

The Boundaries of Unitarian Italy: Gender and Class between Personal and Public Sources. Four Intellectual Couples Compared

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Abstract: The article focuses on the process of Italy's unification from the particular perspective of gender and social boundaries. The period chosen is the 'long nineteenth century', before and after the unification of Italy, when many questions were raised about the country's political and social development. Exploring the debate from the point of view of the history of sentiments and emotions, I move from the personal to the social and political spheres. In particular, I focus on four intellectual couples who discussed gender issues, as well as their political perspectives on citizenship and social responsibilities. The noble couple, Gianna Maffei and Ercole Trotti Mosti, who at the beginning of the nineteenth century encountered the Risorgimento process, were culturally immersed in the relationship between the Risorgimento and Romanticism and expressed a new political vision of human relationships. Their views are compared with those of Grazia Mancini and Augusto Pierantoni, who lived through the Risorgimento and the period of post-Unification Italy, and articulated the idea of the new nation in terms of rigid gender and class boundaries. In opposition to this perspective, Ersilia Bronzini and Luigi Majno developed a socialist and feminist perspective concerning the social and political boundaries of the State. At the end of the century, Angiolo Orvieto and Laura Cantoni responded to their Jewish heritage by again connecting Romanticism to the love for Italy. In this case, the discussion on class and gender roles integrated with the new meanings attributed to the nation at the beginning of the twentieth century, while the terms of political discussion changed rapidly to include the Great War and early Fascism.

Keywords: Risorgimento, Unification of Italy, intellectuals, history of emotions, sentiments

This article analyses the personal correspondence and related documents (such as diaries, family letters, legal and literary papers) of four engaged and married couples who lived in Italy during the 'long nineteenth century' (Chartier, 1991). By comparing private and public sources, it aims to integrate the study of personal subjectivity with an analysis of public

discourse about politics and national identity. This article assumes that it is possible to examine expressions of sentiments in order to interpret how human relationships are conceived and experienced, both in the private and public spheres (Passerini, 2008; Nussbaum, 2010).

The study considers the issue of personal choices and actions towards the political community along with the expression of personal values and moral beliefs (Nussbaum, 2001). It takes into account the formation of gendered identities, and the diverse possibilities men and women had to access the public arena (Davidoff and Hall, 1987; Hall, 1992). By reflecting on the Italian nation-building process and on the definition of the liberal State, it analyses social issues – such as class conflicts related to citizenship, social and political rights – along with questions connected to the formation of Italian cultural identity (Banti, 1996, 2000, 2005; Banti and Bizzocchi, 2002).

Although the four couples all came from the same upper-class social background and were also part of the intellectual *milieu* of the peninsula, they expressed different personal and political perspectives on society and politics. From the analysis and comparison of their experiences, this study investigates their different representations of Italian society, exploring the emotional meaning the couples gave to specific historical moments, social struggles and intellectual debates which contributed to form a national discourse.

As the Italian nation-building process was part of the liberal tradition of nineteenth-century European political culture, it was also linked to the diffusion of Romanticism as a cultural horizon for the expression of emotions (Banti and Ginsborg, 2007). Romanticism represented a common intellectual reference point for the four couples, through which they interpreted their intimate feelings and their cultural representations of society. The early Romantic culture, based on passionate expressions of love and on the recognition of mutual desire within the couple, significantly connected marriage to the idea of mutual feelings and reciprocal care between the spouses. During the nineteenth century, the Romantic cultural horizon continued to influence the modes through which sentiments were perceived and expressed. Declarations of love became fundamental for demonstrating that the partners had chosen each other and the language of feelings was considered a significant code within the couple and the family. While private relationships were transformed through the expression of sentiments, the idea of love also acquired an important new meaning by entering into political discourse. Gender and class relationships were reinterpreted, drawing on a new conceptualisation of sentiments, but this is not to deny that significant differences existed within diverse intellectual languages. In this article, the study of the experiences of these four couples, and of their personal, political or cultural

differences, provides the reader with a complex interpretation of cultural changes and social dynamics in the history of Italy's nineteenth century.

