than a degradation. Only the characters' names would seem to mark them as human actors, yet in two cases—"Dalfino" and "la gatta"—their already folkloristic names are those of animals, and in a third story three characters are grouped under the title "Bestiame." Lust (*lascivia, lussuria, not


6. The 1882 "Bestiame" appears to be a rewriting of Verga's 1880 "La lupa," a rewriting rather than "theft," for the sex of the protagonists has been changed. In "La lupa," a mother-in-law seduces her son-in-law; in "Bestiame," it is a father-in-law who seduces his daughter-in-law. Such a change of sex may alter the ideology thus embodied. For a discussion of a similar change of sex (between
eros) is the dominant motive, lust that leads to sickness or death or is itself a kind of sickness and death.

The most animalesque of these creatures become part of the landscape in satisfying their lust. In the title story, Tulespre is barely distinguishable from the pigs he tends; his desire parallels theirs: "E andavano alle querci della Fara, i porci a zaiarsi di ghiande, Tulespre a fare all'amore" ["And they went to the Fara oaks, the pigs to eat their fill of acorns, and Tulespre to make love"]. The "acorn" that will satisfy Tulespre is Fiora, who, always surrounded by the goats she herds, "rassomigliava una pantera" (Terra vergine, 6) ["resembled a panther"). The names Tulespre and Fiora simply label a natural osmosis, as desire grows, plantlike, over the landscape and through the human actors:

A poco a poco in quel refrigerio l'arsura gli svampava dai pori; dai mucchi di fieno intorno vaporante gli saliva su per le narici calde una voluttà di profumo; in fondo all'erba udiva brulichii d'insetti; provava su la pelle, ne' capelli vellicamenti di corpuscoli strani; e il cuore gli palpitava al ritmo selvaggio dello stornello di Fiora. (Terra vergine, 4)

[Little by little, the burning heat escaped from his pores in that cool spot. From the moldering haystacks a voluptuous aroma rose to his hot nostrils; at the roots of the grass he heard the swarming of insects. On his skin and in his hair he felt ticklings of strange corpuscles, and his heart palpitated to the savage rhythm of Fiora's stornello.]


No intellect intervenes to select or reject these thoughts of nature; no more consciousness can be attributed to the human actors than to the goat that witnesses their copulation: "Una testa nera di capra sbucò tra il fogliame guardando con le miti iridi gialle quel groppo vivo di membra umane" (Terra vergine, 7) ["The black head of a goat poked out among the leaves and, with gentle yellow irises, watched that living tangle of human members"]). Their lusty story is repeated by Dalfino ("pareva proprio un delfino" [8] ["she looked just like a dolphin"]), and Zarra ("Ma che superba fiera era quella Zarra!" [9] ["What a proud beast was that Zarra!"]) in the story "Dalfino," where jealousy and murder conclude their idyll ("Gli si fece addosso come una tigre" [12] ["He attacked him like a tiger"]); by Nara ("china, con la schiena al solleone, colla gonna bianca, pareva una pecora" [13] ["bent over, with her back to the burning sun and her white skirt, she looked like a sheep"]), and Malamore in "Fiore fiurell"; by Biasce and Zolfina in "Campane"; by Tora and Mingo in "La gatta"; by father and daughter-in-law in "Bestiame"; by Ziza, Iori, and Mila in "Ecloga fluviale." In "Ecloga fluviale," sensual burgeoning is presented as healthy despite its final expression as jealous rage and murder:

Ora fioriva così Mila, come una pianta, come un tronco tutto felice di germi.... La vita per quel corpo di femmina si effondeva con un fluore vittorioso di umori sani; e da quella sanità emergeva un senso vergine e lucido delle cose, naturalmente. Tutta la pompa delle forze muliebri aveva già trionfato nell'essere; ora Mila in quella pompa si adagiava con la serenità semplice di chi non pensa, di chi non teme, di chi non sa. (Terra vergine, 56)

[Now Mila blossomed, like a plant or a trunk adorned with buds. . . . Life spread through that female body with a victorious flux of healthy humors. And from that health there emerged, naturally, a virgin and lucid sense of things. All the pomp of womanly forces had already triumphed in her being. Now Mila settled into that pomp with the simple serenity of one who does not think, does not fear, does not know.]
An archaic physiology of humors is adopted to describe desire in a human plant. The relationship of body to thought, in these peasant bodies, is reduced to a relationship between the body and behavior governed by instincts.

Despite his reptilian name, Fra’ Lucerta appears the least animalesque of these personified plants and animals and the most similar to the characters of *Le novelle della Pescara*. Unlike the mute Toto and the idiot Cincinnato, Fra’ Lucerta is capable of speech and is even literate. Unlike Rocco’s typhoid fever or Zolfina’s smallpox, Fra’ Lucerta’s disease is desire itself. A rhetoric of sickness is linked once again to the tension between “conversion” and “perversion.” Fra’ Lucerta’s vocation impedes the flow of the “umori sani” of “Ecloga fluviale”; his attempts to turn from the path of his lust sicken him and qualify his lust as a sort of primitive sexuality rather than as the bestiality that motivates the other characters of *Terra vergine*. His are not, however, the consciousness-sharpening fevers of Andrea Sperelli’s convalescence, but the obfuscating ones of desire:

Una febbre lenta gli bruciava il sangue e gli sconvolgeva l’intelletto. La carne ed il sangue martoriati per tanti anni ora insorgevano terribili ed imperiosi come due schiavi inferociti ad affermare il loro diritto. (*Terra vergine*, 40)

[A slow fever burned his blood and troubled his intellect. His flesh and blood, martyred for so many years, now rose up to assert their rights, imperious and terrible like two enraged slaves.]

Enslaved flesh revolts against an ineffectual intellect, recalling Sartre’s description of the body as “the presence in the oppressor of the oppressed in person.” Yet here D’Annunzio takes the part of the “oppressed,” of the body; his demystifying move reduces Fra’ Lucerta’s faith to a displacement of his lust (or, in Nietzschean terms, a misunderstanding of the body). Both Fra’ Lucerta’s spiritual vocation and his desire for Mena are named by the same term: “La fede era per lui una febbre, gli dava la vertigine e l’allucinazione” (*Terra vergine*, 39) [“Faith was a fever for him, it gave him vertigo and hallucinations”]. The two seemingly antagonistic fevers are
one, his lust is his faith: “Quando il sangue e la carne gli si ribellavano sotto la tonaca, si gettava li davanti a quel suo Cristo nero contorcendosi come una serpe rota nella schiena” (Terra vergine, 39) [“When his flesh and blood rebelled beneath his frock, he threw himself down before his black Christ, writhing like a serpent with a broken back”]. Fra’ Lucerta’s devotion is but a symptom of his physiological condition.

Of the stories of Terra vergine, only “Fra’ Lucerta” can be said to pose the question of the relationship of physiology to thought; elsewhere there is only behavior. The concerns of this story, its “Christian” theme and the demystifying framework in which it is set, are taken up again in Le novelle della Pescara.

The Novellas of Pescara and Vienna

In Le novelle della Pescara, the interaction between body and thought, sexuality and psychology in the lower-class woman’s body is more complex than it is in the peasant body of Terra vergine. Like Terra vergine, these tales are archaising; the hagiographic titles of the first two stories suggest that the edifying lives of two saintly virgins, “La vergine Orsola” [“The Virgin Ursula”] and “La vergine Anna” [“The Virgin Anna”] are about to be recounted. The narratives that gloss those titles, however, undermine rather than satisfy expectation. As the name of the mother of the Virgin Mary suggests, “La vergine Anna” does indeed end in beatification, but it is, it seems, epilepsy and imbecility, rather than mystical illumination and miracle working, which are so rewarded. “La vergine Orsola” is the story of a brutal rape, an even more brutal abortion, and a squalid death. The irony of this latter title is underscored by the choice of “Orsola” as the name of the “vergine sverginata.” In fact, in the earlier version of the same tale which appeared in Il libro delle vergini, the protagonist’s name was Giuliana (who becomes, instead, a bourgeois convalescent in L’Innocente). “Juliana,” the name of a minor saint, is, in Le novelle della Pescara, replaced by “Ursula” who, of course, had a more illustrious career as leader.
of the legendary eleven thousand virgins. The choice of such a notoriously saintly virgin for a tale of rape leaves little doubt as to the story’s demystificatory aims. Both stories associate Christianity with illness, idiocy, and ignorance; a “naturalistic” mode is adopted not to give an accurate, scientific description of peasant society but to degrade and critique an ideology. Like Nietzsche in the Anti-

christ, D'Annunzio employs a rhetoric of sickness in order to critique Christianity.

