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Abstract:

The 1918 short novel *Una donna con tre anime* by Rosa Rosà (translated here as *A Woman with Three Souls*) is one of the most important narrative texts published by a futurist woman. Visual poet, fiction-writer, artist, and feminist Rosa Rosà (Edith von Haynau, 1884-1978) was born and educated in Vienna. She lived in Italy most of her life, publishing in her adopted language and working as an illustrator. *A Woman with Three Souls* is a visionary "futurist-fantastic" narrative, with elements of both realism and science fiction. Written during World War I, the short novel is a



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feminist parable with satirical overtones, and a manifesto about the impending transformation of women's lives, personalities and gender roles in the twentieth century and beyond.

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Rosa Rosà's Futurist-Feminist Short Novel *A Woman With Three Souls*: A Critical Introduction

Lucia Re



Rosa Rosà (Edith von Haynau). Image Fondazione Echaurren Salaris

1. *Rosa Rosà and the Futurist Woman of the Day After Tomorrow.*

Rosa Rosà is the futurist pseudonym of Edith von Haynau (Vienna 1884-Rome 1978). Her aristocratic Austrian family, to whom she was known as Baroness Editha, included an uncle, Julius Jacob von Haynau, who had been Marshall Radetzky's field lieutenant in Italy. Marshall Radetzky's fame was due chiefly to his victories at Custoza and Novara

during the first Italian war of independence and to the belief that Italy was indeed only “a geographical expression.”¹ It is thus ironic that Edith chose to become Italian and to leave her aristocratic Austrian heritage behind. Like Edith, several of the women who were attracted to futurism for its anti-bourgeois agenda and became active in the movement at various points (however briefly) were in fact not native Italians. Valentine de Saint Point, Eva Kühn Amendola (Magamal), Rougena Zátková, Frances Simpson Stevens and Mina Loy were some of the women who contributed to give the movement a more cosmopolitan profile.²

Edith von Haynau was first educated at home in Vienna, where she developed a passion for drawing. Although Vienna at the turn of the century was in some ways a cauldron of innovation and a few emancipated women were starting to develop feminist ideals, as well as salons and careers outside the home, most middle and upper class women were held to highly conservative standards of behavior. “The angel of the house” was still the dominant ideal, while (with notable exceptions such as Klimt) in intellectual and artistic circles the demonic *femme fatale* and the sickly *femme fragile* remained archetypal objects of fascination (see Beller 2001). Rebelling against her traditional upbringing, Edith decided to enroll at the Wiener Kunstschule für Frauen und Mädchen, which opened in 1897 (the year the Vienna Secession was founded) through the initiative of painters Olga Prager and Tina Blau, who wished to create an institution where women artists could receive professional training and work relatively unencumbered by their families’ prejudices and by the sexism that characterized the Austrian art world and Austrian society in general. Edith attended the school for two years.³ In 1907, she met the Italian journalist Ulrico Arnaldi, and the two married the following year, settling in Rome, where the couple had four children before 1915. In addition to publishing for the newspaper *La Tribuna*, Ulrico Arnaldi, who had a law degree but also wrote poetry and fiction, was a passionate sportsman (like several of the male futurists) and he competed internationally as a fencer. During the war, he was sent to the Austrian front, but Edith seems to have felt no conflict of allegiances between Austria and her new country of adoption. She met the futurist leader Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (who refers to her as “Signora Arnaldi” several times in his journals) and joined futurism during the war, changing her name to Rosa Rosà. The name is based on a small town in northeastern Italy adjacent to Bassano del Grappa, where the Ninth Army’s command was stationed as the Italians built their last line of desperate resistance against the Austrian troops’ invasion in 1918. The town of Rosà itself was Austrian until 1866, and the choice of this name may indeed symbolize Rosa Rosà’s double identity at the time, divided and “on the border”

¹ The phrase “Italy is but a geographical expression” was first used by Metternich at the Congress of Vienna. For his atrocities in repressing the Italian “rebels” in Brescia in 1849, General von Haynau earned himself the nickname of “Hyena of Brescia.”

² For an overview of futurist women writers and artists see the anthologies by Bello Minciocchi (2007) and Rainey, Poggi and Wittman (2009). See also Bentivoglio and Zoccoli (1997). Contarini (2006) provides a useful account of the role of woman in futurism. The volume edited by Carpi (2009) is a compilation with little scholarly merit, but is lavishly illustrated.

³ Female artists from Germany and Austria often opted to go to Paris, which had a lively art scene, but women were not admitted to the École des Beaux Arts in the 19th century and the early 1900s, and in private ateliers (where there were separate classes for women), they had to pay double. See Garb (1994, 103). Although there were other, social and cultural barriers, women in Italy were not explicitly forbidden to attend art academies. Rome was a traditional destination for Austrian and German women artists in the 19th and early 20th century.

between Italy and Austria. The experience of the couple's wartime separation seems to have inspired Ulrico Arnaldi's *Il ritorno dei mariti* (1919; *The Return of the Husbands*), a futurist-style "socio-erotic" novel (not unlike those of Bruno Corra and Mario Carli) that discusses the matrimonial crises caused by the war.

Using her new futurist art name, Rosa Rosà began to publish in Italian, her new language. As in the cases of Italo Svevo and many other past and present Italian authors whose mother tongue was not Italian, her style has sometimes been considered "non-native" yet innovative (Bello Miniciacchi 2007, 159).⁴ In the 1980s critics Claudia Salaris and Lea Vergine were among the first to recognize the value and originality of Rosà's work in literature and art and to see her as a key exponent of the female avant-garde (Salaris 1982; Vergine 1980; Re 1989; Re 1994). During the war, Rosà published articles, drawings, visual poetry and short prose pieces in *L'Italia Futurista*, a futurist journal that had a regular column devoted to the "woman question" and included (for the first time in an Italian literary publication) a substantial group of female collaborators. Among them were Irma Valeria, Enif Robert, Fulvia Giuliani, Shara Marini, Magamal (Eva Kühn Amendola), Mina Della Pergola, Enrica Piubellini, Fanny Dini, Emma Marpillero, Maria D'Arezzo and Mary Carbonaro. The poet and novelist Maria Ginanni often served as editor in chief of the journal. She wrote several of the front page editorials and directed the series of books "Edizioni dell'Italia Futurista." She dedicated one of her prose poems, "Assorbimenti" (Absorptions), in the volume *Il poema dello spazio* (*The Poem of Space*) "alla geniale Rosa Rosà, teneramente" (to the brilliant Rosa Rosà, tenderly) (Ginanni 1919, 99). Although the women who published in *L'Italia Futurista* had a wide variety of writing styles and interests (ranging from visual poetry to performance art to Theosophy), they knew and influenced each other's work, contributing to the development of a female avant-garde tradition whose later exponents include Benedetta and Paola Masino (Salaris 1982; Re 2009).

Two of Rosà's most interesting contributions to *L'Italia Futurista* are the short stories "Moltitudine" (Multitude) and "Romanticismo sonnambulo" (Sleepwalking Romanticism). "Multitude" describes the experience of a *flâneuse*, and reflects the fascination of a cityscape seen in different moments and on different levels (visible or invisible but imagined), with its multiple perspectives, monstrous and fantastically unnatural shapes, lights, textures and movements. "Sleepwalking Romanticism" is instead about a bourgeois interior, a living room where people of all ages are dancing. The scene is represented in slow motion and as if upside down and under water, like a *danse macabre*. The dancers, including the narrator's wife, are transformed into surreal sea creatures who, in the second part of the tale, become the victims of a sudden, deadly storm. A surprising inversion in point of view at the end adds to the Borges-like uncanniness of the tale. Only in the conclusion in fact it is revealed that the narrator is a

⁴ Rosà's slightly "non-native" but often surprisingly creative expressions include, for example, "vestitini...rimodernizzati" (1919, 76) ("rammodernati" or "modernizzati" would usually be considered more standard in this case); "qualche cosa possa riuscire troppo faticosa" (ibid) (the standard Italian usage would have "troppo faticoso"); and "insolitamente mattinale" (89) (standard usage would be "insolitamente mattiniero").

woman who has been dreaming that she is her own husband, a man on the verge of madness.⁵

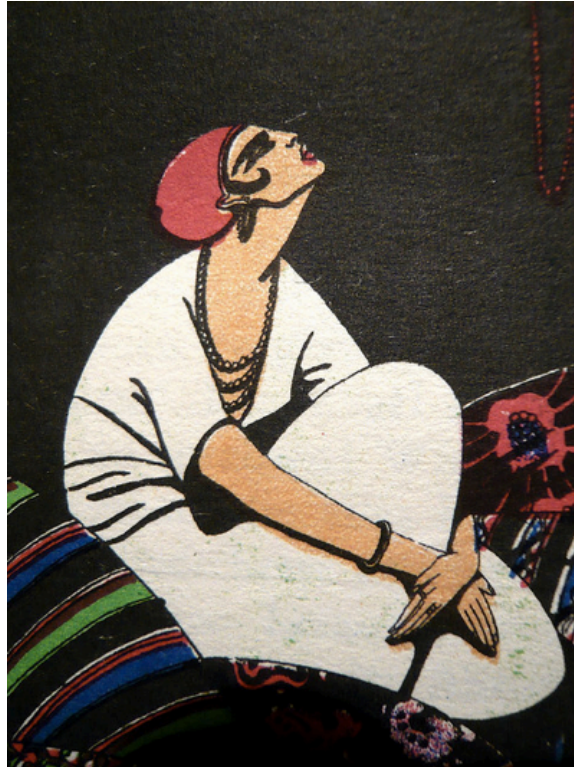


Illustration from *Das persische Papageienbuch* (detail)

Even as she metamorphosed into a futurist, Rosà did not simply take on a new identity, entirely reneging the past. On the contrary, just like Giorgina, the protagonist of her short novel *Una donna con tre anime* (*A Woman With Three Souls*), which we present here for the first time in English translation, she appears to have had multiple identities and talents. Her childhood and Viennese training in drawing and art kept resurfacing in her life and work, which bears the traces of the influence of the Viennese Secession. An abstract black and white ink drawing entitled “Conflagrazione geometrica” (Geometric conflagration) was published in 1917 in *L’Italia Futurista*, along with the witty handwritten, free-word visual poem, “Ricevimento-thé, signore-nessun uomo” (Reception-tea-ladies-no men). As a painter, Rosà participated in the 1919 Grande Esposizione Nazionale Futurista (Milan-Genoa-Florence) and in the 1922 International Futurist Exhibition held in Berlin. In 1921, she exhibited her work at the Lyceum in Rome, where she had a studio in via Margutta (Verdone 1971). Her paintings at the time, as can be gathered from the scarce surviving documentation, were large, abstract or semi-abstract canvases (as may be seen in a photograph included by Salaris in her introduction to Rosà 1981, 26). She also sculpted and designed fabric and ceramic objects, but most of her surviving artworks are illustrations and drawings. Her oneiric, fantastic and humorous illustrations, many with odd geometric perspectives and optical effects that foreshadow

⁵ A less uncanny, more elaborate and more logically and chronologically structured (as well as linguistically polished) version of this story, entitled “L’acquario” (The Aquarium) was published in the volume *Non c’è che te!* (Rosà 1919, 129-138).