Ercole Trotti Mosti and Gianna Maffei married in 1818 after a one-year engagement.¹ They came from two noble families from the North of Italy (Ferrara and Verona respectively) and belonged to two pre-Unitarian states of the peninsula (the Papal State and Lombardo-Veneto). At the end of the eighteenth century, the Napoleonic Army had rapidly changed the political situation of the territories around Venice. Twice – in 1809 and in 1812 (Trotti Mosti, n.d.b-c) – Ercole enrolled in the French Army, while the Napoleonic battle of Borghetto took place close to the Maffei family's dominion of Valeggio on the Mincio river. Neither Ercole nor Gianna's parents were, however, hostile to the rapid changes which were occurring in the northern part of the Italian peninsula. They gave moderate support to Bonaparte's politics and, after the Restoration in Europe (1814), they responded to the need for political change in the Italian territory by expressing an early Italian sentiment of belonging (Maffei, L., n.d.). This attitude soon revealed a significant adherence to the new values of the early Romantic period. The encounter between Gianna and Ercole was, in fact, based on a deep convergence of ideals and sensitivity, in which an important link between private and public modes of behaviour was established. The letters from the period of their engagement (1817-1818) express an interesting conception of love, in which they delineated their interpretation of human relationships (Trotti Mosti, n.d.e; Maffei, G., n.d.). The two fiancés underlined a new set of private and public values which paralleled the change society had undergone when compared to the *ancien régime*. Faithfulness, sincerity and transparency were recognised as important values in the definition and intimate perception of the self; as a consequence, gender and social relationships were reinterpreted, based on a new conceptualisation of sentiments. The private sphere of the future home was defined through the expression of mutual love within the couple and through the idea of reciprocal and intimate communication between husband and wife. This conceptualisation of sentiments as moral values was also related to a new set of cultural standards.

The sense of reciprocity between the two fiancés and their sharing of ideas and desires can be considered important new elements in the definition of gender relationships. The hierarchy between husband and wife, inside the couple and the family, was thus tempered by a new possibility of reciprocal consideration and self-expression. Moreover, these modes of personal relationships delineated a new conceptualisation of personality which significantly influenced their notions of autonomy, liberty, and self-esteem. Even more interestingly, Gianna and Ercole attributed a social meaning to their love. In their letters, the idea of transparency and faithfulness also became a social concept, based on moral values. Without questioning any ideas of social hierarchies, both fiancés

emphasised the need for social care. Gianna condemned any trait of social arrogance and Ercole interpreted his role as the lord of the community by distancing himself from the exploitation of the poor and the consequent accumulation of wealth. Their idea of social responsibility was, thus, based on the definition of their reciprocal love, as if the one were connected to the other. Answering one of Ercole's letters, Gianna wrote in December 1817:

The Count of Collalto has done me a great service by having given me the intense pleasure of hearing you explain the feelings that I never doubted are in your soul. Had I doubted them, I would not love you as I do, yet these feelings make me know and appreciate your soul even more. How right you are: how is it possible – you say – that such a man be happy, and die in peace? I think I told you before that there are some men that frighten me when I think of them, as when I think of a volcano. This man is one of those. How can it be possible to work only to accumulate money, and never to give? How poor a man is he, I would say. Charity, which I consider most allows us to resemble God, is something so sweet. I think that there is no greater good than that of helping those in need; I truly believe some men are put in a comfortable position in order to relieve those who are not. With my approval, you will have more pleasure in doing good. My dear, how sweet I find your sentiment. We love to spend time in the countryside. Can there be greater and more sublime delight than to be loved by those farmers of yours? And how happy I shall be to see you loved by them, to be justified in the eyes of everyone in my great, my unique love for you. Oh yes, believe me, if there is no happiness for us, who so fully understand each other, who think in the same way about all things, then there is no happiness on Earth. You will enjoy this happiness because you are worthy of it. Next to me, sure to be loved as to be loved is possible by your Malvina, esteemed by everyone who knows you, you will be happy as you deserve to be for your virtues, and I shall also be happy, because you are, since now on Earth there is no happiness for me other than yours (Maffei G., 1817).²

While still far from the nineteenth century's concept of social rights and from the century's social struggles, this perspective can be considered highly significant for the political discourse which supported the Risorgimento. On Ercole and Gianna's part, the perception of a future Italian national identity was based on their projection of a political community founded on new moral and social values. How far this interpretation of Romanticism was able to influence the national perspective over the years or become politically significant is, however, a more difficult issue to analyse.

