

Voglio morire!
Suicide in Italian Literature,
Culture, and Society 1789-1919

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Edited by

Paolo L. Bernardini and Anita Virga

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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The thought of suicide is a great consolation: by means of it one
gets successfully through many a bad night.

—FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE

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PREFACE

The study of suicide in nineteenth-century Europe has increased dramatically over the last twenty-five years: see, for instance, the study of suicide in Victorian England, which played a fundamental role in the process of understanding British imperial society and culture well until the end of World War I.¹ This English setting comes as no surprise. Since the early modern times, England has been seen as the homeland of suicide, conceived of as the extreme result of the so-called “English disease,” i.e., a form of melancholy, later known as depression, typical of gloomy climates. Suicide in England has therefore been the subject of several pioneering investigations, from McDonald and Murphy’s ground-breaking work of 1992, to the most recent research of Donna Andrews, which covered the entire history of suicide in England from 1650 to 1850.²

By contrast, the study of suicide in Italy has never produced substantial works. This situation can be better understood if we consider that Italy, a traditionally Catholic country, has never been seen as a place where suicide was commonly practiced, nor, accordingly, morally accepted and intellectually endorsed. None of the most important Enlightenment works, defending the moral legitimacy of suicide, was written in Italy, or in Italian. Suicide has been treated, by the sheer majority of early modern Italian intellectuals, as a crime (from the point of view of lay legislation), and as a sin from the point of view of moral theology. The known cases of suicide in early modern Italy, until the end of the eighteenth century, are very few and rarely discussed by the rising Italian public opinion.³

¹ See e.g. Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford-New York: Clarendon Press, 1987); Victor Bailey, *This Rash Act. Suicide Across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

² See Michael McDonald and Terence Murphy, *Sleepless Souls. Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford-New York: Clarendon Press, 1992); Donna T. Andrews, *The History of Suicide in England 1650-1850* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011).

³ See Paolo L. Bernardini, *Le rive fatali di Keos. Il suicidio nella cultura europea da Montaigne a Kant* (Torino: Fondazione Fabretti, 2009). For a general survey of early modern treatments of suicide, see Jeffrey R. Watt, ed., *From Sin to Insanity. Suicide in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

This book, therefore, is meant to address a gap in nineteenth-century Italian studies. First of all, we treat the so-called long nineteenth century, which in fact begins with the French Revolution and its Italian aftermath (including the key figure of Ugo Foscolo, largely inspired by Jacobinism), and ends with the aftermath of World War I, in 1919, which provided an opening for Fascism. The essays in this book are interdisciplinary, an inevitable consequence of the subject itself. Suicide can be approached, and must be approached, from several points of view and relevant disciplines: philosophy, cultural history, literature, poetry, drama, theology, and—especially in the nineteenth century—the nascent social sciences, namely urban studies, and sociology. As for sociology, Emile Durkheim's pioneering study on suicide in 1897 can be regarded as the founding document of that discipline itself. Well before Durkheim's treatise, all throughout Europe, including Italy, the new positivist science of society, only lately labeled as "sociology," produced quite a number of works dealing with social data and trends; among these data and trends, those related to suicide played a major role since the very beginning of this type of new investigations. This fact is true also for Italy, as we see in Elisa Bianco's essay in this volume.

Since Ugo Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1798), a masterpiece of the epistolary genre which soon became part of the Italian literary canon, suicide became quite a popular literary subject, and increasingly so after Italian unification. At the same time, the number of actual suicides grew as never before, due to a combination of factors: the new urban culture, the secularization of ethics, the relevant detachment from Catholic morals, and the Romantic cult of the ego, and of suffering. From this point of view, suicide became a marker of the new, "modern," bourgeois and secularized Italian society. While the beginning of the nineteenth century dawned under the Wertherian auspices of Foscolo, the beginning of the twentieth century saw suicide becoming an extremely sophisticated subject in literature; as proof, we can read Pirandello's short stories, many of which address the issue of suicide (see *Tales of Suicide*. Boston: Dante University of America Press, 1988).

This book aims to cover only a selection of the authors who treat suicide in Italy in the long nineteenth century: The more its editors delved into the subject, the more they discovered an underground, vast mass of materials. Indeed, suicide seems to emerge from everywhere in Italian literature and culture. Although taboo until the French Revolution, suicide turned into an extremely popular and omnipresent theme in the century afterwards. For this reason, while this is the first work ever to deal with suicide in Italy during this period—there are some works which deal with

suicide in Italy in the twentieth century—its ambitions are limited. We did not cover certain authors, aspects, themes, and treatments of suicide, which in some cases, albeit short and episodic, were quite revealing of new and daring mental attitudes: to name just one case, there is no essay on Ponchielli's famous aria "Il suicidio," in his masterpiece, "La Gioconda" (1874), on a libretto by Arrigo Boito.

In the first prefatory essay, I sketch a brief survey of the theme as it has been dealt with in general during the long Italian nineteenth century. It is an interdisciplinary essay, taking into account literary, philosophical, and sociological themes and authors. The other essays discuss particular works, authors, and themes, from the early nineteenth century until Antonia Pozzi's suicide in 1938.

The second and the third essays in the volume deal with two early political suicides, namely that of Francesco Lomonaco, who took his life in Napoleonic Pavia in 1810, and the one explored by Alessandra Bertozzi, who analyzes Francesco Benedetti's suicide in Tuscany (Pistoia) in 1821. Political suicides, normally of Italian patriots who fought for the liberation of Italy and eventually its unification, make up a very high percentage among the suicides that took place in Italy until the middle of the century.

The fourth and the fifth essays in the volume study several theoretical aspects of voluntary death. In particular, Iglesias Rondina's contribution is a full-fledged treatment of suicide in a classic of the Italian canon, Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), who, along with Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827), and Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), is considered the most important writer of the Italian Romantic period. It is worth noting that both in Foscolo and Leopardi—much less in the Catholic Manzoni—suicide occupies a central position in their literary and theoretical production. The fifth essay, by Elisa Bianco, analyzes three minor figures, Giovanni Volmar, a Venetian writer, Luigi Piantanida, a Milanese lawyer, and Antonio Fossati, another Milanese student of law, who all provided treatments of suicide from several perspectives in the early decades of the nineteenth century. While after the 1850s suicide became the subject of hundreds of publications, during the first half of the century monographic works on the topic are comparatively rare. All three authors are very conservative in their views, while in the case of Fossati, we have the first ever statistical-sociological treatment of suicide in Italy.