“La vergine Orsola” is, in fact, a convalescent narrative. In the opening section of the story, Orsola, dying from typhoid fever, offers a blackened tongue to receive the host and falls into a stupor as extreme unction is administered her. Her rebirth as a convalescent is thus all the more unexpected and dramatic. Here, as in Il piacere, convalescence is characterized as both rebirth, “una seconda nascita,” (Le novelle, 79) and as a state of forgetfulness: “Il passato si dileguava, si assopiva in fondo alla memoria, non risorgeva più” (Le novelle, 91) [“The past faded away and slumbered in a far corner of her memory; it surfaced no more”]. But the combination of convalescence and the lower-class female body is the site of a different chemistry; the description of Orsola’s convalescence emphasizes not the acuity of consciousness but the cellular activity of her body:

La convalescenza era lunga e lenta, ma già un senso mite di sollievo cominciava a spargersi per le membra, a liberare il capo. Per quella sana nutrizione di albumine e di carne muscolare un sangue novello si produceva: i polmoni dilatati ora largamente dall’aria vivificavano il sangue carico di sostanze; e i

8. D’Annunzio does seem to have incorporated elements of Saint Juliana’s life into his tale of the “vergine Orsola.” According to The Saints: A Concise Biographical Dictionary, ed. John Coulson (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1958), “Juliana was the child of noble, wealthy Florentine parents, and on the death of her father was educated under the direction of St. Alexis Falconieri, her uncle. Refusing to marry, she entered the Servite Third Order and was instrumental in founding its conventual branch, of which she became superior. She showed great devotion to the eucharist. On the day of her death being unable to take food she was deprived of communion, and a host was placed at her request on her breast; it miraculously penetrated into her body, enabling her, says tradition, to be nourished with the sacrament of Christ’s body.”
Her convalescence was long and slow, but already a mild sense of relief began to spread through her members and free her head. A new blood was formed from that healthy diet of albumen and meat: the lungs, now amply dilated by the air, vivified the blood rich in substance; and her tissues, irrigated by that tepid and swift wave of blood, took on new color and recomposed themselves, were renewed in bedsores and were re-covered with cutis little by little. And cerebral activities functioned securely with that influx, the innervations of the sensory organs, no longer disturbed, rendered sensation limpid. On the cranium the capilliferous bulbs resprouted densely. And from that reordering of the mechanical laws of life, from that unfolding of energies previously latent which the sickness had caused, from that intense lust for life and for feeling alive which the convalescent had, from everything, a better creature slowly arose, as if in a second birth.]

The woman's physiology interacts differently with her psychology; while Sperelli experienced convalescence as the death of desire, Orsola experiences it as the discovery of desire. Once again convalescence introduces a new relationship between the body and thought, but it is hunger and lust that are awakened in the lower-class female body:

L'istinto della fame si ridestava vivissimo, come più chiara si faceva la coscienza. Quando dal forno di Flaiano saliva nell'aria l'odore caldo del pane, Orsola chiedeva; chiedeva con un
accento di mendicante famelica, tendeva la mano, supplicando alla sorella. Divorava rapidamente, con un godimento brutale di tutto l'essere, guardando d'intorno se qualcuno tentasse strapparle di tra le mani il cibo, in sospetto. (*Le novelle*, 79)

[The instinct of hunger reawakened with vigor as her consciousness became ever clearer. When the warm aroma of bread rose from Flaiano's bakery, Orsola asked for it, asked in the tone of a famished beggar. She held out her hand, begging her sister. She devoured it rapidly, with a brutal enjoyment in all her being, looking about her suspiciously to make sure that no one would try to snatch the food away from her.]

Orsola, who had spent her short life transmitting “la piccola dottrina, i piccoli canti della religione” (*Le novelle*, 80) [“the little doctrine, the little songs of religion”] to the children of the village, now turns away from and forgets her faith. Her convalescence is the scene not of her conversion to art but of her introduction to perversion. The vision that appears on the tabula rasa of this convalescent’s mind is not that of “l’Arte ... l’Amante fedele,” but of the brothel that faces her bedroom window. The observation of the brothel’s commerce becomes her pastime and works a sort of anticonversion in the virgin convalescent: “Così, nella vergine, si accendeva la brama. Il bisogno dell’amore, prima latente, si levava ora da tutto il suo essere, diventava una tortura, un supplizio incessante e feroce da cui ella non sapeva difendersi” (*Le novelle*, 90) [“The need for love, previously latent, now rose from all her being, became a torment, an incessant and ferocious torture against which she knew not how to defend herself”]. The awakening of lust in Orsola suggests a retrospective reading of her former devotion to charitable works as a defense mechanism rather than as successful sublimation. The virgin who never once touched a child’s curls or kissed a childish brow now undertakes a correspondence with a soldier, her future violator acting as go-between. Thus the forgetfulness of convalescence allows her sexuality to develop, bloom, erupt. As Freud might have said, a repression has been lifted.

Indeed, D’Annunzio’s life of a virgin calls to mind what might be called the novellas of Vienna: the 1895 Freud-Breuer *Studies on
Hysteria. A dialogue between Pescara and Vienna can be created by emphasizing the narrative structure of Freud’s clinical studies and the clinical gaze of D’Annunzio’s narrative. Just as D’Annunzio’s account of Orsola’s life begins in medias res with a description of her illness and near death, so do Freud and Breuer begin their portraits of hysterical patients (women all, virgins most) with descriptions of their symptoms, their paralyses, coughs, and tics. In D’Annunzio’s text, a long convalescence follows that illness; in Freud and Breuer’s text, the doctors’ treatment follows the opening symptomatology. That treatment mimics the structure of convalescence: the patient must forget everything in order to remember all. Memory plays a major role in both the scene of convalescence and in hysteria, for Freud and Breuer diagnosed hysteria as an illness deriving from memory: “Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (Freud-Breuer, 7). The cure, then, consists in forcing—through hypnosis, through pressure upon the forehead or eyes—the patient to remember. But while the patient’s task is to remember and tell all, the doctor’s task is, notably in the case of Frau Emmy von N., to induce forgetfulness, to induce the traits of convalescence. Freud in this case study does little more than “wipe away” memories of which Frau von N. has no shortage. Indeed, the magic eraser of hypnosis presents such dizzying possibilities that Freud gets carried away, and toys with Frau von N.’s memory to such an extent that Dr. Breuer must rebuke him. Yet Freud’s joke well represents the crudeness and cruelty of this early technique, for the successful cure is, it seems, a state of partial amnesia:

I saw Frau von N. again in the spring of the following year

9. “In this connection I ventured upon a practical joke in one of my suggestions to her. This was the only abuse of hypnosis—and a fairly innocent one at that—of which I have to plead guilty with this patient. I assured her that her stay in the sanatorium at ‘-tal’ (‘-vale’) would become so remote to her that she would not be able to recall its name and that whenever she wanted to refer to it she would hesitate between ‘-berg’ (‘-hill’), ‘-tal,’ ‘-wald’ (‘-wood’) and so on. This duly happened and presently the only remaining sign of her speech-inhibition was her uncertainty over this name. Eventually, following a remark by Dr. Breuer, I relieved her of this compulsive paramnesia” (Freud-Breuer, 79–80).
at her estate near D——. She had grown stout, and looked in flourishing health. She had felt relatively well during the nine months that had passed since the end of her last treatment. . . . It was during these days, too, that she made her complaints about gaps in her memory, "especially about the most important events". . . . from which I concluded that the work that I had done two years previously had been thoroughly effective and lasting. (Freud-Breuer, 83–84)

Lombroso, who was familiar with Charcot’s work and mentions Freud and “Breus” in Genio e degenerazione, was more blunt in recognizing the power relationship that structures the hypnotic situation:

Quello che più importa a noi è la facilità a subire la così detta suggestione ipnotica, con cui l’ipnotizzatore sostituisce alla volontà del paziente la propria…. E’, l’isterico ipnotizzato, insomma, un automa obbediente, senza spontaneità, alla volontà altrui.10

[What is most important to us is the facility to submit to so-called hypnotic suggestion, with which the hypnotizer substitutes the patient’s will with his own. . . . In short, the

10. Cesare Lombroso and G. Ferrero, La donna deliquente, la prostituta e la donna normale (Turin: L. Roux, 1893), 610. Lombroso’s understanding of Freud and Breuer’s work was, however, less than complete: “Nell’isteria però, come Janet e Binet in Francia, Breus [sic] e Freud a Vienna dimostrarono, si tratta essenzialmente d’una lesione intellettiva, dipendente piuttosto dagli scambi delicati corticali che da alterazioni cerebral grossolane” (“In hysteria, however, as Janet and Binet in France, Breus [sic] and Freud in Vienna have demonstrated, it is essentially a question of an intellectual lesion, dependent upon fine cortical exchanges rather than upon crude cerebral alterations”). Lombroso, Genio e degenerazione (Palermo: Remo Sandron, 1897), 23. The power relationship that structures hypnotic treatment, and psychoanalytic treatment in general, has been the subject of much recent feminist criticism. A most useful bibliography can be found in Diacritics (Spring 1983), an issue titled “A Fine Romance: Freud and Dora.”
hypnotized hysteric is an automaton obedient to the will of others, with no spontaneity.]

Freud's playfulness with Frau Emmy von N.'s memory, his displeasure with disobedient patients such as Dora, his repeated complaints of "dissatisfaction" when Miss Lucy R. fails to produce the information desired indicate that Freud is not far from subscribing to Lombroso's assessment. At the time of the Studies on Hysteria, of course, Freud was still in dialogue with the alienists, still arguing against theories of dégénérescence. In the penultimate paragraph of Emmy's case, Freud dismisses the degeneration theory and in so doing also demonstrates that he has not yet become "Freud," does not yet know what will truly differentiate his theory from those of his predecessors: "To describe such a woman as a 'degenerate' would be to distort the meaning of that word out of all recognition. We should do well to distinguish between the concepts of 'disposition' and 'degeneracy' as applied to people; otherwise we shall find ourselves forced to admit that humanity owes a large proportion of its great achievements to the efforts of 'degenerates'" (Freud-Breuer, 104). The argument is certainly a weak one for, we have seen, Lombroso does indeed attribute humanity's conquests to the efforts of degenerates. Freud has not yet elaborated the theory of the unconscious which will set him apart from his predecessors, though the Studies on Hysteria set him in the "right" direction. It is here that Freud begins to read and translate what he calls the "pictographic script" of the hysterical body: "We (Breuer and I) had often compared the symptomatology of hysteria with a pictographic script which has become intelligible after the discovery of a few bilingual inscriptions. In that alphabet being sick means disgust" (Freud-Breuer, 129). This reading/translation is one in which the key, the Rosetta stone, is held only by Freud. The amnesiac patient, instead, continues to produce "hieroglyphs," continues, as Frau Emmy von N. did, to produce symptoms that she herself is incapable of reading and translating: "The therapeutic success on the whole was considerable; but it was not a lasting one. The patient's tendency to fall ill in a similar way under the impact of fresh traumas was not got rid of" (Freud-Breuer, 101). The jumble of traumatic events that had made her ill continues to convert itself
into tongue clacking and stuttering while the doctor-narrator goes on to become ever more eloquent, ever more skilled as translator.