Escher's style, appeared in some of the major experimental wartime and postwar works by the writers of the *Italia Futurista* circle. Some are surrealist masterpieces *avant la lettre*.⁶ One of Rosà's major achievements as an illustrator is surely the exquisite Art Déco-inspired work she published in the 1922 volume by Ernst Roenau entitled *Das persische Papageienbuch* (The Persian Parrotbook), an adaptation of the *One Thousand and One Nights* (Roenau 1922).

Unprecedented, on the other hand, and strikingly articulate, was the new feminist voice that emerged in Rosà's interventions in the public forum of *L'Italia Futurista* on the pressing wartime issues of gender and politics first raised after the publication of Marinetti's *Come si seducono le donne* (1917; How to Seduce Women), a humorous "seduction manual" meant to assuage the anxieties of soldiers at the front by putting women back "in their place" (Re 2004). Rosà published four articles, filled with acute reflections on the deep changes in gender roles triggered by the war, and leading up to her vision of the new woman. In the first article, "Le donne del posdomani" 1917b; The Woman of the Day After Tomorrow), she observes that during the war, with most able men away at the front, women have successfully taken their places and demonstrated what they are capable of.⁷ Thus, Rosà concludes, by objectively demonstrating the worth of women in the public sphere, the war paradoxically has been even more feminist than feminism itself. In her second intervention, "Risposta a Jean-Jacques" (1917f; Answering Jean-Jacques), Rosà extols futurism as the leader in a metamorphosis of society that will generate liberating changes in the role of women and in all that concerns sexuality. She goes as far as to affirm that as a futurist she is looking now even beyond feminism – i.e. the historical movement born of the need to free women of their long subjection. By 1917, feminism, which had peaked in Italy with the publication of the novel *Una donna* (1906; *A Woman*) by Sibilla Aleramo, seemed indeed a thing of the past, a mere prelude to the changes now made real by the new social realities precipitated by the war. Not only were women widely mobilized on the home front, their new responsibilities were interpreted by many as a prelude to full citizenship and the right to vote. In hindsight, with the dawn of fascism just around the corner, this seems like wishful thinking, and some of the letters and interventions published by *L'Italia Futurista* show that futurist misogyny was alive and well.⁸ In fact, the war seemed in some ways to exacerbate it, as many men felt emasculated by women's new confidence and expectations, and their new roles outside the home. In "Le donne cambiano finalmente" (Women Are Finally Changing), Rosà takes the lead in what is effectively a gender war taking place along with the war itself, and warns her male opponents who still dream of women as objects that "women are acquiring a new consciousness, an awareness of their free and immortal self, subject to nobody and to nothing" (1917a, 2).⁹

⁶ Rosà's illustrations appear in Bruno Corra, *Sam Dunn è morto* (1917), Mario Carli, *Notti filtrate* (1918), Bruno Corra, *Madrigali e grotteschi* (1919), and Arnaldo Ginna, *Le locomotive con le calze* (1919). Many are reproduced in the Salaris edition of Rosà's *Una donna con tre anime* (1981). Some are also reproduced in Bentivoglio and Zoccoli (1997), and Zoccoli comments on their complex and eclectic style (100-104).

⁷ A translation into English of this article, and of the later "Le donne del posdomani II" (Rosà 1917c) are included in Rainey, Poggi and Wittman (2009, 233-34 and 244-46). On changes in gender roles during World War One, see Molinari (2008). On the gender question and the women writers of *L'Italia Futurista* see Re (2009).

⁸ See the interventions by Morosello (1917)) and Jamar 14 (1917).

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

Rosà's final article in *L'Italia Futurista*, which, like her first contribution to the journal, is entitled "Le donne del posdomani," is a direct appeal to women, and a sort of futurist-feminist manifesto (1917c). Rosà asserts that the liberation of woman entails her becoming unbound from hearth and family, and discarding the notion that her subjectivity is purely relational, i.e. subordinated to childbearing and nurturing, and defined in essence by the "sacrificial" and selfless maternal function. For Rosà this definition of female subjectivity amounts to a paradox; it really means that woman is *not* a subject per se. It justifies, among other things, the lack of a real education for women, who are not expected to have to deal with the issues and problems of the essentially male public sphere. Rosà's critique does not imply the need to abdicate the maternal altogether, but rather the wish to recast it in a different mold. The new kind of mother will be conscious of her strong, autonomous self, and she will have confidence in her own intellectual ability. Rosà's notion of a strong, objective and autonomous self does not represent a regression to an un-futurist form of psychological essentialism. She advocates, rather, the notion of a subject-in-process, a subject who undergoes a series of metamorphoses through her existence; a subject that is "complex, open to all callings of simultaneous, modern life." If this process of metamorphosis implies a virilization of the mother, and if it means that the child will in a sense "have two fathers," so be it, Rosà boldly asserts (1917c, 1). For her, this apparent virilization and loss of femininity represent in fact a recasting, a metamorphosis of femininity as a cultural and historical construct that is subject to change, and even to transformation. "Anche ardori e istinti mutano" (even ardors and instincts change), she affirms in the same passage. Alluding to the futurist critique of the old forms of love and sentimentality that in many ways defined woman in pre-war patriarchal culture, she observes that the role-changes of the new era are effectively transforming woman and love itself in ways that even futurist men do not necessarily foresee or like. "Women who work, study, earn and create, no longer know how to love as women. They have learned to conquer for themselves a sharp and clear vision of the world, independently of men." Though they may still love men, women "will no longer feel like they are nothing" without men, Rosà asserts. In a sense, she concludes, "women are finally becoming men" (*ibid.*, 2). This does not mean that they have abdicated or renounced womanhood, but that as new women they are claiming access to the time and space previously reserved for men alone. "The walls of the gynaeceum have been blown up," she concludes, echoing but going well beyond the original futurist call to blow up the walls of the museum.¹⁰

¹⁰ Little is known about the rest of Rosà's life and work, except that she appears to have undergone yet another metamorphosis, devoting herself to art scholarship and research for many years, studying, among other things, primitive art forms and archetypes. Under yet another name, Edyth Arnaldi, she published *Eterno Mediterraneo* (1964), with her own extraordinary illustrations, and *Il fenomeno Bisanzio* (1970). Her last work as a writer was an autobiographical novel – that remained unpublished – about the "Kafkaesque atmosphere" at the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire of her youth. Her unpublished *oeuvre* also included another novel, *Fuga dal labirinto* (*Escape from the Labyrinth*) whose date of composition is unknown (see the introduction by Salaris in Rosà 1981, and Verdone 1971). It is not known under which name she would have chosen to publish these works. As for art, the last traces of her work are reported to be a series of paintings based on Roman and Etruscan sculpture that were exhibited posthumously at the La Feluca Gallery in Rome in 1980 (see Della Coletta 1994).

2. *A Woman with Three Souls.*

Una donna con tre anime by Rosa Rosà (which is translated below under the title *A Woman with Three Souls*) is one of the most important narrative texts published by a futurist woman. Unlike other futurist women writers such as Maria Ginanni and Irma Valeria, who found that a montage of prose poems or prose fragments was the most flexible and congenial form for them, Rosa Rosà, in addition to composing futurist free-word tables and short prose texts, chose to write in a longer, seemingly more traditional narrative form, the short novel (or the long short story). This was perhaps because she was originally Austrian, and wished to test her skills in a genre that was, as Italo Calvino later observed in his introduction to the “Centopagine” series he edited for Einaudi, one which Italian writers found particularly congenial (1995). This genre also presumably allowed her to reach a wider audience. *Una donna con tre anime* was published in 1918 by Studio Editoriale Lombardo; a second edition came out in 1919 as part of a volume published by Facchi (also in Milan) that included another short novel by her and a number of her short stories: *Non c’è che te! Una donna con tre anime e altre novelle*.¹¹

The tight, light, synthetic and fast-moving narrative structure of *Una donna con tre anime* embodies futurist principles of synthetic dynamism far more effectively than Marinetti’s laborious novel *Mafarka* and the later *Gli indomabili*. For the sake of readability and in order to reach a wider audience, Rosà eschews the practice of words in freedom. Freed, instead, are the dimensions of time and space in the novel, which is effectively the first example of a futurist fantastic narrative. Although there are science-fictional elements in *Una donna con tre anime*, the novel does not fall entirely in the category of science fiction and constitutes rather an example of the fantastic (as defined primarily by Tzvetan Todorov in his classic study), because it remains solidly anchored in the real.¹² The shocking, uncanny and disorienting effect of the fantastic, according to Todorov (1973, 25), is always predicated on the reader’s sense that the strange occurrences narrated in the text are neither a fantasy nor a dream, nor can they be attributed to the protagonist’s hallucinations.¹³ Feminist critics such as Monica Farnetti have elaborated a more gender specific, post-Freudian approach that shows how in the modern female tradition of the fantastic, the strange or unfamiliar penetrates the boundaries of the self, of the home, and of the natural undermining “the very foundations of identity” (2007, 46). Rosà’s novel is a case in point. She carries out her radical subversion of time and space, and of female identity, without ever letting go of the real.