Emilio Zucchi and Adolfo Francia, in the sixth and seventh essays of this collection, examine the theme of suicide in Praga's work, and in the literary circle known as the "Scapigliatura", a movement replete with ideological influences from Paris. Gabriele Scalessa, in the eighth essay,

presents an overview of suicide in Italian literature from 1860 to the early twentieth century, in a paper that partially, but fruitfully, overlaps both thematically and chronologically with the work of Zucchi and Francia.

The ninth and tenth contributions focus on one single work. In the former, Susanna Ferlito studies Enrichetta Caracciolo's *I misteri del chiostro napoletano* (1864). In the latter, Roberto Risso writes about Giovanni Cena's *Gli ammonitori* (1904), one of the most ambiguous, yet fascinating, suicide narratives of the early twentieth century—written in the same years as Pirandello's decadent, and disturbing, suicidal novels.

Suicide also played a substantial role in Futurism. Selena Daly discusses the theme of suicide in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, one of the leaders of the *Futuristi*. In the twelfth essay, Anita Virga analyzes one of the most discussed “philosophical” suicides of the Italian early *Novecento*, that of the young Carlo Michelstaedter, who took his life in 1810, right after the seventh anniversary of the much discussed and equally “philosophical” suicide of Otto Weininger, who killed himself at 23—the same age as Carlo—in Vienna in 1903.

The thirteenth essay of the collection, by Antonio Castronuovo, is a short presentation of the suicide of the most celebrated, famous and universally acclaimed Italian writer, Emilio Salgari, who killed himself out of personal and financial troubles, in Turin in 1911. Silvia Mondardini's contribution, the last but not least, deals with the voluntary death of the poet Antonia Pozzi; although she took her life in 1938, this case is nevertheless clearly based on typically nineteenth-century patterns.

We certainly cannot claim to have covered all aspects of suicide in the long Italian nineteenth century. One salient omission is the immense sociological literature on suicide in Italy before and after Durkheim's epoch-making treatise. Nevertheless, our hope is that even a preliminary and partial study such as this will unleash a renewed interest in this topic of profound significance in nineteenth-century Italy.

The editors wish to thank Dr Elisa Bianco (Insubria University) for her invaluable help in the final stage of preparation of the text for publication.

NOTE ON THE COVER IMAGE

Adriano Cecioni (1836-1886) was a Florentine artist and writer, author of several critical and literary essays on contemporary art. He was the founder with other artists, among which De Nittis, of the “Scuola di Resina”, an anti-academic artistic movement, close to the Macchiaioli, active in a neighborhood of Naples from 1863 to 1867.

Cecioni realized “Il suicida” in 1867, drawing inspiration from a Leopardi’s essay, as final exam at the end of his artistic training which had been supported financially by the “Accademia fiorentina.”

The work did not meet with success and Cecioni was accused of having created an “immoral, disgusting subject” by Ulisse Cambi, at that time professor of sculpture at the “Accademia di Belle Arti” in Florence, and by several other artists. Still other professors and artists however, such as Giovanni Dupré and Aristodemo Costoli, did not endorse this negative view and praised the strong expressivity of the work. The majority of the commentators, however, were against it, and Cecioni never got the money necessary to make a marble work from the chalk statue.

In 1880 he wrote a short note on this work, using the *nom de plume* of Ippolito Castiglioni:

Egli fece una volta la statua del Suicida per esprimere un’idea; cioè la facoltà concessa dalla natura all’uomo di poter distruggere sé medesimo; e perciò questa facoltà era da lui considerata la più grande, la sola veramente grande che l’uomo avesse, come quella che fa dell’uomo il solo padrone di sé stesso, e gli rende per conseguenza possibile il termine di ogni suo patimento; come quella che significa la più solenne protesta contro l’ignoto ordine di cose che condanna l’uomo a una vita infelice. E riguardando in questo fatto, non l’effetto di una causa che volgarmente si attribuisce al suicida, ma l’effetto di una facoltà che è nella nostra razza, in alcuni più pronunziata e in altri meno; e paragonando il suicidio a tutti gli eroismi della storia conosciuta, parvegli che questo rimanesse il solo degno di essere eternato coi mezzi della statuaria, e il Cecioni si sentì per la prima volta lieto di essere scultore per poter fare una statua a questa idea. (*I critici profani dell’Esposizione nazionale di Torino*, Firenze: Tipografia del Vocabolario, 1880; also in Antonio Cecioni, *Scritti e ricordi*. Firenze:Tipografia domenicana, 1905)

(On Cecioni see Norma Brude, entry “Cecioni, Adriano,” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. XXIII. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1979).

INTRODUCTION

A CULTURE OF DEATH: SUICIDE IN ITALY IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY 1798-1915

PAOLO L. BERNARDINI

To the memory of Andrea Belfiore, who passed away in 2011

1. Rome, 17 March 2011. While the entire Eternal City is celebrating the 150th year of the Italian unification—to wit, the conquest of most of Italy by the King of Sardinia, who had simply changed the name of his kingdom from Sardinia to Italy without even modifying his dynastic ordinal number (he remained Vittorio Emanuele II) or without altering a single comma in the Sardinian constitution of 1848—a man jumps off the Altare della Patria. He plunges to the ground while the crowd more or less happily sings the national anthem; suddenly they realize what happened and gather around his corpse. The suicide is a clochard from Rumania. Despite several attempts to re-animate him, he dies in a few minutes. Although I have made several attempts to identify him, his name remains unknown. He was a desperate migrant from an eastern European country. Rumania is now part of the European Union, but it is still poor and unknown. The fact that at least its language belongs to the same romance family as Italian (as does nearby Moldova's) does not help, and did not help. His death took on portentous overtones on the day of this celebration. After one and a half centuries, people more or less connected to an ideal of “Italy” celebrated this day marked by the death of one nameless, desperate and homeless foreigner, who symbolically died on the site of a Fascist monument, the Altare della Patria. In the end, the celebration of Italy as a unified country is a Fascist holiday, as it always was, even before Fascism was invented. This man jumped from the well-known “Caffeteria Italia” on the terrace of the monument.