Similarly, the author of the *Le novelle della Pescara* is not yet “D'Annunzio.” By this I do not mean that he is instead a plagiaristic mixture of Maupassant, Flaubert, and Giovanni Verga but that he will work through the Lombrosian rhetoric of sickness employed in these tales in order to arrive at the lyrical antinovels of his maturity. These two contemporaries—the not-yet Freud and the not-yet D’Annunzio—work along parallel tracks, which lead backward toward Lombrosian premises and forward toward non-Lombrosian conclusions. The narrators of “La vergine Anna” and “La vergine Orsola” do not, of course, enter their stories as “Dr. D’Annunzio,” but the narrative structures and the problems they pose are similar to those of Freud’s case studies. Just as Freud induces the effects of convalescence in order to lift repressions, so does D’Annunzio set up convalescence as the scene of the discovery of desire in “La vergine Orsola.” Though not a convalescent narrative, “La vergine Anna” mimes yet other aspects of Frau Emmy von N.’s case study.

Frau von N.’s life was an accumulation of traumas: siblings who threw dead animals at her, brothers who grabbed her on their deathbeds, carriages very nearly struck by lightning, a husband who dropped dead before her very eyes. Anna’s biography is similarly, and no less believably, constructed as a series of traumas, beginning with her introduction to life. Her birth is so difficult that Anna is baptized *in utero*. Then, when she is five, the child’s clothes catch fire as her mother holds her up to kiss the local patron saint. The trauma leaves her dumb:

*Per le ustioni Anna stette inferma lungo tempo in pericolo. Ella giaceva nel letto, con l’esile faccia esangue, senza parlare, come fosse diventata muta; e aveva negli occhi aperti e fissi un’espressione di stupore immemore più che di dolore. (Le novelle, 120)*

[From the burns, Anna lay ill and in danger for a long time. She lay on her bed, her face thin and bloodless, without speaking, as though she had become mute. And in her open
and staring eyes, there was an expression of forgetful stupor more than of pain.]

It is this “stupore immemore” that will characterize Anna’s life; she is a sort of born amnesiac whose memory manifests itself only as illness. The narrative follows a sequence of traumas, eclipsing those moments of Anna’s life in which no traumatic event leaves its impression upon her. Eight years pass, in which “nothing” happens until Anna’s mother dies, trampled to death in church by the overzealous faithful. Her memory of the event appears in the form of epilepsy: “Anna, quando vide la madre distesa sul letto tutta violacea nella faccia e macchiata di sangue, cadde a terra senza conoscenza. Poi, per molti mesi, fu tormentata dal mal caduco” (Le novelle, 123) [“When she saw her mother stretched on the bed, her face all purple and stained with blood, Anna fell to the ground unconscious. Afterwards, for many months she was tormented by epilepsy”]. This is not Dostoevskian or even Lombrosian epilepsy, for Anna receives no genial illumination as a result of her attacks.\(^\text{11}\) Instead, they seem to render her more feebleminded. Four years later comes another trauma: her father abandons her, leaving her in the care of relatives who employ her as a sort of serving maid: “Ella non osava lamentarsi, poiché mangiava il pane nella casa degli altri. Ma quel supplizio di tutte le ore la rendeva ebete: una imbécillità grave le opprimeva a poco a poco l’intelligenza indebolita” (Le novelle, 123–24) [“She dared not complain, for she ate her bread in the house of others. But that continuous torture made her half-witted: a heavy imbecility little by little oppressed her weakened intelligence”]. There follows a brief idyll between Anna and a donkey entrusted to her care, then another trauma: the ass dies and Anna’s epilepsy returns, accompanied by renewed religious fervor: “Nel 1845 il mal caduco riapparve con violenza; sparve dopo alcuni mesi. La fede religiosa in quell’epoca divenne in lei più profonda e più calda” (Le novelle, 127) [“In 1845, her epilepsy returned with violence; it disappeared after several months. In that period her religious faith became deeper and more fervent”]. As

\(^{11}\) An avid reader of Dostoevsky, Lombroso similarly associated epileptic seizures and genial illumination in his studies on genius, L’uomo di genio and Genio e degenereazione.
D’Annunzio well knew, the association of epilepsy with religious experience is ancient; indeed, in *Trionfo della morte*, Ippolita’s epilepsy is described as “il male sacro” [“the sacred disease”], a locution D’Annunzio does not use in the tale of the virgin Anna. Epilepsy here is not a sign that marks the chosen; Anna’s religious faith appears instead to be a symptom of her epilepsy. It is in this sense that one of the rhetorics of this novella can be seen as Lombrosian; Anna’s mystical experiences are portrayed as symptoms of her body, as the side effects of illness.

The demystifying effect of the Lombrosian rhetoric is in contrast to the hagiographic tone that asserts itself as the narrative continues. The connection between illness and faith becomes more complex after the second idyllic interlude in Anna’s life, in which she is given a tortoise, which will accompany her thereafter, and considers marrying Zacchiele. Zacchiele, however, loses Anna’s already uncertain affection by kicking the tortoise and soon after dies in a flood. This apparent misfortune is in fact providential, for Anna’s potential saintliness is reinforced by the preservation of her virginity. At this point, the hagiographic tone becomes dominant.

Her virginity intact, other illnesses begin to manifest themselves in her body. The pulmonary infection that follows Zacchiele’s death is Anna’s mode of mourning and reinforces her faith. Then, after a brief stay with her paralytic uncle, whose young wife manages to pilfer Anna’s belongings, the virgin is received into a convent. By now an elderly woman, Anna begins to exhibit new symptoms:

Con l’andar del tempo, le estasi si fecero più frequenti. La vergine canuta era colpita a quando a quando da suoni angelici, da echi lontani d’organo, da romori e voci non percettibili agli orecchi altrui. Figure luminose le si presentavano dinanzi, nel buio; odori paradisiaci la rapivano.

Così pel monastero una specie di sacro orrore cominciò a diffondersi, come per la presenza di un qualche potere occulto, come per l’imminenza di un qualche avvenimento soprannaturale. Per cautela, la nuova conversa fu dispensata da ogni obbligo d’opere servili. Tutte le attitudini di lei, tutte le parole, tutti gli sguardi furono osservati, comentati con superstizione. E la leggenda della santità incominciò a fiorire.
Su le calende di febbraio dell’anno di Nostro Signore 1873, la voce della vergine divenne singolarmente rauca e profonda. Poi la virtù della parola d’un tratto scomparve. (Le novelle, 155)

[With the passing of time, her ecstasies became more frequent. The white-haireded virgin was stricken from time to time with angelic sounds, distant echoes of organs, sounds and voices not perceptible to other ears. Luminous figures showed themselves to her in the darkness; heavenly smells enraptured her.

Thus a sort of sacred horror began to spread throughout the monastery, as if through the presence of some occult power, or through the imminence of some supernatural event. As a precaution, the new lay sister was released from all obligation to perform servile tasks. All of her attitudes, all of her words and glances were observed and commented upon with superstition. And the legend of her sanctity began to blossom.

On February 1 in the year of Our Lord 1873, the virgin’s voice became singularly hoarse and deep. Then her power of speech suddenly disappeared.]

In these three paragraphs the hagiographic tone is unmarred by the sort of demystifying insinuations I have noted. The nuns and inhabitants of the village do, in fact, interpret Anna’s loss of voice, her olfactory and aural hallucinations as signs of saintliness. The tension between the villagers’ interpretation and a potentially demystificatory one creates an ambiguity in the narrator’s stance. The hagiographic tone continues until Anna’s voice returns and “la fama del miracolo si sparse dal monastero in tutto il paese di Ortona” (Le novelle, 157) [“fame of the miracle spread from the monastery throughout the village of Ortona”]. At this point, however, the narrator refers to Anna as “l’inferma” [“the sick woman”], rather than as “la vergine”:

Nell’agosto del 1876 sopravvennero nuovi prodigi. L’inferma, quando si avvicinava il vespro, cadeva in uno stato di estasi con catalessia; donde sorgeva poi quasi con impeto. E in piedi,
conservando sempre la medesima attitudine, cominciava a parlare, da prima lentamente e quindi gradatamente accelerando, come sotto l’urgenza di un’ispirazione mistica. Il suo eloquio non era se non un miscuglio tumultuario di parole, di frasi, di interi periodi già innanzi appresi, che ora nella sua inconsapevolezza si riproducevano, frammentandosi o combi­nandosi senza legge. Le native forme dialettali s’innestavano alle forme auliche, s’in sinuavano nelle iperboli del linguaggio biblico; e mostruosi congiungimenti di sillabe, inauditi accordi di suoni avvenivano nel disordine. Ma il profondo tremito della voce, ma i cangiamenti repentini dell’inflessione, l’alterno ascendere e discendere del tono, la spiritualità della figura estatica, il mistero dell’ora, tutto concorreva a soggio­gare gli animi delle astanti. (Le novelle, 157)

[In August of 1876, new prodigies occurred. When the time for vespers neared, the sick woman would fall into state of cataleptic ecstasy, and then rise again almost with violence. Standing, and maintaining always the same position, she would begin to speak, first slowly and then gradually accelerating as if under the urgency of a mystical inspiration. Her eloquence was nothing other than a tumultuous mixture of words, phrases, entire sentences she had learned before and which now, in her unconsciousness, reproduced themselves, fragmented themselves to combine together without law. Forms of her native dialect grafted themselves onto aulic forms and insinuated themselves into the hyperboles of biblical language. Monstrous conjunctions of syllables and unheard-of chords were produced in the disorder. But the deep tremble in her voice, the sudden changes of inflection, the alternating rise and fall of tone, the spirituality of the ecstatic figure, the mystery of the hour, all contributed to subjugating the minds of the onlookers.]