¹¹ The present translation is based on this second edition. In addition to the short novels *Non c’è che te!* and *Una donna con tre anime*, the volume contains a number of short stories. This second Italian edition of *Una donna con tre anime* includes slight corrections of form. See also the edition *Una donna con tre anime* of Salaris (1981). Along with the novel, the Salaris edition includes reproductions of a selection of Rosà’s stories, articles, and drawings.

¹² Benedetta’s futurist novels *Il viaggio di Gararà* (“*Gararà’s Journey*”) and *Astra e il sottomarino* (“*Astra and the Submarine*”) are written in a similar mode between fantasy and science fiction, but lack Rosà’s realism. [Editors’ note: On Italian science fiction, see Arielle Saiber’s essay, “Flying Saucers Would Never Land in Lucca: The Fiction of Italian Science Fiction” in this volume.]

¹³ Todorov’s contention that the fantastic as a mode ceases to exist with the advent of psychoanalysis in the 20th century has been variously challenged, especially by feminist critics. See for example Farnetti (1995).

The reference to a kind of electroshock used by a scientist towards the end of the novel to bring the female protagonist ‘back to normal,’ for example, is a grim reminder of the realities of medicine and the social control of women at the time.¹⁴

In the first chapter of the novel, Rosà introduces with Flaubert-like precision and a flair for what Roland Barthes called the art of the “*effet de réel*” (reality effect) the dingy apartment building and the petty bourgeois milieu where the protagonist, an entirely average urban housewife typical of early twentieth century Italy, lives with her husband, who works as a traveling salesman. Unlike Aleramo’s autobiographically-based feminist novel *Una donna*, with its powerful yet deeply tragic story line, *Una donna con tre anime* is entirely non-autobiographical and takes a lighter, mostly satirical and even at times comic approach to the woman question, yet it manages to get its feminist message across very effectively. As a non-native, Rosà was perhaps able to gain a clearer perspective on the predicament of Italian women at the beginning of the twentieth century than some native writers, and to grasp the historic significance of the war in relation to the woman question. At the same time, it seems that “going to Italy” represented for Rosà, as for Stendhal, Mme de Staël and other writers before and after them, an invaluable stimulant for the future-oriented imagination. In Italy – despite or perhaps because (as the futurists claimed) of Italy’s very real limits and backwardness – a real potential for change and metamorphosis became compellingly apparent. The novel is best understood as a creative and feminist response to that crisis of temporality and spatiality (and of the status of the individual as a gendered subject) precipitated by World War One in Italy that is also reflected in other futurist works, such as Bruno Corra’s *Sam Dunn è morto* (Sam Dunn is Dead) (a novel that Rosà admired and for which she created brilliantly original illustrations). But while Corra’s tale was an entirely surreal fantasy, pervaded by a sense of radical nihilism, *Una donna con tre anime* reflects the new optimism that was an ironic consequence of the war and of women’s newly found sense of possibilities. *Una donna con tre anime* does not address the theme of war directly, yet it is clearly inspired by the new perspective on women and gender roles that was emerging during the war in Italy, and it represents a fictional elaboration of the feminist ideas that Rosà was beginning to present at the same time in her interventions on the woman question published by the wartime journal *L’Italia Futurista*.

Una donna con tre anime opens with the realistic portrait of a young woman living, by futurist and feminist standards, an old life. Her dull and ironically commonplace name is Giorgina Rossi, and she is a prototypical petty-bourgeois housewife – a type that Marinetti and other early futurists, in their invectives against woman as erotic and romantic obsession and femme fatale, had not even ever considered worth mentioning (or conveniently forgot). Yet she represents precisely the kind of self-sacrificing woman whom the patriarchal, bourgeois and Catholic ideologues of liberal Italy, from unification on, sought to cultivate and sanctify. She is “buona, mite, e timida” (good, meek, and shy).

¹⁴ Molinari observes that many women held in asylums in northern Italy in the early twentieth century were mere housewives deemed to be inadequate or disobedient (2008, 118). Although modern electroshock was a later invention, various forms of treatment using electricity were well known since the eighteenth century. In the 1890s, Freud used electric shocks to treat women for hysteria; Lombroso used electric shocks to demonstrate women’s purportedly inferior sensitivity to pain (Gibson 1990).

She is a devoted, obedient wife, with no opinions of her own, endowed with a chaste, un-erotic and modest beauty. She is extremely parsimonious and spends her life cleaning, cooking, knitting and tending to the needs of her bland yet bossy husband, who is often away due to his job. Giordina is thus mostly alone in the house, a modest urban apartment. The husband's ability to travel and move freely in the world outside the home, in contrast to Giordina's secluded and solitary life, emphasize the separation of the public and the private sphere and the gender division typical of liberal Italy.¹⁵ According to the ideology of gender evoked by the novel and still prevalent at the time in many sectors of society (despite the changes brought by the war), the woman belongs in the home not only because her duties are there but also because her purity, her innocence and her morality are threatened by all that lies beyond the home: the promiscuity of unknown streets and squares, the dangers of public life – including the life of politics – are to be avoided at all costs. Early in the novel, however, we learn that the sixteen-year old daughter of her husband from a liaison with an unknown woman may also come to live with them in the apartment. This character never actually materializes but serves only as a sign of a social and sexual reality that is beginning to come out into the open, breaking down the old stricter and hypocritical morality and codes of behavior. Yet Giordina's feminine meekness and maternal propensities – and sense of guilt for not yet having children – are such that she promises to take in this young woman in as if she were her own daughter.

Rosà evokes the atmosphere of Giordina's milieu with a few exact mimetic details: the smell of garlic and soapy water emerging from the kitchen, the tired sound of the old pendulum striking three o'clock. Giordina's limited realm of action, as behooved the good, patriotic female citizens of the pre-war era in Italy, is entirely within the private sphere. Although she lives in a city (which could be Rome or Milan), she goes out of the apartment only to borrow her neighbor's sewing machine and to buy groceries, and she repeatedly frets over the increasing price of potatoes (a realistic allusion to the shortages during the war that drove up the price of staple foods). Rosà's ironic narrative voice summarizes her opinion of this young woman with one effective word: although young, Giordina is "polverosa," dusty. This image of a dusty young woman will influence the writing of Paola Masino's anti-fascist feminist and experimental novel, *Nascita e morte della massaia* (1945; *Birth and Death of the Housewife*), a satire of fascism's repression of women. It is an image that also conjures up a fairy-tale plot typical of romance novels and even of realistic novels that – like *Madame Bovary* – exploit the conceits of romance. Like Cinderella, the novel implies, perhaps Giordina will one day be able to shake off the dust and find romantic love.

But Rosà evokes this standard romantic novelistic plot only to debunk it. In the novel, Giordina's entirely normal, predictable and emblematic life is transformed not by a romantic encounter, but by a series of three successive and sudden metamorphoses: erotic-moral, intellectual, and spiritual. The first one begins one day when, overtaken by a sense of vertigo as she is about to turn the key to let herself back into her apartment, Giordina feels her entire body and mind become suddenly sensual and vitally eroticized. The usually indifferent young man who lives next door to her and happens by chance to witness her transformation is stunned by the energy that she suddenly emanates, and feels immediately attracted to her. It's only a flash however: almost immediately her

¹⁵ On women and the private sphere in liberal Italy, see Willson (2004).

metamorphosis seems to be over. Back to normal, and with a sense of deep embarrassment, she steps into her house, leaving the young man in shock for several minutes. In this scene, as in the other two scenes of metamorphosis that follow later in the short novel, Giorgina appears to take on the role of a female medium in a trance or a séance. Yet the personality that temporarily takes over Giorgina's body and mind, and vitally transforms them and eroticizes them, does not come from the past, or the dead, but rather from the future. It is not a resuscitation of something lost, but an adumbration of things to come. In addition, Rosà observes that it is not the personality of *somebody else* that takes over Giorgina's passive body and mind and eroticizes them, but her own, coming from somewhere in the future. The point Rosà wishes to make is clear: women's personalities and identities are not defined by nature and fixed once and for all, but are subject to radical change over time and, potentially, even within the span of a single lifetime, for different potentialities coexist simultaneously in a woman's consciousness. It is up to women themselves to accelerate and bring about the changes they desire.

Giorgina's first metamorphosis is completed when she acquires the spirit and behavior of a *flâneuse*, a motif of feminist modernism that Rosà had already explored in the story "Multitude."¹⁶ The intuition of the space and atmosphere of the modern city that await her outside, with all the exciting connotations popularized by futurist art and literature, energize Giorgina. Feeling all at once light and liberated, she throws off her knitting, dresses elegantly and seductively, and goes out into the city at night, walking through the vibrant, crowded streets and observing with interest the spectacle of many kinds of behavior and passion, including things that would have previously horrified her as illicit or immoral. She buys and reads the newspapers, eats alone in a restaurant, agrees to converse with an unknown man, and feels free to do as she pleases, because within her bourgeois morality has totally dissolved. She finally enters a casino, where she gambles, ending the night with a seductive, mysterious gambling partner.

The second, intellectual, metamorphosis follows almost immediately, as if based directly on the first, moral, one. At dawn, the stunned Giorgina finds herself inexplicably on the threshold of her apartment building. It is her usual time to go to the market, and she wonders why she does not have her shopping basket. She retrieves the basket from her apartment, but not her normal way of being. After reaching the market in fact, Giorgina does not begin to buy fruits and vegetables. Instead, she starts to address the market crowd in an inspired, powerful and energetic new voice. However, her subject is not moral or religious but scientific. She has symbolically entered the *agora*, the public space of intellectual, academic and political discourse traditionally reserved for men. She announces to the stupefied crowd that she has discovered an entirely new method, combining exactness and creativity, whereby the solution to any scientific or social problem can be found by looking for it in an area of knowledge that may initially seem entirely antithetical to it. For example, one may find inspiration for how to improve the technique for tracheotomy by studying the color combinations in Worth's and Poiret's fashion laboratories. The point of Rosà's colorful, playful examples is not only to attack (in true futurist fashion) passéist knowledge, but also to argue that women's intellectual contribution cannot consist simply of catching up to the traditional standards, prejudices and expectations of male rationality and scientific discourse, but needs to go creatively and imaginatively beyond them.

¹⁶ See the now classic discussion of the *flâneuse* in Wolff (1990).