This suicide is symbolic also for historians, because (as we will demonstrate in this book) the suicides and the culture of suicide became increasingly common in the nineteenth century and extended well into the twentieth, in an orgy of self-destruction of vaguely romantic origins, fortified by laicism, individualism, and nihilism, and crowned, in a way, by the desperate, inexplicable end of figures like Cesare Pavese (as late as 1950) and many more after him. *La Bella Italia, il Bel Paese* became a homeland for self-killers, to a remarkable extent. What about her “magnificent and progressive” destiny, “*le sorti magnifiche e progressive*”? What about her Catholic heritage? What about her mild climate and stunning as well sunny landscapes that should discourage suicidal urges, and foster instead a peaceful culture of “*la dolce vita*”? Since 2010, a deep, structural, irreversible economic crisis due to several international and—more importantly—local factors, including an unprecedented increase in direct and indirect taxation that is literally killing Italian economy, has contributed to a dramatic rise in the number of people who decide to put a violent end to their existence. While I am finishing this essay, in the spring of 2012, the peak of the crisis—if this is indeed its peak—is taking away one Italian a day. Suicide is a topic that is continually discussed in the newspapers, as well as the reason behind protest marches and debates on the social networks. In all its lurid glory, this appalling phenomenon is captured in a picture of man in his 50s, Giuseppe Campaniello, who set himself on fire out of desperation in front of the Italian fiscal agency of Bologna, on March 28th, 2012. He survived, even though badly burnt. Many others did not.¹

¹ This book is a first attempt to shed an interdisciplinary light on the phenomenon of suicide in Italy in the long nineteenth century, i.e., from the Napoleonic invasion to its extreme consequence, Italy’s entrance in WWI. I wish to thank my co-editor, Anita Virga, for her enthusiasm, and her ability to entice me with a subject that I have cultivated since 1992. In the nineteenth century, the study of suicide gave birth to an entirely new scientific discipline, sociology, at least, contributed in a decisive way to its making. While the authors of this book are mainly dealing with literary figures, there are many references to themes and personalities that go beyond the literary sphere. As a social and cultural phenomenon, suicide reveals a great deal about the making of modern Italy from the point of view of social history. Likewise, it also tells us much about unified Italy from the point of view of political history. This book aims to cover a good number of works and personalities related directly or indirectly to suicide in all its dimensions. Some of the contents of this preliminary essay have been anticipated in Paolo L. Bernardini, “Trionfi del laicismo. Desacralizzazione della vita e morte volontaria nell’Ottocento italiano,” *Nova historica* 28 (2012), forthcoming. I wish to thank Prof. Clarice

In pre-1798 Italy, before the new lay culture brought about by the French Revolution changed the social, political, economic as well as moral structure of fragmented Italy, suicide was quite rare. 1798 is a *terminus post quem* that fits this work, for in that same year Jacopo Ortis wrote the first letters of his masterpiece, the *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, his imitation of Goethe's *Werther* (1774), published in a semi-clandestine edition in 1799.² As the Jesuit priest Luigi Previti wrote in 1886, "the history of suicide in Italy did not begin until that moment in which youth ran in crowds, infatuated with the writings of Ugo Foscolo, Giacomo Leopardi, and Guerrazzi." Writers, simply represent and embody major changes in culture and mentality, occasionally anticipating those changes, and we cannot certainly blame literature for causing unfortunate social phenomena.³ Well before Romanticism, however, the impact of Neoclassicism in Italy and elsewhere, paved the way for a renewed interest in Stoic suicide, and renewed interest in authors like Epictetus (often in translation, including Giacomo Leopardi's) was of paramount importance for a new role for suicide in literature and, later on, in society.⁴

Zdanski (Franklin College Switzerland) for her precious and caring editorial assistance.

² While political suicide was on the rise in post-1789 France, with a peak in 1793-1795 (including the suicides of writers like Nicolas de Chamfort in 1794 and members of the Convention), the old literary theme of suicide for love powerfully re-emerged in early Romantic culture, in best-sellers like Jean-Baptiste Louvet's *Les Amours du Chevalier de Faublas* (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1798).

³ Luigi Previti, "Il suicidio in Italia," *Civiltà cattolica* XIII, 1 (1886), 513-24, 520, cited in Ty Geltmaker, *Tyred of Living. Suicide in Italy from National Unification to World War I, 1860-1915* (Bern-New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 62. See also Carlo Maria Curci, *Il suicidio* (Firenze: Manuelli, 1876), Italian translation of Previti's sentence by Ty Geltmaker. Geltmaker's is the only monograph on suicide in nineteenth-century Italy, and deals with a limited period of time. Daniel Rolfs, *The Last Cross: A History of Suicide in Italian Literature* (Ravenna: Longo, 1981), deals only briefly with the nineteenth century; Stefano Somogyi, *Il suicidio in Italia dal 1864 ad oggi* (Roma: Kappa, 1995; first edition, Roma: Tipografia Olimpica, 1967), deals with the numerous statistics of suicide in post-unification Italy up to 1962. References to the nineteenth century can be found in the very recent work by Elizabeth Leake, *After Words. Suicide and Authorship in Twentieth-century Italy* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011).

⁴ Apparently, reading Epictetus was dangerous in European society after the Renaissance. For a contemporary attack on the Stoic author, see Jean-Baptiste Lefebvre de Villebrun, *Manuel d'Epictete* (Paris: Imprimerie Ph.D. Pierres, 1783), with a short essay against suicide. Before Leopardi's, Italian translations with similar commentaries were done by Giovanni Battista Giovio, Giuseppe Maria Pagnini and Orazio Maria Pagani, among others.

While writers were initially reluctant to endorse Foscolo's view on suicide as the ultimate expression of individuality, suicide gradually became increasingly common as a theme in literature and opera. Many writers defended its legitimacy and heroic status, including a staunch defender of Mazzini's lay republicanism, Carlo Bini (1806-1842). Perhaps the best representative of this new tendency, Bini did not kill himself, although he died quite young and wrote an exquisite chapter on suicide in his best known work, *Manoscritto di un prigioniero*, written while he was in jail in 1830 and published one year after his death,⁵ a sort of parallel to the prison diaries of Silvio Pellico and Alexandre Andryane.