The writing of hagiography gives way to an interpretation of symptoms; the tumult of words which issues from Anna’s mouth is not a message from God but the surfacing of her past. Like Frau Emmy von N., whose traumas converted themselves into tongue clacking, Anna’s traumas resurface as a sort of idiotic glossolalia.
In the subsequent paragraph, in which her attacks are described in greater detail, the narrator’s only epithet for Anna is “l’inferma.” Then, having lost her teeth, her hair, and her sense of cleanliness, she forgets even the existence of her beloved tortoise.

At this point, the two interpretations seem to part ways; the characters of the story read Anna’s gradual disintegration as a sign from above, while the narrator seems to hold the Lombrosian (and early Freudian) Rosetta stone:

Ma le suore consideravano la imbecillità e la infermità della donna come una di quelle supreme prove di martirio a cui il Signore chiama gli eletti per santificarli e glorificarli poi nel Paradiso; e circondavano di venerazione e di cure l’idiota. NeI’estate del 1881 apparvero i segni della morte prossima. Consumato e piagato, quel miserabile corpo ormai nulla più conservava di umano. Lente deformazioni avevano viziata la positura delle membra; tumori grossi come pomi sporgevano sotto un fianco, su una spalla, dietro la nuca. (Le novelle, 158–59)

[But the sisters considered the woman’s imbecility and infirmity one of those supreme proofs of martyrdom to which the Lord calls the elect in order to sanctify and glorify them afterwards in Paradise, and they surrounded the idiot with veneration and care. In the summer of 1881 the signs of approaching death appeared. Consumed and scarred, that miserable body no longer retained anything human. Slow deformations had vitiated the posture of her limbs; tumors fat as apples sprouted on her side, on her shoulder, at the back of her head.]

Do we read idiota as Dostoevskian or assume that it carries the negative connotations of common parlance? The “signs of death” which appear on the virgin’s body, in lieu of the possible “signs of martyrdom,” seem to point in a Lombrosian direction. Yet even the demystifying Lombrosian stance is not as firm as it might be, for D’Annunzio could well have adopted the Flaubertian strategy of “Un coeur simple” and, rather than dispensing with Anna’s beloved tortoise, made it an object of idolatry like Félicité’s parrot.

What, then, do we make of these two tales? “La vergine Orsola,”
insofar as it is in complementary contrast with Andrea Sperelli’s convalescence, is less problematic than “La vergine Anna.” As a portrayal of convalescence as the bed of an “anticonversion,” “La vergine Orsola,” in a rhetorical sense, had to exist. The scene of convalescence is given a Lombrosian (and early Freudian) inflection that overturns the terms of the Baudelairean rhetoric. The topos of conversion evokes its dialectical counterpart, perversion, and convalescence becomes the ground for both conversion and perversion in D’Annunzio’s works. “La vergine Anna” cannot be inserted into this framework; not only is convalescence not thematized, but neither a dramatic conversion nor an introduction to perversion occurs in the story. Anna’s life is a series of illnesses and traumas, none of which is specifically sexual. As in Frau Emmy von N.’s account of her life, this version of Anna’s biography appears to have been edited in usum delphini. But from the tension between the narrator’s adherence to the nun’s interpretation of Anna’s attacks and the narrator’s demystifying “Lombrosian” moments, there arises a hint of a third interpretation: this, too, is the tale of a conversion, but the conversion here enacted is hysterical conversion. Anna exhibits symptoms that also characterize Freud and Breuer’s Fräulein und Frauen: like Miss Lucy R., Anna has olfactory hallucinations; like Fräulein Anna O. and Frau Emmy von N., the virgin Anna’s speech is disturbed and distorted; like Fräulein Elizabeth von R., Anna assumes positions that are iconic of her psychic condition:

Come l’inferma entrava nell’estasi catalettica, i preludii vaghi dell’organo rapivano gli animi delle religiose in una sfera superiore. Il lume delle lampade si diffondeva svelto dall’alto, dando un’incertitudine aerea e quasi una morente dolcezza all’apparenza delle cose. A un punto l’organo taceva. La respirazione dell’inferma diveniva più profonda; le braccia le si

12. “It has also struck me that amongst all the intimate information given me by the patient there was a complete absence of the sexual element, which is, after all, more liable than any other to provide occasion for traumas. It is impossible that her excitations in this field can have left no traces whatsoever; what I was allowed to hear was no doubt an editio in usum delphini (a bowdlerized edition) of her life story” (Freud-Breuer, 103).
distendevano così che nei polsi scarnificati i tendini vibravano simili alle corde di uno strumento. Poi, d’un tratto, l’inferma balzava in piedi, incrociava le braccia sul petto, restando nell’atteggiamento mistico delle cariatidi d’un battistero. (*Le novelle*, 158)

[As the sick woman entered into cataleptic ecstasy, vague preludes on the organ lifted the souls of the nuns to a higher sphere. The light of the lamps spread dimly from above and gave an airy uncertainty and almost a dying sweetness to the appearance of things. At a certain point the organ fell silent. The sick woman breathed more deeply; her arms were stretched out so that the tendons in her emaciated wrists vibrated like the strings of an instrument. Then suddenly the sick woman would jump to her feet, cross her arms on her breast and stand in the mystical position of the caryatids of a baptistry.]

Anna’s religious devotion is manifested through her body and made visible by a sort of hysterical conversion. The position described, in fact, recalls one of the common postures assumed by hysterics as recorded by Charcot.\(^\text{13}\) As Jacques Goudet puts it, “La vergine Anna” is “a beautiful study of mystical hysteria.”\(^\text{14}\) This series of “coincidences”—fräuleins and virgins as objects of study, similar symptomatologies, a handbook hysterical posture—adds up to more than superficial similarity. The rhetoric of sickness D’Annunzio employs is not, I propose, reducible to “illness as metaphor” but instead implies a theory of the relationship between body and psyche. Physiological disease is adopted as a form of presentation of psychic contents, a rhetorical strategy chosen from among other possible modes of presentation of mental events. This literary choice has, however, epistemological implications: the body so described has no other outlet for the expression of psychic events. This mode

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of expression differs radically from the mode attributed to the male convalescents of Chapter 2, for this "speaker" is neither aware that a message is being transmitted nor fluent in the language employed. The choice of this mode of "speech" is, according to Freud and Breuer, precisely the hysteric's unconscious choice. The woman's body is spoken through once again, but it is not she who speaks; she is not a ventriloquist but a hysteric.

This is a "strong" reading of "La vergine Anna" and might provoke equally strong objections. Let me add, then, to the accumulation of "coincidences" around Signorina Anna's case. D'Annunzio places his female subject in an archaic context; despite the story's fictional collocation in the nineteenth century, it seems to take place, as Mario Ricciardi has noted, in a peasant community outside of history. There are no workers here, no invasion of industrialization as in the works of the naturalist and verist schools, but instead the story of a "visionary" virgin rewarded with veneration. D'Annunzio's archaizing choice brings to mind not only Lombroso but also a more recent discussion of female sexuality which sees in cases of "mystical hysteria" a paradigm of female sexuality: Jacques Lacan's discussion of female sexuality, which radiates from an image of Saint Theresa, whom Breuer had called the "patron saint of hysteria" (Freud-Breuer, 232). And though Freud makes it quite clear that he is dealing with solid, bourgeois gentlewomen (except in the case of the peasant Katharina), his techniques and language betray an archaizing tendency. The hysteric's body speaks in an ancient tongue, pictographic script, and the techniques used to test her are those established by the witch-hunters of the Malleus malefi-

15. Ricciardi, in Coscienza e struttura nella prosa di D'Annunzio (Turin: Giappichelli, 1970), discusses the "mythic dimension" in which Terra vergine and Le novelle della Pescara are situated: "It is here in the emergence of local history, in the 'barbaric' exaltation of primitive and immutable types of the Abruzzi region, that the last step of a gnoseological commitment is taken; in this direction, a polemical intent is confirmed, an intent to rediscover the actual social reality, ignored but now declined to the limits of the most brazen exoticism, by defining its traits according to a realism so extreme as to bring these types to a mythical zone, without time or history" (25).

When Freud pinches the numb limbs of Elizabeth von R., he imitates those witch-hunters who likewise pricked and probed the unfeeling bodies of accused witches to discover not hysterogenic zones, but the paw print of the devil.\textsuperscript{17}

As in Lombroso’s studies, in which woman is placed several rungs lower than man on the evolutionary scale, Freud and Breuer and D’Annunzio place her “outside of history” or in archaic contexts in order to analyze her. Such an archaizing contextualization might, of course, be interpreted as an attempt to reread history. Indeed, the historically “progressive” move of positivism was to reinterpret mysticism and witchcraft as categories of experience deriving from the body rather than from the spirit. Witches and mystics became mere victims of normal neuroses. Yet in Freud and Breuer’s and D’Annunzio’s texts, naturalistic representation coexists uneasily with reverberations from contemporary psychohistorical investigations. Archaizing contextualizations appear to limit and mystify the relationship of the female body to thought, for they raise the positivistic reinterpretation to a general statement on the female condition and limit woman’s “thought” (for mystical experience can be considered a form of thought) to the production of corporeal symptoms.