The nationalist discourse of Grazia Mancini and Augusto Pierantoni offers a different perspective on nineteenth-century Italian culture and values.³ Both Augusto and Grazia experienced the Risorgimento during their youth. As the daughter of a well-known intellectual and political

protagonist of the Risorgimento – Pasquale Stanislao Mancini⁴ – Grazia participated, from her childhood onwards, in the political culture and the intellectual *milieu* of the mid-nineteenth-century Italian circles that supported and prepared the struggle for unity. The many links between literature, political ideas and political engagement within this environment deeply influenced her education and personal growth, forming Grazia's personality, ideas, and desires (Mori, 2000; Meriggi, 2004). Inside her family, Grazia Mancini developed an early interest in literature, which was later translated into her approach to literary writing.⁵ It is thus important to emphasise that Grazia's intellectual development was rooted in her family links and deep sentiments of affection (Mancini, G., 1908).

In 1868, at the time of their marriage, both Grazia Mancini and Augusto Pierantoni were part of the liberal *milieu* of the new nation which had successfully struggled for unity (Mancini, G. n.d.c-d; Pierantoni, n.d.).⁶ As a lawyer and a professor of law (who later also became a politician), Augusto had started his career under the guidance of Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, following his ideals and his political perspective.⁷ Moreover, by joining the Mancini family, Pierantoni established a deep link between his career and his family ties which assured him a stable position within the *élite* of the new state. The hierarchical (and patriarchal) link within the family between the father Pasquale Stanislao and the young couple corresponded not only to a private mode of behaviour but also to the Mancinis' social power and hegemonic position in the public sphere. As Pierantoni's career was based on Mancini's benevolence and personal esteem, Grazia had the role of maintaining and guaranteeing family ties. The relationship between Grazia and Augusto and their consequent world of feelings was thus deeply rooted in the link they established between the family and the nation; a connection which was responsible not only for their ideals, but also for their social identity and experience.

Pasquale Stanislao Mancini's liberal view of the Italian nation was founded on the idea of an extended family based on blood ties (Mancini, P.S., 1851). As the nation was built by different families related to one another, the private and the public spheres were both separate and interconnected, as were the roles of men and women. While women belonged to the private sphere, immersed in family duties, men were active in the public sphere and were responsible for the State. From its hegemonic position, the bourgeoisie often identified itself with the whole nation, representing the nation-building process through the transmission of its values and political criteria.

In their public writings both Grazia and Augusto shared a similar perspective, although some differences can be discerned between them. Through her novels Grazia revealed a significant interest in the condition of women by underlining private and public modes of behaviour. Grazia's literary portraits, however, reproduced a strong gender division inside the

family and the nation, based on female duties such as devotion and obedience. Indeed her characters did not emerge as autonomous personalities capable of expressing independent choices. On the contrary, the writer's attempt to reflect on women's experiences resulted in a monolithic picture which appeared unable to interpret the complex social condition of her time (Mancini, G., 1880 and 1887).

Augusto Pierantoni on the other hand defined his ideology through political and juridical analysis. Being constricted to the private sphere, the women of the new nation testified to the honour of their men through sexual purity and moral qualities related to care and family duties. The identification of the state with a restrictive group of male and bourgeois citizens was, moreover, based on a significant class division:

If with male suffrage the actor, the bootblack, the porter, the lowest of boors, who understands nothing and who threatens the priest [...] should be called to vote for the election of a deputy, why would you deny this right to our brides, to our mothers, our ladies? Explain why you place them below the basest classes of society? Answer! (Pierantoni, 1881: 23).

Even if this passage seems to suggest that Pierantoni would have preferred bourgeois women's suffrage to universal male suffrage (considering class as a more dangerous disadvantage than gender), some years later the politician clarified (or better defined) his perspective:

When King Carlo Alberto used the phrase elector, he did not intend to refer to women, and for many years Parliament, composed of the King, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, did not want to extend the male right to vote to women. Nevertheless, by denying this privilege he did not transgress the principle of equality which, as I said, should balance out with the equality of duties. In the army, in the navy and in the national guard, women were not included (Pierantoni, 1906: 2).