2. In Italy, from the Renaissance to the late Enlightenment, suicide was rarely part of debates; for that matter, suicides were also quite uncommon. Contrary to other countries, whether Protestant or Catholic, suicide did not play a substantial role in any of the intellectual debates that animated the Italian cultural milieu of the Baroque and the Enlightenment. On the level of national or "proto-national" comparisons and "competitions," it was seen as the "English malady," as a powerful sign of the unhappy combination of a bad climate, the industrial revolution, and the birth of modern urban culture.⁶ Moreover, suicide was rarely dealt with in academic writings. One exception is the Celestine Friar, Appiano Buonafede (1716-1793), who wrote an *Istoria critica e filosofica del suicidio ragionato* (1761) under the Arcadian *nom de plume* of Agatopisto Cromaziano. The work met with discrete success, and although extremely conservative, it sheds a new light on the philosophical development of moral doctrines related to suicide. The theme of suicide appealed to such neo-classical poets as Alfieri (the biblical suicide of Saul) and (very literary and abstractly) to the baroque "librettisti" (suicide for love). In philosophy, the theme appealed to Italian radical materialists normally living outside of the narrow Catholic borders of the peninsula, such as Alberto Radicati di Passerano (1698-1737), and to outsiders of the philosophical and cultural scenes such as Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798).

⁵ See Carlo Bini, *Manoscritto di un prigioniero*, with an essay by Gino Tellini (Palermo: Sellerio, 1994), Chapter XVIII.

⁶ See George Cheney, *The English Malady*, (London: Leake and Strahan, 1733) and Mauro Simonazzi, *Il male inglese. La malinconia nella tradizione filosofica e medica dell'Inghilterra moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), *passim*. That same year of the publication of Cheney's groundbreaking work, suicide was also the subject of a noteworthy literary work that has been attributed to Lady Montagu, *The Fair Suicide*, a long poem in which the lady who commits suicide accuses a man as the cause.

Later in the life Casanova wrote a passionate work on the moral ambivalence of suicide.

Catholic until the very end, Casanova ultimately rejected the moral validity of suicide, and refrained from actually killing himself, although he thought of doing several times during his troubled old years.⁷

In Italy, radical works in favor of “moral” suicide did not exist, nor did attacks against Europe’s “cruel laws” against suicide, to use Montesquieu’s same words in the *Lettres persanes* (1721). Moreover, the works of such authors as John Donne, Montaigne, Burton, Hume, Robeck, and many other *esprit fort* and advocates of suicide are not deeply discussed. More often than not, they are completely ignored. At the same time, known cases of suicides are few, although a great deal of research must be still done in the numerous archives of criminal courts scattered throughout Italy. Some research has been conducted in the criminal archives of Tuscany under the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty, and over a period of more than fifty years, very few cases of suicide (only suspected or attempted) emerge.⁸ The celebrated Leopoldina (1786), the criminal code of Pietro Leopoldo, decriminalized suicide by force of law; the practices of the courts had probably already done so in their sentences, thus showing a high degree of piety towards the desperate individuals who attempted to kill themselves or succeeded in doing so.

Yet suicide cases, although extremely rare, held a place in people’s imaginations and caused distress in the places where they occurred. A peculiar case is that of Constantino Ruggeri, a native of Rimini and an acquaintance of Pope Ganganelli, Amaduzzi, Battarra, and the “Rimini circle” which, suspected of Jansenism, enlivened life at the Vatican between 1740 and 1770. Ruggeri was a major figure in the Roman intellectual scene, printer of “De propaganda fide,” librarian at the Imperial library, philologist and historian. He killed himself in 1766, probably because of a combination of grave illness, his melancholic

⁷ On the debates on suicide in eighteenth-century Europe and Appiano Buonafede, see Paolo L. Bernardini, *Le rive fatali di Keos. Il suicidio nella cultura europea da Montaigne a Kant* (Torino: Fondazione Fabretti, 2009). For Casanova, see Paolo L. Bernardini, ed., Giacomo Casanova, *Dialoghi sul suicidio* (Roma: Aracne, 2005).

⁸ See Federica Paradisi, *Il suicidio in Toscana ai tempi della Leopoldina*, unpublished thesis, University of Pisa, 1995-1996 (readers: Domenico Corradini, Paolo L. Bernardini). Over more than five decades, only one certain case of attempted suicide is recorded, that of a destitute farmer nicknamed “Favamolla,” who, out of desperation, tried to hang himself with a grapevine. His unsuccessful attempt only resulted in his tearing down an entire row of grapes and being fined to repay the damage.

temper and his many misfortunes. A shadow of silence was cast on the case, which took place in cradle of Catholicism. The less said about the suicide of a scholar who was close to the future Pope Ganganelli, the better.⁹

If Italian works on suicide are few, at least as far monographs are concerned, so are suicides themselves. The prevalence of Roman Catholic, Tridentine morality was overwhelming until 1796. Suicide was never talked about with the ease or absence of moral scruples that characterizes Voltaire or Hume. However, even the Scottish philosopher did not dare to print his work in favor of suicide while he was still alive. In fact, for God, according to Hume, “the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster.” So his keen defense of the morality of suicide came out only in 1777, one year after his death. Although suicides occurred, they were rarely recorded as such in courts, and, generally speaking, had to be considered extremely marginal phenomena.

3. In turning from the Enlightenment to the twentieth century, namely, to the period of time after the *terminus ante quem* of this volume, set ideally at 1915, we cannot help but notice a strong shift in attitudes towards suicide in all aspects of Italian culture. It entered the cultural and intellectual scene of Italy in the nineteenth century, and reached its peak in the twentieth. Once restrained and constrained in matters of suicide, once dominated by Catholicism, Italian culture celebrated its “liberation” with an explosion of suicides that has its peak in the twentieth century. From Primo Levi (1987) to Franco Lucentini (2002), who killed themselves in the same way and in the same city, Turin, there is a long, appalling list of writers who decided to commit suicide for various reasons: writers, philosophers (like Carlo Michelstaedter in 1910, and Roberto Ardigò in 1920 at the age of 92), patriots, politicians (or their sons),¹⁰ soldiers,¹¹

⁹ I have started some investigation on this case, which has been almost completely neglected by scholarship. For a reconstruction of Ruggeri’s milieu, see Antonio Montanari, “La formazione di Antonio Ganganelli alla scuola riminese di Iano Planco,” in *Studi romagnoli* 1 (2005), 1-10.

¹⁰ As in the well-known and much talked about case of Carlo di Rudini (1867-1917), son of Antonio, who was twice prime minister of Italy. The son apparently killed himself because of his gambling debts, on the very same day as Leopoldo Franchetti (see below).