\textsuperscript{17} The alienists themselves were well aware of the source of this technique. B. A. Morel, in \textit{Traité des maladies mentales} (Paris: Librairies Victor Masson, 1860), describes the witch-hunter’s technique: “The slightest spot on the skin was probed with a needle. If the pricking caused no painful feeling, if it provoked neither cries nor movement, then the poor sick person was a sorcerer and condemned to be burned alive. If, on the contrary, he felt the prick, he was acquitted: Satan had not left his paw print” (320). Lombroso, with his usual nonchalance, spells out the rest: “La grande prova, infatti, di colpa in stregoneria erano i cosidetti segni della zampa del diavolo, i punti della pelle che si potevano pungere senza dolore ed emorragia; si trattava evidentemente di quelle zone anestetiche così caratteristiche dell’isterismo” [“In fact, the great proof of guilt in witchcraft were the so-called marks of the devil’s paw, the points on the skin that could be pricked without pain or bleeding; clearly they were those anesthetic zones so characteristic of hysteria”] (La donna delinquente, 203). The techniques of trial and torture are set out in Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, \textit{Malleus maleficarum}, trans. Montague Summers (1508; London: Arrow Books, 1971). See also, for a discussion of the relationship between demonology and hysteria, Ilza Veith, \textit{Hysteria: The History of a Disease} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
The Influenza of Baudelaire

Far from refuting the medicolegal diagnosis that hoped for their early demise, the decadents incorporated it into their writings, once again transforming insult into a mark of distinction. It is here that the other face of Baudelaire—Baudelaire's illness as text—emerges, for this aspect of Baudelairean "influenza" is filtered through the Lombrosian rhetoric. This appearance of a Lombrosian rhetoric in the description of upper-class protagonists has often been read as merely a response to naturalism. Marc Fumaroli, in his preface to *A rebours*, suggests parodic intentions:

There is something willingly false and pastiched about the naturalist elements imbricated in this strange monster. Such is the case of the "medical report" which Huysmans provides for Des Esseintes: his "heredity," emphatically invoked in order to "explain" his "degeneration," his "neurosis," described by dint of technical terms and based on authoritative scientific works. That, at least, is what Huysmans asserted to Zola in order to reassure him. In the episode, recounted with great seriousness, of the liquid meals administered by clysters, the "clinical case" aspect of Des Esseintes openly becomes a big joke, worthy of the *Malade imaginaire*.18

If indeed the clinical aspect of Huysmans's novel is a parody of naturalism, a barb aimed at Zola, it is also an integral part of decadent narrative. It might, in fact, be more appropriate to speak of a polemical response rather than parody, for while naturalism speaks from the island of normalcy, decadentism speaks through that pathological other which naturalism paternalistically describes. The distance that separates the naturalistic narrator from his pathological subjects is replaced by an identification with pathology and degeneracy.

Yet the "naturalism" of the decadent text is applied in a nonnaturalistic, delirious fashion, for the pathology with which the decadents identify is of a quite specific sort. Des Esseintes, for example,

is an ardent admirer not only of Baudelaire's writings but also of his symptoms. His enfeebled digestive system, his aural and olfactory hallucinations, his nightmarish visions of syphilis all recall Baudelaire’s disease as annotated both by the poet himself and in contemporary medical accounts. It is as though literary inheritance were figured as biological inheritance of the disease of the literary father. Influence truly becomes influenza.

Huysmans’s fellow decadents were quick to point out the spiritual similarities between Huysmans and his idol Baudelaire. Barbey d’Aurevilly wrote apropos of A rebours:

Eh bien, un jour, je défiai l’originalité de Baudelaire de recommencer les Fleurs du mal et de faire un pas de plus dans le sens épuisé du blasphème. Je serais bien capable de porter à l’auteur d’A rebours le même défi: “Après les Fleurs du mal—dis-je à Baudelaire,—il ne vous reste plus, logiquement, que la bouche d’un pistolet ou les pieds de la croix.” Baudelaire choisit les pieds de la croix.

Mais l’auteur d’A Rebours les choisira-t-il?

[Well, one day I challenged Baudelaire's originality to begin the Fleurs du mal over again and to take another step along the worn-out path of blasphemy. I would be quite capable of similarly challenging the author of A Rebours: “After the Fleurs du mal,” I said to Baudelaire, “you logically have only one choice left: either the mouth of a pistol or the feet of the cross.” Baudelaire chose the feet of the cross. But will the author of A rebours choose them?]

Barbey d’Aurevilly succeeded in predicting the future, for Huysmans did indeed choose the foot of the cross later in his career. But in 1884, the year A rebours was published, the association of the two is prompted by both mystical and medical similarities: the blasphemous Huysmans recalls the satanic Baudelaire; Des Esseintes the convalescent recalls the dying Baudelaire. That Baude-

laire's unfortunate end was a continual source of fascination to the decadents is attested by Maurice Barrès's essay of the same year. In "La folie de Baudelaire," Barrès commemorates the afflicted poet with a rundown of his symptoms. Barbey d'Aurevilly's bons mots are fresh in Barres's memory, and the portrait he presents seems to become a double exposure in which both Baudelaire's and Des Esseintes's features can be glimpsed. If Barbey d'Aurevilly predicted Huysmans's spiritual future, then Barrès predicts Des Esseintes's medical future:

"Se suicider ou se faire chrétien!" Le poète n'eut pas à choisir. Depuis des années déjà son organisme assolé se refusait au service quotidien. La paralysie l'envahissait. A l'âge de quarante-six ans le 31 août 1867, Charles Baudelaire expira à Bruxelles, où son inquiétude cherchait quelque repos. Il était de sa destinée de ne le trouver qu'en la tombe. Depuis un an déjà l'aphasie liait sa langue. Qui sait si l'intelligence elle-même ne sombre point dans cette aventure. Des amis vinrent sur son cadavre encore tiède affirmer son esprit lucide dans l'agonie dernière. Jusqu'au cercueil ils soutinrent pieusement cette tête vide qui ballottait de-ci de-là. 20

["Commit suicide or become Christian!" The poet had no choice. For years his maddened organism had resisted daily service. Paralysis had invaded it. At the age of forty-six, 31 August 1867, Charles Baudelaire expired in Brussels, where his restlessness had sought some repose. It was his fate to find it only in the grave. Aphasia had tied his tongue for a year. Who knows if the mind itself does not founder when it comes to such a pass. Friends gathered around his still-warm corpse to affirm that his spirit was still lucid in the final agony. To the very coffin, they piously held up the empty head that bobbed from side to side.]

This mythification of Baudelaire's final years emphasizes three symptoms which will recur in medical reports as well: paralysis,

aphasia, and imbecility. The horrifying appeal of these symptoms to a writer's imagination is clear; they are, all three, physical impediments to the writer's craft. For the decadents, for whom Baudelaire stands as legitimating father, the threat is even greater, if less rational, than for the writer in general. Ideological sympathy threatens to become physiological similarity. It is precisely this threat that D'Annunzio's Baudelairean convalescent experiences in the moment in which he is most Baudelairean, in which he is closest to Constantin Guys.

Having just rediscovered "l'Arte... l'Amante fedele," Andrea Sperelli also discovers the shadow of Baudelaire's final years:

La lenta decadenza dell'ingegno può anche essere inconsciente: qui sta il terribile. L'Artista che a poco a poco perde le sue facoltà non si accorge della sua debolezza progressiva, poiché insieme con la potenza di produrre e di riprodurre lo abbandona anche il giudizio critico, il criterio. Egli non distingue più i difetti dell'opera sua; non sa che la sua opera è cattiva o mediocre; s'illusde; crede che il suo quadro, che la sua statua, che il suo poema siano nelle leggi dell'arte mentre son fuori. Qui sta il terribile. L'artista colpito nell'intelletto può non aver conscienza della propria imbecillità, come il pazzo non ha conscienza della propria aberrazione. E allora? Fu pel convalescente una specie di panico. (Il piacere, 147)

[The slow decay of the mind can also be unconscious: that is the terrible thing about it. The Artist who loses his faculties little by little is unaware of his progressive weakness, for he loses not only the power to produce and reproduce but also his critical judgment, his criterion. He no longer discerns the defects of his work; he does not know that his work is bad or mediocre; he deludes himself; he believes that his painting or his statue or his poem is within laws of art when it is instead outside them. That is the frightful thing. The artist stricken in his intellect may not be aware of his own imbecility, just as the madman is unaware of his own aberration. And then what? This was a sort of panic for the convalescent.]

It is not the language of this passage which is Lombrosian but the fact that a fear of imbecility accompanies Sperelli's discovery of
his identity as an artist. It is as though Sperelli in miming the Baudelairean convalescent risks miming the biographical Baudelaire. The Lombrosian rhetoric of sickness aims precisely to reduce all signs to symptoms of somatic illness, to read literary works as physiological tics. Constantin Guys and Charles Baudelaire represent divergent and contrasting models of the relationship between the (upper-class male) body and thought. Guys’s eternal convalescence makes it possible for him to become an artist, a manipulator and producer of signs. Baudelaire’s sickness instead represents an unconscious production of symptoms, an inability to distinguish between symptoms produced by the body and signs produced by the intellect. These two rhetorics—that of convalescence as the scene of artistic creation, of conversion to art, and that of sickness as the production of mere symptoms, of hysterical conversion—come perilously close to collision. The separate tracks of these rhetorics meet and conflict in Andrea Sperelli; as he rediscovers his capacity to produce signs, he fears that those signs might instead be nothing more than corporeal symptoms.

The narrator of L’Innocente, Tullio Hermil, is similarly haunted by this specter of a Baudelaire (or, indeed, a Maupassant or a Nietzsche) overcome by paralysis and aphasia. Hermil, too, is convalescent, though no physiological disease or wound provides an alibi for his rebirth. In the opening section of the novel, a sort of incipit that precedes the first enumerated chapter, illness appears as a metaphor for a life of perversion:

La mia triste passione per Teresa Raffo divenne sempre più esclusiva, occupò tutte le mie facoltà, non mi diede un’ora di tregua. Io era veramente un ossesso, un uomo invaso da una diabolica follia, corroso da un morbo ignoto e spaventevole.  