The final metamorphosis that reveals to Giorgina her third “soul,” the creative and spiritual one, occurs while she is in the midst of writing a banal letter to her husband, who is away on business. From a prosaic account of bills paid, upcoming visitors and the weather, the letter suddenly turns into a lyrical, increasingly sublime and inspired love letter, or rather a poem, in which Giorgina imagines herself deprived of her human weight and ascending like a spaceship or a cosmic body through ever more ethereal, impalpable space, towards an abstract, purified communion with the lover who, she imagines, may be a creation of her own soul. This is, she reflects before the spell is broken, the utmost expression of her own freedom, as well as her love. She then abruptly relapses into the original mode of prosaic writing. Her final yet temporary metamorphosis is over. The significance of this last metamorphosis is clear. On the one hand Rosà is symbolically appropriating for women the traditionally male discourse of the love lyric and the secular sublime, and on the other she is pointing to the spiritual potential, for women, of this mode of writing, otherwise discredited by the male futurists. The title of the novel indicates that the three metamorphoses or illuminations are not to be seen as progressive stages of an imaginary future evolution and spiritualization of woman, but rather as revelations of three “souls” or facets of a woman’s multiple identity and expressive capacity.

Lest her novel be considered merely a utopian feminist fantasy, Rosà not only uses realist language and imagery, but she is also careful to give the text a substantial, albeit ironic scientific foundation, both as regards the reality of the protagonist’s transformations and the question of time. The first part of the novel is structured through a series of alternating chapters, devoted in turn to the events regarding Giorgina and to the discussion, among a group of three male scientists of a series of similar, but apparently unrelated inexplicable and seemingly supernatural occurrences following an extraordinarily violent electrical storm. The satirical figures of the three scientists (Professors X, Y and Z) represent a combination of Darwinian biology, physics, Lombrosian anthropology and sociology, typical of positivist thought in Italy in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Professor Y, who, we are told, was conducting an experiment at the time, suddenly found himself in the midst of a weird, phosphorescent light with luminous corpuscles floating around him and discovered that he had undergone a shocking physical transformation: his hair and nails had grown to monstrous proportions as if he had suddenly aged at least twenty years. Rosà’s futurist irony is clear: passéist science is destined to become obsolete and grotesque. However, there is also an additional feminist irony that subverts the usual Lombrosian stereotypes about the innate primitiveness of women: while Giorgina’s metamorphoses as a woman are an evolutionary improvement, the male scientist’s is a degeneration that turns him into a kind of hairy primitive animal. The scientists get to work to seek an explanation for the strange phenomenon but find the solution only when they are finally able to connect it to Giorgina’s coincidental performance on the same day at the market (which is reported in the newspaper as a ‘psychic’ attack of madness). With the help of a detective, the trio is able to reconstruct all the phases of Giorgina’s three-fold metamorphosis and ascertain that Giorgina’s strange behavior is entirely out of character, and incompatible with female ‘nature’ and with the socio-cultural history of Giorgina’s family. Since Giorgina’s transformations all took place, like the scientist’s abnormal mutation, following the electric storm, they deduce that the storm itself was the cause. The electro-magnetic

storm dislodged from the rotating mass of time fragments belonging to the future, and threw them back unexpectedly into the present. Giorgina's uncharacteristic and deplorable behavior then, belongs not to her, they conclude, but to various stages in the lamentable future evolution of the female sex. In order to "free her" from the fragments of the future that have unduly lodged themselves into her personality, then, and to cure her of her worsening disorder, one of the scientists administers electroshock to her. The cure, they conclude, has been successful, as no further "disorders" in her personality have surfaced within thirty-six hours. But since similar storms may become more frequent and lead to a multiplication of such disorders among the population, there is an urgent need to intensify prevention of such episodes of accelerated evolution, and to alert the political authorities of the need to adjust the moral and legal codes accordingly.

This dénouement, inspired in part by Einstein's theory of special relativity, and possibly by classic science fiction works such as H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1894), is a brilliant mixture of the scientific and the fantastic that exposes scientists' widespread patriarchal biases even as it gives science its due credit. Rosà's own feminist notion of the simultaneous existence of three "souls" in different, yet parallel dimensions of time, testifies not only to the scientific but also to the poetic, spiritual and political significance of Einstein's theory, which was recently beginning to be popularized in Europe.¹⁷ Going beyond the sequential evolutionary Lamarckian and Darwinian model that was still Marinetti's main frame of reference, Rosà's creative use of relativity argues implicitly for the need to believe in the possibility of radical disjunctions and leaps ahead in the consciousness, personalities and roles of women. The war to her seemed to be, at least for a while, the equivalent of the electromagnetic storm in the novel, a cause, potentially, for a radical mutation.

¹⁷ Einstein's first papers on special relativity were published in 1905. The theory deprived space of its independent three-dimensional existence, holding that it is a four-dimensional manifold defined by time as well as extension. In 1917 Einstein published a brief book in German with a lay exposition entitled *Über die spezielle und die allgemeine Relativitätstheorie, Gemeinverständlich* (*On the Special and General Theory of Relativity, Generally Comprehensible*). In Italy, Einstein's relativity became more widely known and an object of debate only after World War One. See Maiocchi (1985).

A Woman with Three Souls

by

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Translated

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1.

For the Rossi couple, life unfolded simply and uneventfully, with nothing deep or complicated in it. To them, everything appeared just as it was, straightforward and transparent, without the slightest hint of further meaning.¹

They knew nothing of the multifaceted realities that lie beneath the surface of things. Giorgina Rossi was young, but her youth was starting to collect *dust*.

Even for those who knew her well, it was difficult to remember anything about her. One could say that Nature wanted her to be average in every way. Her face was all too insignificant, and her eyes too inexpressive for her to be attractive. But fortunately Nature stopped before making her truly ugly, although it had given her a body that never once aroused anyone's erotic interest. It did however grant her a certain simple and slender gracefulness, making it a pity that she had to wear such bland little dresses, mended and updated year after year to save money.

The same went for her personality; in twenty-six years, she never uttered a single word that grabbed anyone's attention. On top of that, she said little. Those close to her easily failed to notice when something was either too much for her, too dull or too taxing.

She was good, she was meek and she was shy.

Umberto Rossi, her husband, was a traveling salesman for a dry goods company.

He had a horn made of coral hanging from his watch chain and carried a used toothpick next to the fountain pen in his waistcoat pocket.

The couple has just finished breakfast. The wife was clearing the table.

"There's nothing else we can do," she said to her husband, pointing to a letter covered with greasy fingerprints, "if we don't want Maria to end up sleeping on the streets we must have her live with us."

"That's what I was thinking," Umberto Rossi replied, "but I didn't want to ask you."

He was not used to showing his feelings, but he was obviously happy with his wife's proposal. And with reason: the girl in question was his daughter.

He never told anyone who the mother was. Yet he had never forgotten to send a monthly check to the aged relation whose death was announced in letter.

While he put on his jacket and his hat and prepared to leave, Giorgina – with all her humble kindness in her voice – continued to talk to him:

"You'll see that I'll love her as if she were my own daughter..."

Once alone, she set to tidying up the rest of the kitchen.

¹ This translation is based on the original Italian text entitled *Una donna con tre anime* published for the second time (the first was in 1918) in Rosa Rosà, *Non c'è che te! Una donna con tre anime e altre novelle* (1919,, 75-125). Although in the opening section and in other parts of the short novel Rosà uses with great naturalness the "historical present" (unlike English, the historical present is often used in written and literary Italian, even outside direct discourse or conversational contexts), we have adopted the past throughout in order to maintain the original's smooth tone and rhythm. Rosà occasionally uses expressions and lexemes that are slightly different from "standard" usage (see n. 4 in the "Introduction"), but not enough to warrant deviating from grammatical and colloquial usage in English. Rather than flaws, we consider these "variants" part of Rosà's style, which is overall very idiomatic, and have translated them accordingly.

With the swift motions of someone used to this sort of thing, of someone accustomed to housework and nothing else, she wiped off the crumbs from the kitchen table and poured the leftover wine from the glasses back into the bottle.

After arranging the four chairs symmetrically around the kitchen table, she picked up a dust rag and began to polish the shiny walnut furniture. Once this task was complete, she took a bundle of garments out of the sideboard, exited her apartment, and crossed the landing to ring the doorbell on the other side of the hall. A portly, ruddy-faced elderly woman answered the door:

“Good morning, Signora Gina, how are you?”

“I’m fine, thank God. Am I disturbing you, Signora Boni? I came to ask the usual small favor.”

“The sewing machine? Of course! Come in, you’re always welcome.”

They entered a big, messy room where Boni’s son, a medical student, was studying near the window in his shirtsleeves. At the sight of their mother, the two young daughters stuffed something back into their pockets, stifling their laughter.

“I brought my thread with me,” Giorgina Rossi said. “I won’t be very long, twenty minutes or so.”

“Don’t worry about it...” said Mrs. Boni, taken with her own generosity.

“So, what’s new?”

Giorgina, sitting in front of the sewing machine, had already wound the thread around the spools and placed the first tacked hem under the presser foot. The student, annoyed by the sound of the machine, covered his ears with his hands. Giorgina was ready for the inquisition:

“My husband’s niece is coming in a few days. A sixteen year old orphan.”

“She’s coming to stay with you? Sixteen years old?...”

Mrs. Boni willingly lent her sewing machine in exchange for information about what was going on at the Rossi residence.

“She’s an orphan? Whose daughter is she?”

Giorgina explained the best she could, adding:

“She’ll help me around the house, that way we can let the maid go and save money...”

“Oh! Don’t fool yourself, my dear Signora Rossi! A girl that age isn’t good for much, and the cost of keeping her around is more than she’s worth: look at my daughters, they spend money, and when they’ll finally be old enough to work and repay me for all the sacrifices I made bringing them up, they’ll fall in love, and I’ll still have to thank God if they find a man who’s willing to marry them; watch out for that niece...orphans are nothing but trouble!”

The chimes of the grandfather clock softly rang three times. From the open kitchen door drifted the strong smell of garlic and soapy water mixed with the pungent odor of floor cleaner.

2.

The renowned doctor X took off his galoshes in the doorway, still panting from his climb up the stairs.