¹¹ See the (alleged) suicide of captain Alfredo Cappellini (1828-1866) who apparently killed himself, together with his crew, after the defeat of Lissa (1866). On Cappellini see Francesco Guerri, “Alfredo Cappellini,” *Liburni civitas*, 2 (1929), 171-207, and Carlo Randaccio, *Storia delle marine militari italiane dal*

Christians, Jews,¹² atheists and even publishers, like Formigginì (1938), whose death falls outside the chronological limits of this volume. One case, however, is telling: Formigginì, a Jew from Modena, killed himself as a form of protest against Mussolini's racial laws. This was an act of self-inflicted violence which was obviously quite useless in front of the Fascist violence it meant to oppose. Fascists commented his death in a most disturbing way: "He killed himself by jumping down a tower, in order to save a bullet, in a typical Jewish way." Thus spoke Achille Starace, a leading Fascist authority.

During the twenty to twenty-three years of the Fascist regime, suicide was still common, as it was after 1945. The death of Formigginì can be compared to that of Primo Levi, which took place almost half a century later. Formigginì protested against Fascist discrimination against the Jews; Levi killed himself because he could no longer stand the burden of memory, of his personal memory of his life as a victim of the most extreme form of Fascist discrimination, the extermination of the European Jews. Although the Shoah took place just a few years after Formigginì's suicide, he could never have conceived of such a horror.¹³

There are countless suicides among both European and non-European writers of the twentieth century, from Stephan Zweig to Ernest Hemingway (and his father, niece, and two of his siblings): suicide had become an iconic way to seal off one's destiny and assure immortality, as well as the sale of a huge number of copies of one's own books. Literary works dealing with suicide number in the hundreds, while the literature on suicide has grown immensely, including a number of disciplines even higher than those which first dealt with the phenomenon in the nineteenth century. The cultural transition that took place in the nineteenth century, in Italy later than in Britain, France, and Germany, is essential to understand the new position of suicide in society and literature. Suicide became a phenomenon which brought forth a good degree of *Unheimlichkeit*, as well

1750 al 1860 e della marina militare italiana dal 1860 al 1870, 2 vols. (Roma: Forzani, 1866), vol. II, 174-176, 188-192.

¹² Suicides among Italian Jews included Leopoldo Franchetti (1847-1917), who killed himself in an outburst of wounded patriotism after the Italian debacle at Caporetto, and the Italian biblical scholar and Zionist Raffaele Ottolenghi (1860-1917). Apparently, Ottolenghi killed himself out of despair over the horrors of war. On Franchetti, see the unpublished thesis by Mirko Ruffoni, *Leopoldo Franchetti (1847-1917). Note per la ricostruzione della vita e della morte di un senatore del Regno*, University of Insubria, School of Law, 2011-2012.

¹³ On Formigginì see Antonio Castronuovo, *Libri da ridere* (Viterbo: Stampa alternativa, 2005). See also Id., *Suicidi d'autore* (Roma: Nuovi equilibri, 2003).

as of fascination. Reciprocal influences are extremely common even in the age of rampant nationalisms. Although deserving a book in its own right, Italian sociological literature on suicide was of paramount importance for Durkheim's (1858-1917) epochal essay on suicide of 1897. The new role taken up by suicide in Romantic and post-revolutionary "liberal" ideology, initiated by Goethe, was codified by Madame de Staël (1766-1817), whose *Réflexions sur le suicide* (1813) were immensely influential at least as regards the first half of the century.¹⁴ Just eight years before the *Réflexions* was published, *Le Dernier homme* by the Catholic priest Jean-Baptiste-François-Xavier Cousin de Grainville was published posthumously, selling only 40 copies. Grainville had plunged in the Somme in 1805, right before the publication of his dark work. While this mighty novel inaugurated the rich tradition of nineteenth-century French science fiction, its author's suicide inaugurated a long series of suicides by poor, destitute intellectuals, who could not survive with the income of their intellectual profession, nor wished to move to another. The second edition of *Le Dernier homme*, published in 1811, sold much better, as is always the case with dead authors.¹⁵

Secularization processes played an immense role, as is clear from most of the essays that follow. The political equivalent of Orti is to be found in the suicides of the members of the French Convention. A new culture of death powerfully emerged in the French Revolution. There were even cases in which suicide was not intentional, like that of Bonbon Robespierre, the "good" member of the family,¹⁶ and cases in which suicide was the only way to escape the guillotine (Robespierre the older attempted suicide, but his attempt failed).

In this introductory essay to a rich, stimulating volume, I will not write a sort of *Spoon River* anthology, that is, I will not create a sort of cemetery of suicides with comments, nor will I try to report on all of the famous suicides that occurred in the long nineteenth century. Indeed, there are too many of them, and some are controversial—for obvious reasons, dictated by the ever-present, albeit fading Catholic morality, and occasionally by real uncertainty. My aim is to demonstrate how suicidal behaviors like

¹⁴ See the recent work by Michel Winock, *Madame de Staël* (Paris: Fayard, 2010). Goethe's masterpiece influenced even the young Napoleon, who wrote the short work *Note sur le suicide* around 1795. On Napoleon's self-destructive urges, see Avner Falk, *Napoleon Against Himself. A Psychobiography* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone, 2007).

¹⁵ Chez Ferra aîné et Chez Deterville, à Paris, 1811.

¹⁶ See Sergio Luzzatto, *Bonbon Robespierre. La rivoluzione dal volto umano* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010).

melancholy and depression took political and social paths of a new nature, and how suicide, not so much as a philosophy of life (or death), is deeply embedded in the construction of the Italian state, in the Italian “nation” and in the rhetoric of liberation from foreign oppression. I will do so by briefly analyzing a number of cases, some of which lie within the scope of this volume. Others deserve to be gone into greater depth than can be granted here.

As noted above, the number of suicides dramatically increased after the Italian unification,¹⁷ reaching a peak in the years between 1880 and 1915. Are there “phases” in the history (literary, social, and cultural) of suicide in the long nineteenth century in Italy? If there are, they coincide with the phases of the unification process and its aftermath, which includes the beginning of massive migration, colonial wars, as well as systematic pillages of the South and of the Veneto. In the collective suicide known as World War I no less than 600,000 Italians soldiers died and around 2,000,000 came out badly wounded.

Still latent at least until 1861, a substantial, new culture of death emerged from 1861 to 1915, and it is within this broader context that each and every study of suicide at that time should be placed.