This concept of citizenship formed the basis for Pierantoni's definition of the Italian nation and its internal hierarchies. Moreover, in his writings and speeches the politician supported the first colonial expeditions to Africa (started by his father-in-law as Minister of Foreign Affairs⁸), by drawing on an early concept of the racial inferiority of non-white people (Pierantoni, 1908). How far the ideology of European imperialism influenced Italian politics and identity can be better comprehended by analysing various aspects of the internal debate within the peninsula.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century the political culture of Unitarian Italy expressed many other voices which discussed the same political and social issues from alternative perspectives, emphasising contrasting problems and representing a variety of social subjects. In particular, the socialist discourse directly addressed the structure of the State and its barriers to inclusion. The sense of the nation emerged

differently here and the debate directly addressed the social condition of women and the lower classes. Ersilia Bronzini and Luigi Majno met for the first time in Milan in 1877 and married, some years later, in 1883 (Bronzini, n.d.; Majno, n.d.a).⁹ Their encounter and their engagement were firmly based on late Romantic culture, through which they expressed their reciprocal affection. Having experienced some difficulties in their respective families during their youth, Ersilia and Luigi idealised their future home as a retreat from the adversity of public life and as a space for intimacy. They expressed their love as a dimension of reciprocal care and deep devotion, through which it would be possible to experience mutual support inside the family. During their marriage, Luigi and Ersilia assumed that family life was a central part of their personal development, since it integrated their personal resources and desires. Although in the early years the couple adopted a gendered division of roles between Luigi's profession – he was a lawyer and a scholar of penal law – and the domestic duties of Ersilia as a mother and wife, we can argue that this was not a hierarchical condition since the two spouses intimately shared their problems and views.

The dynamic political milieu of the 1880s and 1890s supported the couple's growing interest in politics. Luigi approached the Socialist Party (and was especially close to Filippo Turati and Enrico Ferri¹⁰), becoming interested not only in social and class issues but also in a broader vision of love, family and gender relationships. Ersilia meanwhile developed her personal interest in the condition of women and became a feminist. By collaborating with the Associazione nazionale operaia femminile (National Association of Female Workers), created by Laura Solera Mantegazza,¹¹ she devoted her energy to female workers and later – in 1899 – founded the *Unione Femminile* (Womens' Union) in Milan, a social association of women engaged in women's issues.¹² While political involvement was growing on both sides, the correspondence between Bronzini and Majno testifies to the spouses' close convergence on political issues, political ideas, and gender problems.

The intellectual reflections of Ersilia and Luigi Majno concerned the definition of the state, which they saw as including women and the poor. Their interest in the social condition of the lower classes implied – as a consequence – a deep analysis of the perception of sentiments which were open to social problems and the social aspects of life. Ersilia, in her letters, testified to her concern for the condition of infancy, of women and the poor. Her intellectual reflections included a reformulation of values in terms of social hierarchies and social needs. She wrote, in 1902:

What a world! There is so much good, but also so much evil, especially injustice, injustice, injustice. [...] And we are so accustomed to being unfair that we don't realise we are so. Rarely, a ray of light dispels the darkness, and makes us clearly see the path we should follow.

I had many of these thoughts while reading about the agitation for the abolition of bakery work at night. [...] What painful effects such an apparently small issue can produce! I do not know if we shall have to eat stale bread when the bakers no longer work at night. Meanwhile, I have started to eat it anyway and I will continue to do so if needed, since I recognise that it is unfair that those poor people should work at night, and I would not have peace now that I have recognised that I would be wrong if I did not continue to do so.

I think that we should accustom ourselves, and we do so with great difficulty because we are too set in our negative ways to be as fair as we can, and teach our children to do so. It is the first virtue that they must have. [...] We do not think, we do not reflect. And we tread not on the atoms of our brothers, but their living hearts, their dignity, their holiest and most equitable aspirations (Bronzini, 1890).