The renowned doctor Y, the owner of the house, went up to him to shake his hand.

Doctor X said:

“My esteemed colleague, I received your invitation with much delight. I can guess what this is about: you’ve succeeded in discovering the long-sought formula you were after...”

With a solemn look on his face, Doctor Y accompanied his guest into the laboratory without saying a word. There, Doctor Z was waiting, hunched over a microscope.

Upon the tables were scattered basins, distilling tubes, vials, flasks and numerous other scientific instruments for all kinds of experiments.

A sickly sweet odor hung in the air.

Doctor X and Doctor Z shook hands then sat down, waiting for the master of the house to tell them why they had been summoned.

He sat down at his desk and spoke:

“My dear and esteemed colleagues! You know how much respect I have for both you and your work. I called you here today to ask your advice on a most interesting phenomenon that I myself was unable to explain, although I thought about it long and hard.

“Never in my long career as a scientist have I encountered such an unexpected and mysterious case. Let me tell you what it is about:

“Last night, around eleven, I was working in this very room on one of my favorite experiments: you are well aware that I have now succeeded in isolating the radioactive elements of Xenit I discovered a few years ago. I was heating over a Bunsen burner the end of a vial that contained a hefty quantity of those elements. Outside, last night’s frightening storm was at its peak.

“I had just finished heating the vial, when a bolt of lightning shook all the walls and windows. An electrical discharge of unusual intensity had struck the lightning rod on top of this house or another nearby.

“I felt a violent jolt through all the nerves and bones in my body.

“When it hit, I was putting away the Bunsen burner I had turned off moments before. Upon returning to my work table, completely stunned by the jolt my nerves had experienced, I noticed, to my amazement and disappointment, that the vial, which I had left on a piece of isolation carpet for only a second, had vanished!”

“Was the vial the only thing that vanished, or was something else missing as well?” Doctor Z interrupted, deeply interested in the matter.

“Only the vial, and, even stranger, I could not find, as much as I tried, either on the walls, the table, or anything nearby, a single trace that resembled a vial struck directly by lightning. It clearly has something to do with a much more complex phenomenon. I would not have solicited your expertise if it regarded a mere accident.

“I had yet to recover from the shock, when I was overwhelmed by an even more astonishing phenomenon: all of sudden, this room, which you see has now returned to its normal state, assumed a truly fantastical appearance. All of the objects in the room,

tables, chairs, shelves, instruments, suddenly began to glow from within. This phosphorescent light spread across the room, filling it with a steaming cloud swarming with countless sunsets.

“The cloud slowly began to change, as if it were living and breathing. It started to produce many dense nuclei that collected in the corners of the room, around the edges of the shelves and tables, and on the metal surfaces of the scientific equipment.”

“Allow me to offer a plausible explanation based on what you have told us thus far” Doctor X said with nervous impatience.

“Wait just a minute, my esteemed colleague, I have yet to come to the most baffling part. Then you can offer me a thorough explanation, based on scientific reasoning, of the other phenomena that followed in the next few extraordinary minutes:

“I immediately felt the scientific impulse to measure the exact duration of the different phenomena that were taking place in front of my eyes. Therefore, I took my highly accurate chronometer out of my pocket, and what I saw was even more stunning: the hands of the watch had literally gone mad. While the minute hand swung speedily to the right, the hour hand turned with the same speed in the opposite direction. The second hand gracefully but inexplicably leapt back and forth like some kind of wild animal.

“Completely astonished by this occurrence, I ran over to that corner where you see my grandfather clock. Well, this too had fallen prey to the same madness afflicting my chronometer. Right away, I saw the two counter-weights jump up and pull violently on the cords as if they were tired of the monotony created by their eternal rising and falling, and sought finally to rebel.”

The renowned professors X and Z, crouching in their chairs, did not attempt to offer any further explanations. Instead, they shot glances at one another while continuing to follow professor Y, who spoke with growing fervor:

“My amazement was such that I was almost paralyzed. At this point, I was ready for anything; nothing else could surprise me. Therefore, I was not shocked in the least to see this flowerpot full of rich soil – in which I had planted, just a few days ago, some clover seeds on which to test a new chemical solution.

“All of sudden, it appeared to me just as you see it now: bursting with foliage.

“But as you see, the little plants in this flowerpot hardly resemble typical clovers. Rather they seem to be some sort of superior clover, perfected and advanced clovers, as if the plants had undergone several centuries of evolution.

“But soon thereafter, my friends, such strange new things began to happen to my body that I was no longer able to concentrate on the things around me. All of a sudden, I felt a heavy weight on my head. I struggled to free myself of it but instead I found myself, and I beg you not to laugh, literally buried under a thick mass of hair: my head, usually shaven, had sprouted hair that had grown at a fantastic rate. It was at least two meters long, my dear colleagues, and as thick as a tropical jungle!

“I instinctively tried to lift that uncomfortable and unexpected mane. However, I could not do so, for my fingernails had experienced the same transformation as my hair; they had grown to the remarkable length of no less than seventy-five centimeters!”

“Fine, fine,” professor Z said pretending to agree with him, “surely, this is a new phenomenon in the history of science.”

“Indeed,” said professor X rising to his feet, “we will reflect on what you have told us, my dear professor Y, then we will let you know what we think. But now it is getting late and we should probably take our leave.”

With utter confidence, Professor Y held up his hand to stop his two friends; they obviously took him for a madman or for someone suffering from hallucinations:

“Wait a moment. What I have told you seems so implausible that I must give you some tangible proof.”

“No, no” his two friends protested with one voice, hastening to add: “Heavens no! We believe you, we believe you.”

“But you will believe me even more – continued the unflappable professor Y – when I have shown you the set of seventy-five centimeter fingernails and the mass of hair big enough to stuff a pillow case. I wanted to stay that way so you could see it with your own eyes, but how was I supposed to teach my class at the university?”

Having said this, professor Y gravely lifted the lid of a trunk on the floor to his right and then opened the desk drawer in front of him.

X and Z felt compelled to examine the alleged evidence.

There was no doubt whatsoever: that enormous mass of tangled hair was the same color as that on the professor’s head. All doubt was vanquished at the sight of those seventy-five centimeter claws, which, at the professor’s request, his friends verified: they matched his fingers perfectly.

Without saying a word, X and Z returned to their seats to listen to Y, who signaled he had more to say:

“Now, please allow me to finish telling you what happened last night.

“There was no way, as I explained earlier, for me to verify with precision the duration of these supernatural phenomena. But from what I can remember, I would say that ten minutes had elapsed from the time the room started to change to the time I noticed that my fingernails had grown. Just a moment later, the phenomena ended as quickly as they had begun.

The thunderstorm, which you obviously remember well, continued unabated. The lightning was still incredibly intense, at one point striking another house in the neighborhood. Once again, I heard a frightful sound and felt the walls and windows shake.

“As soon as it was over, I saw, peering through my hair as best I could, that my laboratory had returned to normal.

“One last thing; I made another distressing discovery about myself this morning: in the span of one evening, my blood pressure rose as if I had aged at least twenty years.”

At this point X and Z stood up again. But this time to shake their colleague’s hand cordially.

“Thank you, dear Y, for having thought to include us in the research that will need to be performed in order to find an explanation for this unique event. We are at your complete disposal. We are available to meet even everyday – at a time of your choosing – and begin our work immediately,” said X.

“And allow me, my dearest Y” – said Z – “to express...”

“Excuse me” X interrupted, “what’s that?”

It sounded as if someone was trying to knock down a small yellow door set in the wall at the far end of the laboratory. The three scientists stopped to listen.

Z said:

“Maybe someone got locked in there. Could it be your assistant?”

“Impossible, impossible” – responded an alarmed Y – “I am sure nobody’s in there. That’s the door to a small empty room where yesterday morning I left a guinea pig for one of my experiments.”

“Well, let’s open it” – said X – “and see what is going on.”

Y headed toward the door. As soon as he opened it, an animal the size of a calf, burst into the laboratory, running into Y and knocking him to the floor.

Terrified, X and Z stared at the unexpected intruder.

The animal galloped once around the table at the center of the room, then headed straight for the water tank in the corner. And while it drank happily, the renowned professors X, Y and Z gathered around to observe it.

The animal had the typical shape and colors (black, white and brown) of a guinea pig.

3.

Giorgina Rossi went out, as usual, to do her daily shopping.

She returned home holding in her right hand a shopping basket full of groceries. She walked in her usual tired, inelegant way, completely devoid of any youthful vigor.

She began to climb the stairs, but stopped immediately to rest on the first floor landing.

At that moment she heard Alberto Boni whistling downstairs; he too was returning home – unusual for the young man at this hour – after running to the tobacconist shop to stock up on cigarettes.

He quickly climbed the first set of stairs, stopping only to greet his neighbor on the landing.

Like all men, he had always shown little interest in this insignificant woman, with whom he had exchanged nothing more than a few pleasantries.

“Good morning, Signora Rossi, were you out grocery shopping?”

“Yes, Signor Alberto. Will you believe I paid fifty-five cents per kilo for potatoes... everything is getting so expensive! We can't go on like this...”

They began to climb the stairs together without saying a word, seemingly indifferent to one another. The young man did not even think to offer her help with her heavy basket.

Without saying a word, they arrived at the second floor landing where the doors to their respective apartments were.

Then Alberto Boni said:

“Goodbye, Signora Rossi.”

“Goodbye, Alberto. Regards to your mother.”

They took out their keys and while Alberto Boni put his in the lock, Giorgina Rossi suddenly paused, her keys in hand, confused and seemingly lost.

At that moment, in the dim grayish light of the landing filtering down through a window covered in cobwebs, one could sense that something unexpected was about to happen.

In the few seconds it took for the student to put his key in the lock, Giorgina Rossi, standing stock still, her hands trembling, was overcome by a kind of vertigo and was suddenly aware that a series of radical changes were taking place at lightning speed throughout her nervous system.

A variety of different sensations had converged in one central point. She felt a great surge of vitality, in her very being, altering her personality and her thought process. Her feminine sensibilities seemed to multiply exponentially in a passionate burst of sensuality that had been completely unfamiliar to her until that moment.

Since she first began to think, she had never encountered anything like the overwhelming and almost mechanical precision with which the change in her sensibilities took place.