21. Nietzsche and Maupassant both suffered from this aspect of Baudelairean influenza. It was in 1889 in Lombroso’s Turin that Nietzsche crossed the threshold into madness and in 1889 that Maupassant began his descent toward madness and his eventual death in 1893. For biographical details, see Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); and Michael G. Lerner, Maupassant (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975).

[My sad passion for Teresa Raffo became ever more exclusive; it occupied all my faculties and gave me not a single hour of peace. I was truly an obsessed man, a man possessed by a diabolical madness, corroded by an unknown and frightful malady.]

His, he tells us, is an entirely spiritual convalescence, a conversion from the “sozzura fallica” [“phallic filth”], represented by Teresa Raffo, to a purer mode of being:

Le grandi malattie dell’anima come quelle del corpo rinovellano l’uomo; e le convalescenze spirituali non sono meno soavi e meno miracolose di quelle fisiche. Davanti a un arbusto fiorito, davanti a un ramo coperto di minute gemme, davanti a un rampollo nato su un vecchio tronco quasi estinto, davanti alla più umile fra le grazie della terra, davanti alla più modesta fra le trasfigurazioni della primavera, io mi soffermavo semplice, candido, attonito! (L’Innocente, 423)

[Great illnesses of the soul, like those of the body, renew man, and spiritual convalescences are not less sweet or less miraculous than physical ones. Before a flowering shrub, before a branch covered with tiny buds, before a shoot born from an old and almost extinct trunk, before the most humble of the earth’s beauties, before the most modest of spring’s transfigurations, I stopped, simple, pure, astonished!]

Like Sperelli, Hermil discovers the liberating tabula rasa of the convalescent, and once again a Lombrosian shadow appears in the context of a Baudelairean convalescence, though here it appears projected upon Hermil’s rival and double, Filippo Arborio. Hermil, himself expert in the art of seduction, describes his wife’s seducer in terms that suggest a self-portrait (and in fact anticipate the terms with which D’Annunzio’s biographers and critics will describe D’Annunzio himself):

Filippo Arborio, esperto, avendo indovinato la special condizione fisica della donna ch’egli voleva possedere, s’era servito del metodo più conveniente e più sicuro, che è questo: —
parlare di idealità, di zone superiori, di alleanze mistiche, ed occupare nel tempo medesimo le mani alla scoperta d’altri misteri; unire insomma un brano di pura eloquenza a una delicata manomessione. (L’Innocente, 510–11)

[Experienced in such matters, Filippo Arborio had divined the special physical condition of the women he wanted to possess, and he had adopted the most appropriate and surest method, which is this: —speak of the ideal, of higher realms, of mystical alliances, and at the same time occupy one’s hands in the discovery of other mysteries. In short, unite a passage of pure eloquence with a delicate laying on of hands.]

Projected upon Arborio, sickness becomes murder by wish fulfillment; Hermil wishes a tragic end upon his wife’s lover moments before he receives confirmation of its fulfillment from an albino bookseller:

E m’augurai che si trattasse d’una di quelle terribili malattie del midollo spinale o della sostanza cerebrale, che conducono un uomo alle infime degradazioni, all’idiotismo, alle più tristi forme della follia e quindi alla morte. Le nozioni apprese dai libri di scienza, i ricordi di una visita a un manicomio, le immagini anche più precise lasciatemi impresse dal caso speciale di un mio amico, del povero Spinelli, ora mi tornavano alla memoria rapidamente. E rivedevo il povero Spinelli seduto su la gran poltrona di cuoio rosso, pallido d’un pallor terreo, con tutti i lineamenti della faccia irrigiditi, con la bocca dilatata e aperta, piena di saliva e d’un balbettio incomprensibile. (L’Innocente, 557)

[And I hoped that it was one of those terrible diseases of the spinal cord or of the cerebral substance that reduce a man to the lowest degradations, to idiocy, to the most pitiful forms of madness and finally to death. Notions learned from scientific books, memories of a visit to an insane asylum, the even more precise images that had impressed themselves upon me in the special case of a friend of mine, poor Spinelli, now all rushed back into my memory. And I saw again poor Spinelli, seated
in a large red leather armchair, pale with an ashen pallor, with all the lines of his face rigidifed, his mouth open and gaping, full of saliva and an incomprehensible babble.]

The paronomasia of “Spinelli,” who appears only in these few pages, with “Sperelli” is irresistible, not only because Sperelli’s fear becomes Spinelli’s reality but because Spinelli is associated by medical analogy with Filippo Arborio, whose forthcoming novel was to have been titled *Turris eburnea*. It is as though the hero of the first book of the *Romanzi della Rosa* returned in the second, having in the meantime dedicated a novel to Maria Ferres, *turris eburnea*, and contracted the feared disease. This connection is, of course, not systematic but part of the rhetoric that also links Hermil to Arborio; Hermil’s confession is presumably a revelation of his crime, “il mio segreto,” which echoes the title of Arborio’s latest novel, *Il segreto*—precisely the book that the pale clerk offers him in this scene. Arborio is both a literary and a sexual rival, and his sickness precludes the necessity of homicide; it is in itself a homicide by what Freud will call animistic thinking:

Pensavo: “Ho tutto da guadagnare. Se avessi un duello con un avversario così celebre, se lo ferissi gravemente, se l’uccidessi, il fatto, certo, non rimarrebbe segreto; correrebbe su tutte le bocche, sarebbe divulgato, commentato da tutte le gazzette. E potrebbe anche venire in chiaro la causa vera del duello! Invece questa malattia provvidenziale mi salva da ogni pericolo, da ogni fastidio, da ogni pettegolezzo. Io posso ben rinunziare a una voluttà sanguinaria, a un castigo inflitto con la mia mano (e sono poi certo dell’esito?), quando so paralizzato dalla malattia, ridotto all’impotenza l’uomo che detesto. Ma la notizia sarà vero? E se si trattasse di un disturbo transitorio?” Mi venne una buona idea. Saltai in una vettura e mi fece condurre alla libreria dell’editore. Nella strada consideravo mentalmente (con un voto sincero) i due disturbi cerebrali più terribili per un uomo di lettere, per un artefice della parola, per uno stilista: —l’afasia e l’agrafia. E avevo la visione fantastica dei sintomi. (*L’Innocente*, 557–58)

[I thought: “I have everything to gain. If I were to duel such
a famous adversary, if I were to wound him seriously or kill him, the fact would certainly not remain secret. It would spread quickly by word-of-mouth and would be in all the papers. The true cause of the duel might even come out! And instead this providential sickness saves me from all perils, from all annoyances, and from all the gossip. I can surely renounce a bloody pleasure, a punishment inflicted by my own hand (and am I so sure of the outcome?), when I know that the man I detest is paralyzed by his disease and reduced to impotence. But can this news be true? And what if it were a transitory disturbance?" A good idea occurred to me. I jumped into a carriage and had it take me to his editor's bookstore. On the way I mentally pictured (with a sincere vow) the two cerebral disturbances most terrible for a man of letters, for the craftsman of the word, for a stylist: aphasia and agraphia. And I had an imaginary vision of the symptoms.

Later in the novel, Hermil will exploit this intuition of the exculpatory possibilities of disease in matters of murder; infanticide by induced pneumonia is, of course, the crime to which Hermil ostensibly confesses. Here he limits himself to wishing upon his double Baudelaire's symptoms—paralysis, aphasia, and one of Lombroso's favorite categories in La donna delinquente, agraphia. The bookseller supplies both confirmation and nomenclature of the hoped-for disease:

—Il romanziere è molto malato!
—Malato! Di che male?
—D'una paralisi bulbare progressiva—rispose l'albinò distaccando le parole terribili l'una dall'altra, con una certa affettazione di saccenate. "Ah, il male di Giulio Spinelli!"
(L'Innocente, 558–59)

["The novelist is very sick!"
"Sick! What does he have?"
"A progressive paralysis of the medulla oblongata," replied the albino, separating the terrible words with a certain scientific affectation. "Oh, The same illness that Giulio Spinelli had!"]
Tullio and the bookseller then consult medical texts to ascertain the incurability of Arborio’s condition, just as D’Annunzio claimed to have consulted medical texts in the researching and writing of L’Innocente. Whether or not D’Annunzio consulted Genio e follia (1882) or the then recent rewrite of that volume, L’uomo di genio (1892), the diagnosis echoes Lombroso’s diagnosis of Baudelaire: “fini colla paralisi progressiva degli alienati” [“ended with the progressive paralysis of alienati”].