4. For a number of reasons, including the fact that Italy came to existence only in 1861, we do not have reliable social statistics about the whole of Italy until that date, although we do have quite a few on certain cities. Without a doubt, suicides become increasingly common, so that authors—whether Catholic or lay—felt the urge to write works against suicide as to prevent its diffusion among youth, as happened with the *Wertherkrankheit* in Germany after 1774.¹⁸

If Goethe’s *Werther* (1774) caused vast numbers of romantic suicides (for love), Foscolo’s cunning imitation of the German epistolary novel, the *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1799), opened the path for the suicide, among many others, of Francesco Lomonaco’s. Suicide enters the realm of literature thanks to the shrewd exploitation of real cases, like Karl Jerusalem for Goethe or Gerolamo Ortis for Foscolo, which have nothing to do with political delusions and frustrations.¹⁹ Jacopo kills himself for a

¹⁷ See Geltmaker, *Tyred of Living*, 1-4, *passim*.

¹⁸ See Elisa Bianco’s paper on the case of the Milanese lawyer Luigi Piantanida (1828) in the present volume, below. Suicide was quite frequent in Milan. A very famous case of suicide took place in 1905, when Marchesa Pallavicino killed herself in the Duomo. See *Il secolo illustrato della Domenica* (1905), n. 798.

¹⁹ See Claudio Perini, *Girolamo e Laura. La vera storia dell’Ortis* (Venezia: Accademietta, 2005).

combination of two factors. His love story is over, and his “dream” of a Jacobin Venetian republic had been shattered by Napoleon, who traded in the old Serenissima to Austria in exchange for the Rheinland. Ortis regrets the passing away of a French-style democratic Venice—not of the old Serenissima Republic which lasted 1100 years, and where Foscolo was born in 1778 (on the Aegean island of Zante). If Foscolo chose exile, spending his last years in dire poverty in Digamma Cottage in what is now Saint John’s Wood in London in 1827, Francesco Lomonaco chose suicide. Both had great expectations from the arrival of Napoleon. However, Lomonaco quite soon realized that Napoleon had no intentions whatsoever of granting even the slightest degree of freedom to Italy once it had been conquered. The puppet states of the “Cisalpinia” and the “Repubblica italiana” soon gave way to the Kingdom of Italy, which was even more securely in Napoleon’s hands than those states had been as a part of his mighty empire. Francesco Lomonaco was a writer and a friend of Foscolo’s. One of the masters of Alessandro Manzoni, this scholar celebrated the glory of Italy in the past, in a way reminiscent of Foscolo’s *Sepolcri*, only less stylish and written for a more general public. Like Foscolo, in his native South he fought for the Neapolitan republic in 1799, escaping death by chance when it fell (his surname had been misspelt). Lomonaco led a life of poverty in Milan and Pavia, and only in 1807 did he obtain a position as professor of history and geography at the Military School of Pavia. His political views, however, proved to be fatal. In early May 1809 he published a book, *Discorsi letterari e filosofici*, in which he advocated a constitution for the Kingdom of Italy capable of restraining Napoleon’s despotic rule. Obviously, the book, while praised by some leading intellectuals and the *Giornale italiano* was attacked by the government and censored. Thus, his career was probably at risk. On 1 September 1809, at the age of 37, Lomonaco put on his best clothes, a formal suit, and, after cheerfully drinking a glass of wine with some friends at the Bar Bariletto, walked to San Lanfranco and jumped into the Ticino River. After the literary suicide of Jacopo Ortis, this was the first true noteworthy political suicide of the Italian Risorgimento. The aged Alessandro Manzoni, who in his youth had drawn inspiration from Lomonaco for his own *Il conte di Carmagnola*, still spoke highly of the Jacobin from Basilicata in 1866. Lomonaco’s death was just the beginning of a long tradition.²⁰

In the case of Lomonaco, suicide was an extreme response to an extreme disappointment. He detested Napoleon’s despotic regime as much

²⁰ See the essay by Fabrizio Lomonaco in this volume.

as he would have hated the restoration of Habsburg rule in 1815. In the Risorgimento, political suicide also took the form of viable way out of imprisonment, as a heroic deed to avoid damages to the cause of independence (for instance, disclosing details of operations and names of accomplices under torture). For Lomonaco, Pavia is the scene for the suicide, as it is for another case resulting from an unhappy love affair and mental instability.

Jacopo Ruffini was born in the same place and on the very same day as Giuseppe Mazzini, in Genova on June 22th, 1805.

Contrary to his mentor and master conspirator Mazzini, he did not live long, because he actually got involved in a thwarted revolution, was captured by the Savoy police, and allegedly killed himself while in prison in the Torre Grimaldina in the Ducal Palace in Genoa on 14 May 1833. Quite like today's star in the politically correct academic world, Toni Negri, Mazzini had never held a gun in his hands, even though he never failed to recommend or organize terrorist actions. Although bloodthirsty, he could be that way while conveniently sitting on a velvet sofa. Although he came from a monarchic family, Jacopo drew inspiration from Mazzini's republican ideals. His enemy, however, was easier to identify than his final aim. Genoa never willingly submitted to Savoy domination, which began with an illegal act in 1798. Did he want to create a free independent republic of Genoa, or rather—but this is more unlikely—to re-create the “Superba,” the oligarchic republic which for several centuries had vied with Venice for supremacy in the Mediterranean? Certainly, Ruffini's Genoa had not lost the aspiration to regain her lost liberty. An attempt to re-instate the old “Superba” failed in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna. One of the advocates of this unwelcome but at the time still feasible restoration was Luigi Emanuele Corvetto, a highly controversial figure in Genoese history, especially for his ambivalence towards the old republic of Genoa. Although he had championed its annexation to the French Kingdom of Italy in 1805, he was nevertheless among the Genoese living in Paris who wrote a plea in favor of the restoration of the “Superba” in 1815. Published in short form in French newspapers (not in its entirety), the plea had originally been written in the form of a long memoir by Corvetto himself. Corvetto died in 1821, in his home town of Nervi, where is buried.²¹

The anti-Savoy sentiments of 1805 were still alive and well in 1833, and even up to 1849, so it is possible that Ruffini had in mind, if not the

²¹ On Corvetto see Meuccio Ruini, *Luigi Corvetto genovese* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008) (first edition: Bari: Laterza, 1929).