This strange phenomenon was almost frightening to her because she was quite sure it could not be due to the presence of Alberto, who, even now, as always, was of no interest to her.

A new form of energy was born inside her.

Despite being prompted by a force released from within her, this was a phenomenon that caused changes to her physical appearance and radiated even beyond her body.

In fact Alberto Boni, as if under the spell of some hypnotic force, began to hesitate while inserting his key in the lock. He had the almost imperceptible feeling (one of those fleeting, yet very real sensations that cause every human being to notice an exceptional person or event) that behind his back there was something that demanded his attention and consideration.

He turned around instinctively to stare at his neighbor who he had greeted with such indifference just moments before.

She seemed fundamentally different to him.

It was difficult to say exactly what this change was – but it was nevertheless evident.

Any onlooker would have agreed that Giordina Rossi *had changed into a different type of woman*.

Her features were the same as before, yet her face was transformed. Her shape did not appear to have changed, but her body was different.

Her face glowed with a new light typical of those who live life with great intensity. A new vitality gave her body and movements grace and elasticity, conveying the fresh exuberance of her new personality.

Attracted to the suddenly revealed femininity, Alberto Boni was about to approach the new Giordina Rossi, when, all of a sudden, the woman's aura evaporated before his very eyes.

And then, just as the young man moved eagerly toward her, Giordina Rossi picked up her basket, which, in her inebriation, she had let fall from her hand. Blushing and flustered by Alberto's behavior, she opened the door, walked into her apartment, and quickly closed the door behind her.

Alberto Boni, completely dumbfounded, stood on the landing for some ten minutes before going back to his apartment.

4.

The head of the *Elios* detective agency, clean shaven, with a gold monocle covering his left eye, sat in professor Y's studio, saying:

"I believe I understand what you want from me. I read the report you sent me this morning with great care. Although what you're asking is not easy, not even for a well-organized agency like mine, I promise I will do my best to satisfy your request. I have already issued the necessary orders to my agents and, in a few days' time, I hope to provide you with information that can shed some light on the scientific problem you are investigating.

"As I said, I carefully read your lengthy and detailed description of what happened. But please excuse me if I tell you I am not the least bit interested in the many scientific particulars you included.

"I am not a scientist and my only goal is to achieve the results you asked for. Therefore, could you please repeat, in a few words and in laymen's terms, precisely what you are asking me to do? Actually, if you don't mind, I myself will try to formulate it in plain terms.

"If I understand correctly, it's mainly about this:

"Some chemicals with strange properties have disappeared from your laboratory. You are extremely worried because you fear these chemicals will end up who knows where; in the hands of some people unaware of the dangers they pose, with undesirable consequences for everyone. You would be very pleased if the missing materials were to be returned to you. Therefore, you would like our agency to keep you informed of any unusual phenomena that take place within the area you have mapped out; that is, phenomena presumably created by those chemicals."

Professor Y could not help but smile as he listened.

"Please do not assume from my letter that this is a matter of a simple burglary; the disappearance of what you refer to as 'chemicals' was caused by an electrical storm."

"I believe you entirely" – the head of the *Elios* detective agency interrupted – "but, as I said, I am only interested in the practical goal we must reach. Therefore, I am not at all concerned with investigating the cause of the disappearance, but only with informing you of any possible consequences."

Having said this, the head of the *Elios* detective agency politely shook the scientist's hand. Stiff and professional, he bowed as he went out.

5.

Umberto Rossi had left on one of his usual trips as a traveling salesman. Giorgina was home alone and spent most of her time knitting by the window.

The tedious task did not wear her out, rather she found her endless work with knitting needles quite relaxing; it allowed her thoughts to travel between the two or three chief worries she had on her mind: the upcoming arrival of her “niece” Maria and the hope of paying off a small loan, taken out when times were hard.

The sound of a dripping faucet could be heard through the kitchen doorway. She spent her hours in almost complete physical and mental immobility, in a calm state devoid of desire and anxiety, perfectly in tune with the stillness of her surroundings.

Her face, as she bent over her work, was peaceful and gentle. It expressed no emotion, nothing that would indicate even the slightest awareness of the swarming life of the streets, of people in their homes, in restaurants, cafes and nightclubs.

At the exact moment at which a clock in the distance struck six, for the second time, her usual way of being was suddenly overthrown, and a new personality was revealed. Yet unlike the first, this transformation occurred gradually.

The transition did not last longer than a minute, but during this brief period Giorgina had the strong feeling that *two distinct personalities coexisted inside her*.

Although vanishing rapidly, the everyday Giorgina Rossi became suddenly aware of the new personality that was about to take over.

She was fading away and disappearing like a ghost, yet retained, until the last second, her self-awareness, amazed and frightened by the aggression of the new personality.

And indeed, with her naïve and kind nature, the old Giorgina had every reason to be afraid.

That strange soul invading her being with such overwhelming force, had traits and tendencies that could not have been further removed from the way Giorgina used to be.

First of all, she felt an unfamiliar and invigorating impatience, a restlessness that pushed her to do something different, forcing her at every turn to make immediately interesting and daring decisions. A feeling of insufferable boredom, monotony, and immobility drove her to crave even an unpleasant experience just so that there could at least be a change. A new lucidity and mental vivacity urged her brain to address problems and explore possibilities she had never imagined before.

As if it were completely natural, she stood up and casually tossed away both the knitting needles and the yarn, a gesture completely bereft of her usual thriftiness.

She headed quickly toward the bedroom, moving almost as if she were dancing. She removed her cotton robe and, instead of hanging it up carefully as usual, she let it fall carelessly to the ground, and began to get dressed.

She put on her best dress: a short frock in black and white checks. The dress was poorly made and terribly worn out, yet it looked almost elegant on her newly transformed body.

Immediately, she went over to look at herself in the mirror on the dresser. With nimble fingers, she pushed her hair in order to give a lift to her straight and dull hairstyle.

Then, with impatient hands, she quickly searched around for a powder puff *that was not there* and a blush jar *that was equally nonexistent*.

She put on the only hat she owned, capriciously tilting it a bit over her right ear, and went out, looking happy and full of life.

She walked along the spacious sidewalks under the harsh glare emanating from the street lamps. The new sensation of lightness she felt growing inside her transpired with the candid nonchalance of each step she took; with each new movement she made; a newfound sense of adventure filled her head and nerves with daring yearnings.

She walked with ease through the crowd of people talking, gesturing, laughing, buying newspapers and rushing toward a thousand different destinations, like a river weaving through the noisy expanse of the streets. The crowd was a colorful mosaic.

Giorgina slid nimbly between people, observing their faces and gestures with passionate interest and listening with curiosity to their voices, to the chaotic symphony of city noises.

Reality, which before had appeared to her as a vast undifferentiated grey mass, now suddenly looked like an immense and multiform pulsation of different powers, the fast and frantic race of wills eager to surpass one another.

A whirlwind of different desires and opposing passions clashing, fighting and vanishing in the mad rush to win.

In the human river clamoring around her, Giorgina could see the faces of men of action, the blank expressions of idlers, the gaudy elegance of ladies exiting stores to get into their cars, the multicolored dresses of numerous women waiting for clients.

This display of immorality failed to arouse even the slightest feeling of disapproval in her. She watched with interest and curiosity, without repugnance.

Although it was almost time for her modest evening meal, she did not even consider returning home.

All of a sudden, she grew bored of all those people, of all that clamor. Without hesitating, with a completely new spontaneity, she turned down the first street she came across. From here, a few minutes later, she turned down another.

At a certain point, she stopped, feeling ravenous.

She looked around. About a hundred feet in front of her, she saw a yellow lantern, clearly the sign of a restaurant. Her instinct told her that inside there must have been something to eat.

In fact, a few seconds later, she read on the sign:

*Trattoria Al Granchio Marino.*²

She walked through the red curtain hanging at the entrance and found herself in a small, smoke-filled establishment with low ceilings. A huge kettle was boiling over the fire in the rear.

Of the five tables that ran along the wall of the narrow room, four were occupied by poorly dressed men. They looked like clerks.

She sat at an empty table and signaled to the waitress.

As Giorgina began to dig into a hefty bowl of soup, they all turned to stare at her.

Her presence was met with winks and smiles from all the other tables. She received these complements with obvious satisfaction but also with the indifference of a woman accustomed to provoking such an interest wherever she goes.

²“*The Sea Crab’s restaurant.*”

A young man sitting at the table next to her, his fingers stained with ink, stared at her intensely. She pretended not to notice. Then, with a careless gesture, she dropped her fork on the floor. The young man quickly rushed to pick it up, gallantly cleaning it for her with his handkerchief before placing it back on the table.

She responded with a flirtatious “Thank you!”

The young man then said:

“No trouble at all, madam. This soup is pretty good, isn’t it? As a second course, I recommend the roasted goat.”

Then turning toward the waitress, he called:

“Caterina, a plate of roasted goat for the lady.”

As they sat eating fruit, the conversation became animated.

During the coffee, he said to her:

“With your permission, madam, may I sit at your table?”

The offer was cordially accepted.

Giorgina could sense that her actions were obeying the orders of her new personality.

She did not even ask herself whether she was right or wrong, whether she was acting properly or not. Every moral scruple had vanished from her soul. Her bourgeois consciousness had effectively shattered.

Deep down, she felt entitled to do whatever she pleased, anything to satisfy her desire to be different, to appease that yearning for more intensity that was now at the core of her being.

It was almost nine o’clock when Giorgina’s attention, still immersed in intimate conversation with the young man with the ink stained hands, was distracted by something that could not go unnoticed, for, after eight, the *trattoria*’s customers were few and far between.

The red curtain frequently opened to allow in some men, who were clearly very different from the restaurant’s typical patrons.

They must have been men of certain stature, though they tried to hide their faces behind the collars of their overcoats or by lowering the brim of their hats. Obviously they were neither clerical workers nor traveling salesmen.

With her newly refined sensibility, Giorgina immediately noticed the elegant elasticity of their strides and gestures. They entered, either one at time or in groups of two or three, without stopping in the smoky restaurant, and headed straight toward the host. They leaned over to whisper something in his ear and then disappeared through a little door at the rear of the room.