The concept of justice, to which Ersilia dedicated much of her intellectual analysis, was rooted in ideas of equality and reciprocity among human beings. While her socialist view was based on the consideration of diversity between individuals, and did not imply any rigid assimilation of human qualities, attitudes or scopes, Ersilia Majno questioned the boundaries between social classes and their consequent formulation of social values. In the correspondence with her husband she thus underlined the social value of work and insisted on the social rights and economic dignity of every individual. In her idea of social justice, Ersilia considered intellectual and manual work complementary and she interpreted the discrepancy between capital and labour as a significant social injustice. Participating in the nineteenth century's exploration of education as a means of social improvement, she dedicated much of her attention to the question of literacy among the lower classes (Soldani, 1989). Moreover, her deep interest in the condition of infancy supported her social work for women and the poor in order to develop more widespread attention to rights and social issues.

As a lawyer engaged in advocacy for the poor, Luigi Majno supported his wife's work in the social organisations of Milan by contributing legal interpretations. As a scholar of penal law, he also participated in the *Scuola positiva di diritto penale* (Positivist School of Criminal Law) by trying to deconstruct the link between social hierarchies and moral values which traditionally assumed a role in the formulation of legal judgments (Majno, n.d.b).¹³ Moreover, when Luigi was elected to Parliament (1900-1904) as a socialist deputy, he sought to translate his ideas and legal work in favour of the lower classes into legislative action.¹⁴ Together with his wife he proposed and defended legislation for working mothers, aiming to create a social fund for women during maternity (Buttafuoco, 1997). His deep engagement in politics was directed toward the affirmation of civil and social rights, while the concept of Italy which emerged from his intellectual

activity was enriched by a new formulation of the idea of citizenship and of the social and political borders of the state.

This criticism of the bourgeois definition of the liberal state (which emerged, in this case, from the bourgeoisie itself) underlined relevant issues for political discussion in the early twentieth century. The debate was complex, and was complicated by the political situation at the time. At the end of the nineteenth century, Italian society was riven by political tensions linked to the events of 1898 and initiated a new reflection on social care and social responsibility.¹⁵ In this political atmosphere, Angiolo Orvieto and Laura Cantoni – Jewish cousins – emerged as original thinkers, taking up the theme of human progress and transferring it to the central issue of education. Son of Amalia Cantoni and Leone Orvieto – a rich Florentine banker – Angiolo revealed, from his youth, a deep interest in literary and philosophical subjects and decided to dedicate his life to poetry and the organisation of cultural activities.¹⁶ With his brother Adolfo and some other friends, he founded two literary journals, *La Vita Nuova* (1889-1891)¹⁷ and *Il Marzocco* (1899-1932),¹⁸ which contributed to the development and maintenance of an important literary environment in Florence between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

When she married Angiolo in 1899, Laura had already expressed a deep interest in studying which had supported the development of her personality and personal reflection (Cantoni, n.d.a; Orvieto, A., n.d.).¹⁹ Through her marriage she tried to further her cultural participation by also embarking on literary work. In the early years of the twentieth century Laura asked Angiolo to teach her about journalistic writing and she also became a writer for children, thereby becoming progressively more involved in the intellectual and political debates of her time (Orvieto, L., 1909, 1911, 1914). Since she was interested in the condition of women, Laura supported women's issues in *Il Marzocco* and approached the moderate sector of the women's political movement in Italy. Significantly, she also connected the theme of women's liberty and personal choice to the question of education, which acquired importance in intellectual and social debate at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (Gori, 2003, 2004). The concept of a free personality, capable of influencing the way in which people live and relate to one another, became a central theme in her thoughts, which linked the progressive hopes of her time to the concept of human development and improvement:

Ruskin says that fathers, and especially mothers, are concerned above all else with the position that their child will have in life. He is indignant with those who ask him what form of education is best suited for pursuing a certain career, fulfilling certain ambitions, and bitterly observes that few of those fathers and none of those mothers aspire to give their child an education that is good in itself, that makes him a

deeply and intimately righteous human being, rather than a person who is outwardly respected (Orvieto, L., 1905).

Laura observed how human relationships were formed by extensively using the concept of liberty and by questioning the significance of social hierarchies. During the early years of the twentieth century she thus shared some features of liberal and democratic thought by interpreting the meaning that peace and liberty assumed for the definition of human relationships.