restoration of the “Superba republic,” at the least the restoration of the short-lived Jacobine “Liguria Republic,” which lasted from 1797 to 1799, much longer than her Venetian equivalent, the end of which caused Jacopo Ortis to take his own life. More significant for our essay, Corvetto was the grandfather, and Ruffini one of the family friends, of the second and most poignant suicide in Savoy Genova, Nina Giustiniani Schiaffino’s (1807-1841).²²

Nina is best known for being one of the young Cavour’s lovers. Unlike Ruffini’s, her suicide was definitely political suicide and resulted from a combination of psychiatric disease, Romantic culture, and despair over the loss of Camillo, who at that time was a sort of playboy and gambler always looking for new adventures. Had Nina ever conceived of a possible return of the Genoese Republic, a cause amply betrayed by her own fellow Genoese compatriots and obviously opposed by the Savoy Government? Certainly, her case is well worth further investigation. Cavour himself toyed with the idea of killing himself before and after Nina’s suicide, as is well known from his private letters. Clearly, the new Romantic vogue of self-sacrifice and triumph of the ego by means of killing oneself (for love or politics), was quite fashionable among the Genoese and Piedmontese bourgeoisie and nobility. In 1857 and 1858, just before the creation of a unified Italy, we have two emblematic cases of suicide. The first is Carlo Pisacane (1818-1857), another follower of Mazzini, who allegedly killed himself after the failure of a courageous expedition to conquer the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Pisacane killed himself at Sanza near Salerno in order to avoid being lynched or imprisoned. He soon became one of the icons of the Risorgimento, closer to Garibaldi, a true soldier, than to his mentor Mazzini, who had never fought in his life. This sort of Stoic-political suicide was highly celebrated by nationalist literature.²³ After the Italian unification, Nicola Pernice, another follower of Mazzini, killed himself in the aftermath of one of the republican revolts that struck Italy. He was an associate of Pietro Barsanti (1849-1870), executed in Milan, and considered as one of the first “martyrs” of the Italian republic.

One year after the death of Pisacane, far away from burning Naples, in the quiet, secluded little town of Bardolino, on Lake Garda, another significant suicide takes place. Cesare Betteloni (1808-1858), poet, writer and member of one of the richest Veronese families, who lived in a villa that once belonged to the renowned humanist Guarino Veronese, killed

²² See Arturo Codignola, *Anna Giustiniani Schiaffino. Un dramma intimo di Cavour* (Milano: Garzanti, 1945).

²³ See Luciano Russi, *Carlo Pisacane. Vita e pensiero di un rivoluzionario senza rivoluzione*, (Napoli: ESI, 2007).

himself with two pistol shots to his chest. It was not a suicide caused by “spleen” or Romantic melancholy, as became fashionable later on. Betteloni was seriously physically ill, and had suffered from depression since his youth. “Lake Garda’s Leopardi,” in a certain sense,” Betteloni drew inspiration from nature, as well as from death. Contrary to Leopardi and Foscolo, however, he was a Catholic, trained in the very conservative Collegio Gallio, a Catholic academy in Como. Betteloni well represented Verona’s Catholic conservatism, a conservatism that had a long tradition dating back to the Council of Trento, that is a city close to Verona in every possible sense, and not only geographically. Betteloni is being rediscovered today, but has long been neglected by scholars, who have seen him as a local icon at best. Through his tragic end, which was perfectly planned and acted out, Cesare Betteloni seems to promote and endorse the “moral acceptability” of suicide within Catholic circles. Certainly not on the same par as Leopardi in terms of literary talent and cultural skills, Betteloni is nonetheless is a perfect figure of transition: his Arcadian themes, his praise of the two lakes of his life, Garda and Como, his constant reference to the contemporary literary scene (Jean Paul, Matthison, Moore, Byron) are connected with his cult of melancholy and death, a cult that more than once clashes with his original, bucolic inspiration from nature.²⁴

5. The period immediately following Italian unification, celebrated with the opening of the first Italian Parliament on 17 March 1861 (already deserted by a good number of its members)²⁵ witnessed a quantitative and, possibly qualitative change as far as suicide is concerned. Those years marked a steady increase in suicides. This trend reached its peak around 1910, with a sharp increase after 1880. The response of Italian society to this new phenomenon—which had a parallel in Bismarck’s Prussia, urging the Prussian government to censor extremely pessimistic works such as those of Eduard Von Hartmann—merits a scholarly work in itself. In any case, reactions were varied and prompt. Benefactors went to the point of funding the construction of barriers in places where suicides were most often committed, such as high bridges, as in the case of the Carignano bridge in Genoa: Giulio Cesare Drago, a rich Genoese merchant, provided

²⁴ On Betteloni see Luciano Bonuzzi, Gian Paolo Marchi, eds., *I Betteloni* (Bardolino: Comune di Bardolino, 2008), and in particular the essays by Simona Cappellari, Corrado Viola, and Luciano Bonuzzi.

²⁵ See Roberto Martucci, *L’invezione dell’Italia unita* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1999), *passim*.

the funds to build the iron barriers that are still there. A commemorative stone in nearby via Ravasco is a reminder of that civic initiative.²⁶

From the very beginning, unified Italy proved to be far from a new Paradise. While several of the patriots who, infamously labeled as “briganti,” fought for the deposed Bourbon kings from 1860 to 1870, killed themselves, the founding fathers of unified Italy themselves also fell victim to suicide: the list includes men quite close to Garibaldi, like Eliodoro Specchi (1810-1866) and Marziano Ciotti (1839-1887), who killed himself the same year as the famous explorer Giacomo Bove (b. 1852), one of Salgari’s famous legends.²⁷ Both deaths reveal a situation of uneasiness and frustration which affected the Garibaldini (and even Garibaldi himself) after they saw the real ways and methods by which unified Italy was governed and expanded. It was, in fact, not what many, if not most of them expected. After having used Garibaldi, Cavour and his followers had to find a proper place in society for his soldiers, and this proved to be an arduous task. Furthermore, authoritarian, centralist policies did not appeal to all of the Garibaldini. Some of them were republican, others anarchist, and very few shared Cavour’s shrewd ideology of expansion and annihilation. This is certainly the case with Ciotti, and probably the case with Specchi, too. Both were extremely poor, in spite of having served the Italian cause with their swords and blood; both were distressed and alienated.

While political suicide took place also among the “winners” of the Risorgimento movement, a new form of suicide entered the scene: the artist’s suicides. Decadentism took on the weighty heritage of Romanticism, bringing Romantic themes and attitudes to perfection.