There were a few women amongst them as well, whose elegance was completely out-of-tune with that miserable environment.

The quick procession lasted a few minutes and ended with the arrival of a tall, slender woman wrapped in a black silk mantle that was in sharp contrast to her white hair.

With a quick, confident stride, she too headed straight toward the host. Unlike the others, however, she suddenly stopped in front of the table where Giorgina was sitting and stared at her intensely. But she immediately regained her composure and disappeared through the little door.

Giorgina jumped up and headed toward the door, forgetting about her suitor. She reached the threshold and was about to cross it, when the owner, jumping out from behind his counter, screamed:

“Hey! Where are you going! You’ve made a mistake!”

Without responding, Giorgina began to open the door. The owner then came up behind her, grabbed her arm and said with vehemence:

“I told you that you couldn’t go in there...”

But everyone inside had already heard someone trying to open the door and a few yelled out:

“Who is it? Who is it?”

The elegant woman with white hair reappeared at the door. The owner addressed her in an obsequious tone: “Forgive me, madam, but this lady wanted to come in...and I...”

Once again, the woman stared intensely at Giorgina then said in a dreamy voice:

“Do let her in. I have a feeling she’ll be my lucky charm for the evening.”

She placed her right hand softly on Giorgina’s shoulder, whispering:

“Come, come in.”

Beyond the door lay a vast hall, elegantly furnished. In the middle, all the people who entered just minutes before were now standing around a green table.

The elegant woman removed her cloak, showing off her exceptionally thin figure. Then, as if overcome by a feverish energy, she led Giorgina to the table, sat her down in the chair next to her and, after taking a handful of chips out of her purse, placed a large sum on Red. The cards immediately confirmed her intuition. She won and proceeded to violently throw all her winnings back on the table, this time on Black. She won again. Then she gave Giorgina a big hug, screaming:

“I knew it, I knew I found my infallible lucky charm...”

All eyes were fixed on Giorgina and the woman. Not the least bit intimidated, Giorgina scanned all the faces looking in her direction and her eyes landed with interest on the oddly asymmetric face of a young, skinny man, clean-shaven, with brown hair. Like all the rest, he was staring at her.

With the same ease with which a few minutes earlier she had left her young suitor with ink stained fingers alone at the table, she stood up, walked away from the woman with the white hair and sat next to him, slipping her arm under his, and whispered something in his ear while looking at him intensely.

Immediately the young man, who lately had only been losing, began to win.

In the span of a half an hour, he won a small fortune. As he looked at Giorgina Rossi, his eyes gleamed with a kind of superstitious passion.

They left together around midnight: Giorgina on the arm of the young man with an asymmetric face.

6.

Early the next morning Giorgina Rossi found herself standing in front of the door to her apartment building. She paused at the threshold for a moment and could not remember if she was coming or going.

It was the time she usually went out to do the shopping. But, to her surprise, she had forgotten her shopping basket. She climbed the stairs, entered her apartment, grabbed the basket and left again.

While she was descending the first few steps, Mrs. Boni came out of her apartment.

“Oh, Signora Rossi, how are things?” – and without giving her time to respond, she added:

“They told me the price of potatoes has gone up to sixty cents a kilo.”

“They told *me* the iron tunnel under the Pacific has collapsed!”

Thinking her friend was joking, Mrs. Boni burst out laughing.

Those words, however, were the initial symptoms of a new phase. An inexplicable, wondrous transformation was taking place within Giorgina’s soul.

Together, the two women headed toward the market that was only a stone’s throw from their building.

Mrs. Boni, who was chatting with an egg vendor, said at one point:

“Listen to this, listen: six cents an egg! When is this inflation going to end, Signora Gina?”

She turned, no longer feeling Giorgina’s presence at her side, and was left riveted next to the egg stand when she saw Giorgina on top of a chair with her arms outstretched and an inspired look on her face, gesturing as if to hush the crowd of people and call for their attention.

All eyes turned toward her and then Giorgina, with the voice and motions of an experienced orator, began to speak:

“I have discovered forces unknown till now just by applying a simple formula. I devised a formula that will surely lead us to further discoveries of similar importance, if and when humanity will learn to use it.

“My formula is simple:

“Look for the solution to any problem in the material diametrically opposed to it.

“For example, do you want to perfect the technique for tracheotomy? Go to Paris and study the strange combinations of dyes in the laboratories of the Drecoll, Worth and Poiret fashion houses. Do you want to put an end to social ills? Go and observe a butterfly trapped in an icebox in summer and watch how it stiffens and hibernates as if it were actually winter.

“In short: a meticulous study of the pulsations and the capillary circulation of chlorophyll through a tree, conducted with mathematical accuracy, has led me to a hypothesis that has since been widely confirmed by the most rigorous studies. Here’s what this is about:

“Inside volcanoes there are enormous quantities of chemical substances that can easily be converted into gas by applying electricity. Therefore, giant gasometers could be set up over the craters in order to collect these gases, whose precious qualities I will now explain to you.”

The crowd of merchants and shoppers watched the spectacle without understanding what was going on. Most of them shrugged their shoulders presuming that she was merely some sort of traveling saleswoman making this strange speech in order to attract customers.

This could not have been further from the truth: it was instead a new personality, entirely different from that of the night before, that was taking shape inside Giorgina Rossi.

She felt her inner being become magnified, turning into a vortex strangely impelled to move simultaneously in different directions.

Four, five, ten ideas popped into her head at once, and she painfully felt the lack of adequate means to communicate them all immediately.

She felt like the hub of an enormous network of fluids and irradiant energies spreading out over infinite space.

She felt as if invisible nerves connected her to unfamiliar, far-away people, unknown environments, matter she had never even thought existed.

Her physical appearance had mutated once again.

She was no longer the gentle, docile wife of Umberto Rossi, nor was she the magnetically sensual, amoral woman of the night before. Her expression had become hard and energetic. Her gestures were violent, angular and precise, her voice cutting and willful.

With increasing force, she continued:

“These substances that can easily be converted to gas have energetic and luminous properties far superior to any of the combustibles we know. Do I need to tell you how important my discovery is in an era when we are aware more than ever of the progressive cooling and darkening of the earth, and of the need to create new sources of heat and artificial light?”

“I see from the red lines spreading through the knot of your magnetic fields that my words have astonished you. But I tell you that if I were able to express all the ideas boiling inside me, those red lines would extend over the entire sphere of your spiritual emanations.”

At this point the egg merchant tapped Mrs. Boni on the arm saying:

“But madam, your friend has gone mad!”

Mrs. Boni now snapped out of her stupor enough to state with apparent sincerity that that crazy woman had indeed come to the market with her, yet she had no clue who she was.

The crowd was growing restless. A few carrots flew by the orator who did not seem to notice.

She continued to speak with extraordinary eloquence about marvelous discoveries, in a language filled with vaguely futuristic terms.

Two policemen were approaching through the crowd that had gathered around the improvised show when the transformation suddenly stopped.

Giorgina let her arms fall back to her side while her face resumed the kind and meek expression of Umberto Rossi’s humble wife.

She stepped off the chair, looking with astonishment at the people gathered around her, asking:

“What happened, what was that?”

The crowd parted, letting her through, and Giorgina, basket in hand, walked over to a vegetable stand and asked if cabbage had also gone up in price.

7.

“...In addition to what I have already reported, another strange event took place in our city yesterday. It involves a woman by the name of Giorgina Rossi. It seems she had a sudden fit of insanity while shopping at the market.

“No need for me to go into the details of the incident: they have already been covered in all the city papers.

“This is all our Agency has to report about what occurred yesterday. Tomorrow, then, at the same time, we will inform you of what happened today.”

“Can I help you with anything else, Professor?”

“No. Thank you. I will speak to you tomorrow.”

The telephone connection between professor Y’s study and the *Elios* detective agency was cut off.

Immediately after hanging up the receiver, the professor started leafing eagerly through the morning paper. His eyes scanned the day’s news stories. He read then paused to think for a while. After reading the story one more time, he asked the operator to connect him with number 18-230.

“Hello! Am I speaking with Professor Z?”

“Yes, this is he – who’s calling?”

“This is Professor Y calling. I just received the daily report from the *Elios* detective agency. They briefed me on some peculiar incidents that happened yesterday.

“Well, my dear Z, there was one in particular that makes me think we will soon find a solution to the problem ailing us...”

“Tell me what happened! All this fruitless research has become a nightmare for me!”

“There is no need for me to tell you what happened, my dear Z. – You will find a full report in the news section of this morning’s paper. Read *The Awakening*. It is the paper that provides the most detailed account. Search for the title: *Unusual Psychic Occurrence at the Central Market*. I could be mistaken, but it seems like this incident has something in common with the phenomena of acceleration and anticipation I experienced on that memorable night. I don’t want to say anything further so as not to sway you in any way.

“I would like you to read and study the account, and deduce, on your own, the hypotheses that seem most logical. As soon as we’re done talking, I will phone professor X asking him to do the same. We will meet in a couple of days to compare our individual findings.”

“Agreed, my dear colleague, I’ll go and read the newspapers immediately and I promise to dedicate all my available time to studying this event. Good day and talk to you soon.”

On that same day, the head of the *Elios* detective agency received a letter from professor Y that read something like this:

“Could you please provide me with a thorough report concerning the life of Giorgina Rossi as soon as possible – the woman of the incident at the market that your agency brought to my attention.

“I would like to know all about where she comes from, her past, her lifestyle, her mindset, her health, etc, etc.

“I will ask you again to please make sure this information is as detailed as possible and please send it as soon as you can.”

8.

It was ten o'clock in the evening.

Giorgina Rossi was home alone, hunched over her kitchen table. Having pushed the rest of her modest meal aside, she was writing a letter to Umberto Rossi.

He was still traveling through Puglia, busy trying to sell his stock of food preserves to stores.

She wrote to him slowly, painstakingly filling the paper with her oversize handwriting like someone unaccustomed to such a task:

Dear Umberto! I am writing to tell you that I am fine and I hope you are the same. I paid off most of the loan. Maria wrote to me and said she is coming in a few days. It rained the last few days, but the weather is finally nice again.

At this point, Giorgina stopped. She sat still for a few seconds, staring off into space and then began to write again:

You're not here. I go out. With my exhausted, desolate hands, I feel the city. It is rough, empty, hostile. I keep searching stone after stone to find some trace of you.