At this point, both Lombroso and Baudelaire are clearly metonymies; Baudelaire could well be a number of Lombroso’s alienati, Lombroso, a number of fellow alienists. What is important here is the appearance of Lombrosian alienist language and symptomologies. Tullio Hermil, in fact, describes himself as an alienist would describe an alienato:

Quante volte io, ideologo e analista e sofista in epoca di decadenza, m’ero compiaciuto d’essere il discendente di quel Raimondo Hermil de Penedo che alla Goletta operò prodigi di valore e di ferocia sotto gli occhi di Carlo Quinto! Lo sviluppo eccessivo della mia intelligenza e la mia multanimità non avevano potuto modificare il fondo della mia sostanza, il substrato nascosto in cui erano inscritti tutti i caratteri ereditari della mia razza. In mio fratello, organismo equilibrato, il

23. In her preface to the 1976 Oscar Mondadori edition of L’Innocente, Maria Teresa Giannelli states that, in his correspondence with his French translator, Georges Hérelle, D’Annunzio claims to have researched the symptoms of the adulterine child’s illness and death (23). She does not, however, cite the letter involved, and it does not appear in the collection of letters published as Gabriele D’Annunzio à Georges Hérelle: Correspondance, ed. Guy Tosi (Paris: Denoël, 1946). But in his introductory note to that collection, Tosi recounts an episode from Hérelle’s manuscript “Notelette dannunziane” which seems to corroborate Gian­nelli’s reference. D’Annunzio happens upon a child suffering from croup, and tries to put his medical studies to use: “J’avais essayé, sans succès, de le soulagé à l’aide du peu de connaissances médicales que j’avais acquises lorsque je faisais des études pour la description de la mort du petit Raymond dans L’Innocente” [“I tried, unsuccessfully, to relieve it with the help of the little medical knowledge I had acquired when I did research for the description of the death of Raimondo in L’Innocente”] (33).

pensiero s'accompagnava sempre all'opera; in me il pensiero predominava ma senza distruggere le mie facoltà di azione che anzi non di rado si esplicavano con una straordinaria potenza. Io ero insomma un violento e un appassionato consiente, nel quale l'ipertrrofia di alcuni centri cerebrali rendeva impossibile la coordinazione necessaria alla vita normale dello spirito. Lucidissimo sorvegliatore di me stesso, avevo tutti gli impeti delle nature primitive indisciplinabili. Più di una volta io ero stato tentato da improvvisi suggestioni delittuose. Più d'una volta ero rimasto sorpreso dall'insurrezione spontanea d'un istinto crudele. (L'Innocente, 514–15)

[How often I, ideologue and analyst and sophist in an epoch of decadence, had prided myself on being the descendant of that Raimondo Hermil de Penedo who had worked miracles of valor and ferocity before the eyes of Charles V! The excessive development of my intelligence and my many-souledness had not been able to modify the foundation of my substance, the hidden substratum in which all the hereditary characteristics of my race were inscribed. In my brother, a balanced organism, thought and action were always linked; in me, thought predominated, yet without destroying my faculties of action, which in fact often unfolded with extraordinary power. In short, I was a violent and passionate, conscious man, in whom the hypertrophy of certain cerebral centers rendered impossible the coordination necessary to the normal life of the spirit. An extremely lucid observer of myself, I had all the impulses of undisciplinable, primitive natures. More than once I had been tempted by sudden criminal ideas. More than once I had been surprised by the spontaneous insurrection of a cruel instinct.]

Lombroso appears once again in filigrana, for Hermil attributes to himself the pathological symptoms of genius and a concomitant tendency toward "follia morale." Both the technical terms and the general outline of Hermil's character are Lombrosian:

Mancare di talento, o meglio di buon senso, di senso comune, è questo uno dei caratteri speciali del genio, e che ne sigillano
la nevrosi, la psicosi, indicando che l’ipertrofia di alcuni centri psychici è, come diciamo tecnicamente, compensata da parziali atrofie di altri. (L’uomo di genio, xxi)

[To lack talent, or better, to lack good sense or common sense, is one of the special characteristics of genius; it is the stamp of neurosis and psychosis and indicates that the hypertrophy of certain psychic centers is, technically speaking, compensated by partial atrophies of others.]

Hermil’s supposed analytic abilities and extraordinary lucidity are, for a Lombrosian, further proof that Hermil is a pathological case. Lombroso comments, apropos of the writings of “average” degenerates:

Ogni numero, quasi, di questi curiosi diari, portava in se, e risuggellava la dimostrazione di quella tesi, creduta per tanto tempo un bislacco paradosso, e riscuiva a convincere i più: quanto poco nell’alienato s’avveri di quel caotico e assurdo che le menti volgari vi appiccicano, e come anzi spesso, l’alienazione dia luogo ad una, non ordinaria, lucidezza di mente. (Genio e follia, Premessa)

[Almost every one of these strange diaries carried within it and reconfirmed the demonstration of our thesis, and managed to convince most people of what had long been considered a quaint paradox: very rarely does one find the chaotic and absurd elements that the man on the street attaches to the alienato, but on the contrary, alienation often gives rise to an extraordinary lucidity of mind.]

D’Annunzio did his homework so well that the alienists themselves recognized their theories in Tullio Hermil. Enrico Ferri concluded, not surprisingly, that Hermil was a born criminal. 25

25. Enrico Ferri describes Tullio Hermil thus: “Tullio Hermil, in Gabriele D’Annunzio’s Innocente, is one of those elegantly dressed scoundrels whom one meets on the sidewalks of big cities, a born criminal on account of the congenital atrophy of the moral sense and corresponding hypertrophy of the ego, especially of the sexual ego—who does not of course resort to the ingenuous and primitive method of poison or knife in order to kill a human creature but who is not for this any less degenerate and perverse.” Enrico Ferri, I delinquenti nell’arte, 2d ed. (Turin: UTET, 1926), 127.
But if Tullio Hermil describes himself as a Lombrosian might have, D'Annunzio reads Hermil's symptoms as Freud might have, reads them by presenting a first-person narrative whose narrator protests too much that he is an acute and accurate analyst of himself. Here symptoms do not appear on the body, as was the case with the virgin Anna; they manifest themselves in discourse. The unreliable narrator's moments of self-analysis assert themselves as the metalanguage that "explains" the flow of his confession. But if instead we reverse the terms and read the confession as the metalanguage that interprets those moments of self-definition, we discover that Hermil's Lombrosian professions are undermined by the rhetorical strategies employed in the text.

The opening lines of the novel put into question the status of this "confession":


Non posso né voglio. La giustizia degli uomini non mi tocca. Nessun tribunale della terra saprebbe giudicarmi.

Eppure bisogna che io mi accusi, che io mi confessi. Bisogna che io rivelì il mio segreto a qualcuno.

A CHI? (L'Innoccnte, 370)

[To go before the judge and say to him: "I committed a crime. That poor creature would not be dead if I had not killed it. I myself, Tullio Hermil, killed it. I premeditated the assassination in my own house. I carried it out with perfect lucidity of consciousness, precisely, in the greatest security. Then I continued to live with my secret in my house, an entire year up to today. Today is the anniversary. Here I am in your hands. Listen to me. Judge me." Can I go before the judge, can I speak to him thus?]
I cannot, nor do I wish to. The justice of men does not touch me. No court on earth would know how to judge me. And yet I must accuse myself, I must confess. I must reveal my secret to someone. TO WHOM?

A confessione may be an admission of guilt, a declaration of illegal or immoral acts committed; it may (in the reflexive form confessarsi) be the manifestation of one's sins in the Christian sacrament of Confession; it may also be a profession of a faith, a doctrine, a religion. In the case of a confessional (Christian) text like Saint Augustine's, these differing meanings presumably form a seamless whole: a "profession" of Christian faith requires a "confession" of one's sins, a confession of guilt and immoral acts. But the possibility of a secular rift between "confession" and "profession" presents itself: one might "confess" to a crime but at the same time deny that any "crime" has been committed according to one's own doctrines. This, in fact, seems to be Hermil's strategy: his admission of guilt is merely a sample of a possible confession, closed off by quotation marks, and the profession that follows negates that sample. Not only can he not say "I, Tullio Hermil, committed a crime," but he denies the very possibility of a confession by denying the existence of a qualified judge. Or at least, one might argue, of a secular judge, for the only form of confessare the narrator uses is the reflexive, sacramental form: "bisogna...che io mi confessi." "A CHI?" comes the response. The question puts into question even the possibility of a sovereign judge and hence the validity of confession itself. What is left is only desacralizing profession, an anticonfession, or a confession through negation. It would appear to be all three. The very title of the novel contains a hint of this desacralization, for while L'Innocente refers, we learn toward the end

26. Luchino Visconti's film L'Innocente in fact presents Hermil as more of a "profess-or" than confessor. Though it is true that Visconti's representation of Hermil as a mixture of the biographical D'Annunzio, a two-bit stereotypical Nietzsche, and a nihilist is less than faithful to the novel, the opening frames of the film, with shots of the book itself as a hand leafs quickly through its pages (rather than, for example, a shot of the book as it is opened followed by a fade to the first scene of the film), suggest that Visconti's film does not attempt to "read" the novel and has dispensed with the very problem of fidelity.
of the novel, to the child after baptism, it also inevitably refers to
the “profess-or” himself, “innocent” of crime. A liturgical scheme
is invoked only to be desacralized: Easter become the occasion of
the resurrezione of Tullio and Giuliana’s “passion;” Christmas, the
occasion of the child’s death, rather than birth. Tullio and Giuliana
read together poems from Verlaine’s Sagesse, written as testimony
to his conversion, precisely in the moment when Tullio is about
(once again) to leave the diritta via. Still caught in the system it
would degrade, a desacralizing profession is an anticonfession. And
the form this anticonfession takes is a confession through negation:
not “I did this and I did that,” but “I did not do this, nor did I
do that.”

(De)negation is but one of the ways that unconscious material
may make its way to consciousness, according to Freud.27 The
superlucid narrator is, in fact, at the mercy of mechanisms of
the unconscious; displacement, condensation, and denegation are
Hermil’s true strategies. Condensation works primarily upon
names: Giuliana, la sorella, comes to be identified with Costanza,
the dead sister, through the transfer of the sister’s name, “costanza,”
to Giuliana herself, “costantemente fedele,” “la mia adorazione
costante” (450) [“constantly faithful” “my constant adoration”]; “la
sorella unica” [“the only sister”] becomes “la sorella, Unica” [“the
sister, Unique”]. A particularly “dense” condensation occurs in the
naming of the adulterine child, Raimondo, for Raimondo is, of
course, the name of Hermil’s father. By itself, such a naming could
be simply a detail of sociological interest, but as we shall see, its
insertion into the narrative justifies considering it an example of
condensation.