The decadent Paris of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, the mean and exciting Paris of the *Bohème*, so accurately depicted by Walter Benjamin,

²⁶ The text of the commemorative stone is very telling: PERCHÈ NON PASSI PER CONSUETUDINE L'ESEMPIO ANTICO E RECENTE DI GITTARE DISPERATAMENTE LA VITA DAI PONTI DI CARIGNANO E DELL'ARCO GIULIO CESARE DRAGO RAGGUARDEVOL MERCADANTE GENOVESE NEGLI ANNI 1877-1879 CON LARGO DISPENDIO PROVVIDE CHE DI FERREA CANCELLATA NE FOSSERO BARRATE LE SPONDE VOLLE RIMANERE FINCHÈ VISSE BENEFATTORE IGNORATO MORTO IN FIRENZE IL 9 AGOSTO 1880 IL SUO TESTAMENTO LO FÈ MANIFESTO—IL MUNICIPIO DI GENOVA PER LA MERITATA E RICUSATA ONORANZA GLI DECRETÒ QUESTA LAPIDA IL 16 AGOSTO 1880. Drago is buried in the Cemetery of Staglieno, and his tombstone, by the Genoese sculptor Pietro Costa, is one of the most impressive of that period.

²⁷ Bove was probably influenced by the suicide of another brilliant and famous explorer, the Englishman Willam John Burchell, who killed himself in 1863. Burchell is famous for, *inter alia*, the first in-depth explorations of the interior of South Africa.

was in its infancy. The new bohemian lifestyle inaugurated in Paris took its toll on human life in Italy as well. The abuse of absynthe, opium, laudanum, alcohol, can be seen as a form of “delayed” suicide. However, some preferred more radical forms of the new “fashion” of suicide, and killed themselves with guns or ropes, without “postponing” death by abusing alcohol and/or drugs.

This is the case with Federico Faruffini (1833-1869), the first in a series of “artists’ suicides” that go all the way down to Pellizza da Volpedo (1907)²⁸ and beyond, including Diego Valeri’s brother, Ugo, who killed himself in 1911, the same year as Emilio Salgari.²⁹ After Faruffini’s time, this type of suicide became the subject of one of the most popular novels by Zola, *Oeuvre* (1886); while a (aspiring) writer’s suicide is at the center of London’s most controversial work, *Martin Eden* (1909).³⁰

Faruffini was a passionate, eccentric painter who spent part of his career in Paris, taking part in the epoch-making salons of 1866 and 1867.³¹ A native of Sesto San Giovanni and family friend of Cairoli, Faruffini shared Garibaldi’s ideas. A pupil of such painters as Trécourt, Gricoletti in Venice, and Bertini in Milan, he decided to take up the new art of photography in the last years of his life. He killed himself by taking potassium cyanide. In his very lively paintings, Faruffini shows a world of Romantic passions, at a time when Romanticism was verging on Decadentism; thus his paintings have crepuscular nuances. The death of Ophelia, the poet’s love, the lovers’ meeting and other themes are developed with an use of extreme colors and a powerful emphasis on capturing the height of passion. Faruffini is a painter of an age of transition, realism occasionally surfaces in his works, but they are mostly characterized by a highly pervasive sensuality. In a masterpiece such as *La lettrice* (*Young Woman Reading*), where the sitter is depicted from behind, with a cigarette in her left hand as she reads. She looks snobbish, sitting there with a bottle of liquor in front of a desk full of books. Here is the new bourgeois world which, passing from England to France, and from

²⁸ On Pellizza see Massimo Onofri, *Il suicidio del socialismo. Inchiesta su Pellizza da Volpedo* (Roma: Donzelli, 2009). Pellizza’s friend and fellow socialist Ernesto Majocchi killed himself on May 14th, 1907, setting a precedent for the desperate painter.

²⁹ See Guido Perocco, ed., *Ugo Valeri (1874-1911)*, (Milano: All’Insegna del Pesce d’Oro, 1962), and Federica Luser, ed., *Ugo Valeri un inquieto sentimentale* (Venezia: Trart, 2002).

³⁰ See Massimo Onofri, *Il suicidio del socialismo*, 63-77.

³¹ On Faruffini see Anna Finocchi, *Federico Faruffini un pittore tra Romanticismo e Realismo* (Milano: Editoriale Umbra, 1989).

France to newly unified Italy, dominates the cultural and intellectual scene under a veil of luxury, decadence, and the intense sensual and sexual disorder that characterized the later Scapigliatura artistic and literary current.³²

Italy was entirely unified (excluding the territories of the Tyrol, which were acquired only in 1919) in 1870. Along with the Italian unification came the (belated) birth of Italian social statistics, which followed the French school of André-Michel Guerry and Adolphe Quételet, who wrote in the 1830s. In Italy in those years not only was there an apparent increase in the suicide rate, there was also a parallel increase in awareness among authorities and social scientists alike. For this reason, we can easily set a third phase of the history of suicide in Italy which began around 1878. It is the beginning of an escalation in suicides, which gave rise to a huge body of literature, and a number of philosophical and sociological reflections that marked the apex of the phenomenon (directly and indirectly) in the long period of time 1798-1915. Both before and after Durkheim's treatise (1897), suicide became a sort of topical theme, and almost all Italian criminologists dealt with it even if occasionally. Among them was the infamous Alfredo Niceforo (1876-1960), a pupil of Lombroso, who developed the "scientific" theory of the two Italian races, one, Arian, in the North, and one, completely degenerate or even "maledetta," the "Negroid," in the South.³³

6. Enrico Morselli (1852-1929) was only twenty-six when he submitted a long statistical and medical essay on suicide to the Istituto Reale Lombardo on the occasion of their sponsoring an award for work dealing with suicide, in particular, with the reasons why so many Italians killed themselves. Morselli, at that time director of the Macerata bedlam, won the competition. As is clear from this long work, as well as from the others submitted to the competition, suicide was more common among people in their twenties than it was for other age groups, although there had been an increase in suicide among teenagers over the previous 20 years. Most cases of suicide (80%) involved men, and most of them lived in cities. Moreover, the majority had taken place in Northern Italy; much less in the rural South. Among the explanations given by Morselli is the fact that suicide was more closely linked to literary and high culture,

³² See the essay by Adolfo Francia in the present volume.

³³ See Alfredo Niceforo, *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* (Bologna: Sandron, 1898), 96ff.