Empty domes tower above streets brimming with a thousand bodies hastily condensed. The streets are deserted like a snow-covered plain.

The restlessness of my vain search for you can be found climbing every lamppost. My anguish can be seen looming in front of every house.

You are not here, and I love you. I love you without knowing who you are or where you are. I do not know if you are a body, if you are a soul, or if you are simply the projection into the Infinite of all my desires, of my thirst for Unreality.

I vaguely yet distinctly intuit you are in some remote corner of an unknown space. You are the settler of a new continent of light. You are an immaterial being, without boundaries or definition.

I feel I am breaking through the hermetic, suffocating confines of the earth's atmosphere. I travel through spaces filled with billions of astral storms, incredibly violent electric charges. I overcome obstacles and destroy distances with opalescent speed.

My flight leaves nothing behind but the dust of pulverized planets. It's like the fan-shaped wake of sparks that a speeding train leaves behind in the darkness. I am relieved of all impure human weight. I am an abstract spaceship shooting toward hues unknown to the human color spectrum.

In my flight, I am surrounded by forms of energy that defy the rules of natural evolution. I leap back towards the eternal complex from which I feel I once painfully fell. In my meteoric trajectory, I feverishly pierce through space, travel through all its dimensions, creating new forms, liquid combinations, abstract shapes, blinding hot energy. In my flight I trace astral curves that appear with a tawny hiss against the backdrop of the Infinite.

In my trajectory, I go by a cloud of architectural sounds detached from any matter and I ask:

"Tell me the way back to the roots from which I have been severed long ago" – (but why?) – in the exasperating labor of a feverish lunar day.

“Tell me where I can quench the century-old thirst that drives me in pursuit beyond the earth. I am still infected. The wounds of life still painfully burn. My journey across the cold Ether has yet to cure my fever.

“I feel the weight of relentless reproduction fertilized by sin and lust. The unbearable prison created by Mother Nature’s embrace. The stifling violence of incessant instincts.

“Help me find the Glacial Ocean so I can wash Humanity’s hot, lethal kiss off my face...

“Tell me the way...

“You’re far away – you’re far away” – the indistinct shapes sing, “look how pure we are – you must go on, you must still go on...”

The rest of the sentence vanishes into thin air. A sweet-smelling flash of light goes by, whispering:

“You’re too human, you’re too human. Purify yourself.”

The desert-like, solitary path stretches far off, towards the Lakes of Eternity, and my flight continues in a dizzying search for you, the man I love, without knowing who you are or where you are. Without knowing if you truly exist or whether you are my soul’s creation.

Yet it does not matter if I never know you. I will remain faithful to your indistinct image, your amorphous and anonymous distance. I love you more than ever, because I know this love will never try to invade this remote corner of Freedom, which must remain my own. I must dedicate it to a distance a thousand times further than yours, to something...that might be absolute Absurdity, for which there is no place among living creatures.

Giorgina paused a second time, she sat still for a few seconds, her eyes staring off into space, and then she began to write again:

I went to see about the fabric for that brown dress I have been wanting to make for myself, but the price of fabric has gotten so expensive. I thought I would wait a while longer.

I hope to see you soon, [signed] your dear wife,

Giorgina.

9.

The three illustrious professors X, Y and Z had once again gathered in the laboratory.

Each was carefully reading through a pile of manuscript pages. From time to time they interrupted their readings and exclaimed in astonishment:

“My dear X – this is truly amazing!”

“Your hypothesis, which you have stated so clearly, is in total agreement with mine that you are now reading.”

“Indeed! Look, my dear Z, you included here the very same detail, the same exact notation that you will find in my report.”

Having completed their readings, they shook hands, proud of their perfectly synchronized minds. Then Y began to speak:

“Please allow me, esteemed colleagues, to summarize briefly the main points of your theories. The fact that all three are in complete agreement, despite being conceived by each of us independently, seems to me proof of their indisputable accuracy.

“We can therefore conclude that we have been successful in identifying the nature of the mysterious occurrences the other night in my laboratory.

“We are dealing with, if I may use your extremely accurate expression my dear X, *materialized abstractions of time*: diaphanous astral splinters, torn from the rotating block of time: fragments of eras destined for the future; unraveled edges of chronological stretches of time – dislodged to anticipate their own past. Consequences, so to speak, coming before causes.

“Regarding their origin, or the phenomenon that might have caused this separation from the chronological sequence to which they belonged, we found ourselves in agreement on several points.

“The hypothesis that seems most correct, is that time, that limitless entity – which spreads everywhere, crossing countless dimensions of which only three are known, though we now think we can also guess a fourth – must have, *for reasons unknown to us*, imperceptibly diminished its normal speed. This reduction caused a phenomenon similar to what happens with a man riding a horse at full speed when the horse suddenly stops: the rider is thrown over the horse’s head, landing in front of it.

“Therefore as time suddenly slowed down, a few fragments of time broke off and were catapulted *forward* at full speed. As their impetus ran out, a few of these fragments plummeted into our time period.

“An extremely potent electrical discharge (the bolt of lightning that fell from the sky that evening) caused them to end up in my laboratory, where they mixed with the radioactive material with which I was working and eventually produced the complex phenomena we have been studying.

“Another electrical discharge (the second bolt of lightning) caused them, with its blind force, to radiate elsewhere, leading them to invade Giorgina Rossi’s breathing space.

“We are all familiar with the banality of that woman. Prior to this phenomenon, she was utterly unremarkable in every way.

“We are dealing here with a case of *grafting*, a *stratification* of foreign substances on an absolutely passive terrain.

“I had the history of the last five generations of her family investigated: not one case of pathology, no crimes committed. Not one incident stands out in that calm and honest dynasty of hard working petty bourgeois. The records of various provincial towns testify to the fact that they were all cut out for quiet, unremarkable occupations: the petty business of decent little people.

“A great grandmother sold olive oil and wine. One of her sons, after selling his orchard, lived for sixty-six years off the earnings of a modest haberdasher in a village near Pistoia.

“His son went on to study law and became a notary public.

“Giorgina Rossi is his daughter.

“Her antecedents all died of the typical diseases of decent people; of pleurisy at eighty-two, arthritis and heart disease at ninety, pneumonia at sixty-two. What more could you expect?

“As you know, in a brief amount of time, this woman manifested three separate personalities, each different from the other and very different from her usual disposition. We were able to reconstruct exactly what she did on those occasions, although we lack any clarification on her part because she did not retain any memory of what happened.

“At first one night she was suddenly transformed into a being filled with an intense vitality and endowed with predatory instincts, devoid of any moral judgment, seeking excitement at any cost.

“A second transformation then occurred, which drove her to eloquently deliver an illogical speech, replete with vague scientific terms, describing with ease marvelous discoveries that do not exist.

“Undergoing a third transformation, she was to compose, in the middle of a letter addressed to her husband, a piece of lyrical prose that appears to be a loving address to a distant and unknown entity. The original copy of this document came into our possession through her husband, who, after receiving that letter, returned immediately, fearing for his spouse’s sanity.

“We all agree that all three of these personalities have one thing in common: a pre-conscious element that allows us to discern their nature.

“All three are examples of how the life of woman will be in the future.

“The first manifests symptoms of amorality, individualism, adventurousness, multiple erotic experiences, the devaluation of love (reduced to nothing more than one element of a multifaceted existence); all have already been predicted by scholars as the typical tendencies of the woman of the future.

“The second personality seems instead to be made up of characteristics causing her to appear more masculine than feminine, and extremely evolved.

“She completely lacks any sentimental feelings and is uniquely preoccupied with testing more and more the multiplied powers of her brain, exploring the mysteries of matter. Undoubtedly, she fell upon our era from centuries who knows how distant from our present.

“Finally, the third personality provides us with a glimpse of a remote future in which, after dizzying leaps of evolution, humans will transcend material sensibilities and will witness the birth of new, immaterial senses that radiate across the Infinite.

“In fact, we have a vision of a female life reaching out in a mystic leap towards a symbol of unreality.

“I have yet to tell you, my dear friends, that we now have luminous confirmation of the truth of our hypotheses. I thought that if an electrical discharge was able to wedge that unreal splinter of time into that poor woman’s soul, then I could probably free her of it by exposing her to a series of intense and prolonged electro-magnetic shocks right here in my laboratory.

“And that is exactly what I attempted to do.

“Yesterday morning, Giorgina Rossi came in with her husband, and she agreed to submit to the treatment.

“You all know that the alternation of personalities within her had reached a frequent and regular rhythm, like that of an intermittent fever.

“Well, my friends, she has not experienced a single manifestation of the unusual phenomena in the last thirty-six hours.

“And now, my dear and esteemed colleagues, I intend to study thoroughly the consequences of these phenomena, examining even their smallest ramifications.

“I am convinced that we are facing a very important phase in human evolution.

“We are rapidly approaching a time in which the doubling, the multiplication and the alternation of personalities will be considered normal. These splinters of time, which just materialized in our era, will turn out to be a constant and growing phenomenon that will continue to unfold in the future. For reasons unknown to us, in the abstract structure of epochs that should have materialized on earth centuries from now, a process of *disintegration* has occurred, and fragments of *pulverized* futures are floating through space pushed by unknown forces.

“The precipitation of these splinters indicates that, in the vastness of the Ether, there are forces pushing toward our earth’s atmosphere the dust clouds of time that were floating in the void. We are undoubtedly moving toward a future in which this phenomenon will occur in several parts of the globe: a constant *snow fall* of these time abstractions, each containing an intimation of a future human ‘type.’

“The coexistence of multiple personalities within the same organism will bring an end to the continuity of consciousness and, consequently, to all ethical and legal responsibilities. Since this future is probably closer than we think, it will be necessary to prepare for a complete change in all the moral and legal codes that have regulated our Society thus far.

“Hence, esteemed colleagues, the utmost, historic importance of our experiments, which we must undoubtedly emphasize with all our might at the next Conference.

“I believe it is the duty of every scientist to place his knowledge and resourcefulness at the service of society.

“I also believe it is our duty to advocate the dissemination of a truth that everybody must know, so the world is well aware of its evolutionary destiny.”

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