The contrast between the incipit and the narration that “begins”
with chapter 1 testifies to the presence of extensive displacement.
Hermil begins his confession twice as he attempts to arrive at the
“primo ricordo,” which continues to elude him. A sort of chiastic
tension is created between these two beginnings, for the traits that
characterize Giuliana in the incipit characterize Hermil in the second
“primo ricordo,” and vice versa. It is Giuliana who is convalescent

dated 1925. I use the term denegation, modeled on the French translation of
Verneinung as denegation, in order to mark this “negation” as Freudian.
in the *incipit* (she recovers from a gynecological operation), Giuliana who is faithful and pure, Giuliana who is sororal. In the second section, it is Tullio who is convalescent, Tullio who has become faithful and pure, Tullio whose fraternal role is emphasized in relation to his brother Federico. This exchange of qualities works both ways, for it is Tullio who is unfaithful in the *incipit*, unable to separate himself from the "phallic image, a filthy thing" (represented by Teresa Raffo), which had become his "morbo ignoto." In the second section, Giuliana's infidelity is revealed; the narrative focuses on Giuliana's "fallo," her sin, and the resultant pregnancy becomes Giuliana's "morbo." This transfer of characteristics is a transference of guilt; attention is shifted from the narrator's infidelity to Giuliana's supposed affair. Such an exchange of qualities renders Hermil's "true confession" suspect and suggests that his narrative is a symptomatic one.

Suspicion mounts as our reading proceeds. The characters of *L'Innocente*, who are linked by sexual and familial relations, fall into three categories, each of which contains three characters: a triad of adult women comprising Giuliana, Hermil's mother, and Teresa Raffo; a group of adult men including Tullio, his brother Federico, and Arborio; and a trio of female children—Maria, Natalia, and Costanza, dead but ever-present to Hermil. In each group of three, the third member is present only as an absence: Teresa is referred to as "L'Assente" ["The Absent One"]; Costanza, Hermil's sister, is dead; Filippo Arborio, who is dying, is referred to as "L'Altro" ["The Other"]. In the group of women, Teresa and Hermil's mother are linked to Giuliana as representations of her maternal and erotic potentialities. In the triad of men, Federico seems to represent Tullio's "good" double, Arborio the seducer, his "bad" double. It is in the triad of children that a disturbance occurs, caused by the appearance of a fourth member: the adulterine child who bears the name of Hermil's father. This child must be eliminated because he belongs to too many categories, he is simply one too many: he is Giuliana's child, Arborio's progeny, Tullio's apparent heir, the bearer of Hermil's father's name. The play of similarities and doublings among these characters allows us to retell *L'Innocente* as a confession of a different series of crimes. We might, then, imagine

28. The consequences of the exchange of *falli* are discussed in Chapter 4.
a sort of ghost narrative in which Hermil would summarize his story in denigrations and displacements. It might sound something like this: “It is not my mother but my wife who is with child in my mother’s house. In any case, it was not I but Filippo Arborio who impregnated her. It was not I who killed that other but his disease. I merely desired his death, predicted his disease. It was not my son that I killed (and after all, it was pneumonia that killed him) but an intruder, an intruder with the name of my father but not my father.” A series of displacements, of “rejection by projection,” adds up to a confession through denegation: the narrator claims the child is not his own, just as Freud’s dreamers will claim it is not their mother of whom they dream. But to what does Hermil confess? That Tullio is reenacting and reinterpreting a literary topos is made explicit by the text itself, as Tullio experiences a sense of déjà vu in deciding upon the murder method:

[Yes, I remembered. Was it the memory of something read long ago? Had I found an analogous case described in some book? Had someone, once, told me of that case as something that happened in real life? Or was this feeling of remembrance illusory, nothing but the effect of a mysterious association of ideas? It certainly seemed to me that the means had been]
suggested to me by someone else. It seemed that someone had suddenly come to me to relieve me of all doubts, by saying: "You must do it in this way, as the other did in your case." But who was that other? ... that man, the predecessor, was unknown to me, and I could not associate that notion with the images relative to it without putting myself in his place. Thus I saw myself carrying out those special actions already carried out by another, I saw myself imitate the course of action taken by another in a case similar to my own. I had no feeling of original spontaneity.]

These "special actions" are, first and foremost, literary topoi: a narration, a book, a reading. At the same time as this passage describes Hermil trapped in a narration not his own, unable to read his symptoms as signs, it constitutes a set of instructions for reading the text: the narrative itself is a repetition. If Hermil cannot "remember" his predecessor, the reader can speculate, for it is as though three different but related mythological situations informed his confession: sibling rivalry with the son of the wife who so resembles Hermil's mother; an oedipal triangle in which the terms have undergone such distortion that Hermil becomes the apparent father of his father; another version of the Oedipus myth in which Hermil, however, plays the role not of Oedipus but of Laius as he exposes his feared and unwanted son to the elements.

Sibling rivalry is perhaps the least developed of these possibilities, thematized indirectly though nonetheless present. Arborio, Hermil's literary and sexual rival, is the author of a book that Hermil considers "fraternal," as well as the presumed father of the son who will threaten genealogical order. Hermil's unqualified praise for Federico, the Tolstoian brother, includes an evocation of primogeniture: "Avrei voluto essere da lui non soltanto amato ma dominato; avrei voluto cedere la primogenitura a lui più degno e star sommesso al suo consiglio, riguardarlo come la mia guida, obbedirgli" (425) ["I would have liked to have been not only loved but also dominated by him. I would have liked to have given my primogeniture to him, more worthy than I, and to give myself over to his counsel, consider him my guide, obey him"]). Nothing of the kind happens, of course—not, that is, until Hermil contemplates the consequences of the birth of this child, "l'intruso che
avrebbe portato il mio nome, che sarebbe stato il mio erede, che avrebbe usurpato le carezze di mia madre, delle mie figliuole, di mio fratello" (*L'Innocente*, 493) ["The intruder who would bear my name, who would be my heir, who would usurp the caresses of my mother, of my daughters, of my brother"].

Giuliana dava alla luce un maschio, unico erede del nostro antico nome. Il figliuolo non mio cresceva, incolume, usurpava l'amore di mia madre, di mio fratello.... diveniva capriccioso come un piccolo despota; s'impadroniva della mia casa. (*L'Innocente*, 539)

Juliana gave birth to a boy, only heir to the family name. The son not mine grew, unharmed, and usurped the love of my mother, of my brother. . . . he became capricious, like a little despot; he became master of my house.

The child would "usurp" both the mother's love—that of Hermil's mother, not of Giuliana, Hermil's wife—and Hermil's property, *his* inheritance. As "unico erede" the child would indeed take away Hermil's primogeniture and thus might be said to figure as fraternal enemy.

The second possibility—that Hermil becomes the father of his father, the son of his son, and then acts out an oedipal narrative in disguised form—is perhaps the most obvious. Raimondo, the child who would usurp the mother's love, is none other than Raimondo, "l'uomo che mia madre amava" (569); in killing the son, Hermil kills the father.

The last possibility, however, suggests an interesting shift of focus in reading the Oedipus myth. The *means* suggested to him by his unknown predecessor are Laius's means: exposure to the elements. What if the Oedipus complex were a distorted version of the Laius complex? Rather than the representation of an infantile fantasy, the myth would then become a projection onto the child of a parental fantasy of infanticide. The oracle who warns Laius would thus be an externalization of a father's anxieties, an externalization that gives him the justification he needs to murder his own son. The attribution of evil intent to the child justifies evil intent
on the part of the father. Tullio Hermil himself explains the underlying mechanism:

Il piccolo fantasma perverso era una emanazione diretta del mio odio; aveva contro di me la stessa inimicizia che io avevo contro di lui; era un nemico, un avversario col quale stavo per impegnare la lotta. Egli era la mia vittima ed io era la sua. (L’Innocente, 540)

[That perverse little phantom was a direct emanation of my hatred; it harbored the same hostility against me that I harbored against it; it was an enemy, an adversary with whom I was about to take up battle. He was my victim and I was his.]

Tullio is caught in a family romance in which, however, motives for murder exist on the part of the father as well as that of the son. His confession through denegation is impressively economical, for he thus commits fratricide, parricide, and infanticide in one condensed stroke. The mythological subtexts are too many, the variations on the family romance too obsessive, the rhetorical mechanisms too similar not to suspect that D’Annunzio here is discovering Freud’s terrain before Freud has even set foot on it. D’Annunzio’s rendering of the discourse of an alienato suggests the presence of unconscious mechanisms that limit and distort Hermil’s true confession, mechanisms that, Freud will claim, are proper to oneiric discourse. The “true” confession lies elsewhere; another narrative lies “behind” that of the novel, recounting the tortuous paths taken by Hermil’s sexuality and psychology. The logic is that which we have come to label Freudian, but its narrativization in D’Annunzio’s text produces a kind of scrambling of the Freudian code. We might say, in fact, that L’Innocente is not a rereading but a prereading of the Freudian account of Oedipus.

“As you know,” wrote Freud, “every discovery is made more than once and none is made all at once.”29 The suggested parallel between D’Annunzio and Freud is precisely that: the two contemporaries (Freud, seven years D’Annunzio’s elder, died one year after the poet) explore similar problems, and though their modes of

analysis and conclusions may ultimately be dissimilar, both “dis-
cover” the unconscious. By way of Lombroso and the Lombrosian
narrator of L’Innocente, D’Annunzio’s meditation on the relationship
of bodies to thought opens onto very non-Lombrosian conclusions,
and his search for a language with which to describe “stati d’animo”
leads him to a rhetoric of the unconscious. But this particular
discovery is tied to a particular body—the upper-class male body;
the rhetoric of sickness as applied to the upper-class female body
is, as we shall see in the final chapter, quite a different matter.