More conservative than Laura, Angiolo addressed the culture of his time from a different perspective. By emphasising his sense of belonging to Italy, he profoundly adhered to the Italian nation-building process and tried to interpret the Italian literary tradition through his poetry. The process of inclusion of his Jewish identity in liberal Italy, however, was marked by a strong class-identification, which expressed significant aspects of the bourgeois values of the nineteenth century. Angiolo Orvieto supported the colonial expeditions in Africa in the late 1890s and during the early years of the twentieth century. Since the Italian debate of the time was influenced by a new class struggle and political opposition, he positioned himself on the right of the political spectrum by supporting the First World War and early Fascism. His class identity thus had a significant influence on his decision to support Fascism. During the early years of the regime, however, he was progressively excluded from the political and cultural activities of Florentine circles because he was Jewish and - from the late 1920s - he was obliged to retire from the public sphere (Orvieto, L., 2001).

Having followed her husband in supporting Italian interventionism in the First World War, Laura Orvieto distanced herself from the Fascist regime only in the late 1920s (Cantoni, n.d.b). She thus lived through the traumatic 1930s by Angiolo's side and with him found refuge in Padre Massimo's retreat in Mugello, hiding among elderly people when the persecutions increased (Cantoni, n.d.c). The concept of race which - along with the two related ideas of class and nation - significantly influenced Italian nationalist discourse at the time, and the conservative perception of liberalism, was used by the Fascist regime not only to support its colonial policies but also as an internal instrument of discrimination against the Jews. Angiolo and Laura Orvieto survived this persecution and returned to their activities after the Second World War. Their experience, however, was profoundly marked by the support they gave to the advent of Fascism and, until the early 1930s, to the Fascist regime.

The four couples discussed in this article all participated in the same political and social environment of the nineteenth century in Italy. Through an analysis of their writings, the Italian public sphere of the time emerges as a still limited political space in which the liberal state is dominated by the bourgeois culture of the century, which conditioned the debate on its

moral values and political criteria. Moreover, before and after the Great War, the explosion of social conflict revealed how the class struggle had influenced Italian politics since the unification of the peninsula. The political culture of Unitarian Italy thus evidenced its fragility by affirming an ambiguous convergence between class and nation, which expressed significant aspects of liberal theory of the time. In this study, the issue of sentiment has proven useful for interpreting the personal significance of political ideas and choices and for analysing how cultural representations were constructed and personally experienced. The Italian nation-building process has thus emerged as a complex phenomenon in which the idea of liberty – while revealing its roots in a still hierarchical definition of human relationships and moral beliefs – was nevertheless capable of introducing elements of larger reciprocity in gender and social relationships. In this perspective, it has been linked to a new perception of sentiments as political and moral values. Despite the difficulties encountered by the Italian élite of the liberal state in understanding and responding to social changes and power dynamics, such as European imperialism, it is also possible to conclude that important ideas and experiences in the exploration of sentiments had developed before the advent of the Fascist regime.

Notes

1. Ercole Trotti Mosti was born in Ferrara in 1786, where he died in 1828. Gianna Maffei was born in Verona in 1798 and died in Ferrara in 1879.

2. I would like to avoid any confusion between the *ancien régime* concept of charity based on the Catholic tradition, and this already secular conceptualisation of love, based on a circularity between personal and public ideas of sentiments. As I stressed, it is implicit that this Romantic discourse was also based on the definition of a significant set of moral attitudes.

3. Grazia Mancini was born in Naples in 1842 and died in Rome in 1913. Augusto Pierantoni was born in Chieti in 1840 and died in Rome in 1911.

4. Pasquale Stanislao Mancini was born in Castelbaronia (Avellino) in 1817 and died in Rome in 1888. He participated in the Neapolitan Revolution of 1848 and later became a deputy in the Parliament of Turin (Regno di Sardegna). After Unification, he was appointed Minister of the Italian State in 1862 (Ministry of Education), in 1876-78 (Ministry of Justice), and in 1881-85 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). As a lawyer and a professor of constitutional law, he wrote widely on Italian politics, presenting the national discourse from a moderate and liberal perspective.

5. Grazia Mancini was a prolific writer and published several books between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. From her personal documents it emerges, however, that she did not perceive literary activity as a profession, and in her writings she supported the gender division of roles between the private and the public sphere.

6. The letters between Grazia and Augusto are dated from 1866 to 1909.

7. Augusto Pierantoni met Pasquale Stanislao Mancini while he was employed in the Ministry of Education in Turin, after Unification. In a few years, he became Mancini's assistant in the legal profession, graduated in law from the University of Naples and started his academic career. After having fought in Garibaldi's 'Spedizione dei Mille' in 1860, he obtained the chair of international and constitutional law at the University of Modena in 1865. In 1866 he took part as a gunner in the war against the Austrian Empire, and in 1868 married Grazia Mancini. In 1870 Pierantoni became professor of constitutional law in Naples and in 1878 succeeded Mancini as chair of international law at the University of Rome. In 1874, Pierantoni was elected to Parliament as a deputy of the Left for the constituency of Santa Maria Capua Vetere. He was reelected in 1876 and in 1880.

8. Pasquale Stanislao Mancini decided the first Italian colonial expedition to Africa, which resulted in the occupation of the port of Massaua in 1885.

9. Luigi Majno was born in Gallarate (Milan) in 1852 and died in Milan in 1915. Ersilia Bronzini was born in Milan in 1859, where she died in 1933. Their letters are dated from 1877 to 1913.

10. Filippo Turati (1857-1932), one of the founders of the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party, PSI) in 1892, was the leading figure of Italian reformism. Enrico Ferri (1856-1929), evolutionary sociologist and university professor, was a well-known exponent of the PSI, close to the reformist current of the party and, later, to the revolutionary one.

11. Laura Solera Mantegazza (1813-1873) was a protagonist of the Risorgimento and extensively discussed the condition of women and women workers. Interested in issues related to maternity and education, she founded the *Ricovero per bambini lattanti* (Home for Un-weaned Babies), the *Scuola per le adulte analfabete* (School for Illiterate Adults), the *Scuola professionale femminile* (Women's Professional Institute) and the *Associazione nazionale operaia femminile* (National Association of Female Workers).

12. Ersilia was one of the founders of the *Unione femminile* (Women's Union) (1899), which later became the *Unione femminile nazionale* (National Women's Union) (1905), with offices in many Italian cities. The association was one of the centres of 'practical feminism' in Italy. Its work was directed at social activities and the assistance of women through such means as the struggle for women's rights and the pursuit of parenthood, of equal pay between men and women, and of the maternity allowance.

13. The *Scuola positiva di diritto penale* (Positivist school of Criminal Law), which was influenced by the theories of Cesare Lombroso, expressed difficult and questionable positions about science and ethics (Majno, 1885). Despite these uncertain intellectual bases, Luigi Majno was able to follow an interesting political perspective on the issue of moral judgment.

14. In addition to his work as a lawyer, Luigi Majno was for some years Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Pavia, where he had been a pupil of Antonio Buccellati. He was also politically active in Milan within workers' organisations and in the City Council. From 1900 to 1904 he sat in Parliament as a Socialist deputy. His academic activity concentrated mainly on writing a commentary on the Italian Criminal Code, which was published in separate files from the 1890s onwards (Majno, 1915).

15. At the end of the nineteenth century, social protest exploded against the increase in agricultural prices. The Italian government harshly repressed popular demonstrations, and Prime Minister Luigi Pelloux directed an attempted coup, which failed thanks to the opposition of the left-wing parties. This inaugurated a new policy, which began to unfold after these events, of *détente* based on an increasing awareness of social issues.

16. Angiolo Orvieto was born in Florence in 1869, where he died in 1967.

17. *La Vita Nuova. Periodico settimanale di letteratura, d'arte e di filosofia* was published in Florence from 20 January 1889 to March 1891. Luigi Pirandello and Giovanni Pascoli were among its contributors.

18. *Il Marzocco. Periodico settimanale di letteratura e arte* was published in Florence from 1896 to 1932. Initially edited by Corradini, in 1899 it was taken up by the brothers Angiolo and Adolfo Orvieto, who were its creators and early supporters. From 1903 Adolfo became its sole editor. Contributors included Giovanni Pascoli, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Luigi Pirandello, Enrico Nencioni, Neera, Angelo Conti, Carlo Placci, Emilio Cecchi, Mario Morasso and Vittorio Cardarelli.

19. Laura Cantoni was born in Milan in 1876 and died in Florence in 1953. Her father, Achille Cantoni, was the cousin of Angiolo's mother, Amalia. The letters between Angiolo and Laura are dated from 1899 to 1940.

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