"What Should a Woman Smell Like? Body and Language in Capuana's *Profumo*"

"This baby makes my flesh creep because it doesn't smell the way children ought to smell."
". . . But now be so kind as to tell me: what does a baby smell like when he smells the way you think he ought to smell? Well?"
(Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* 10-11).

And what does a woman smell like, may we ask paraphrasing Süskind, when she smells the way she ought to smell? This is the question that the characters of Luigi Capuana's *Profumo* (1892) repeatedly ask themselves, explicitly or implicitly, in the course of the novel, thus displacing the apparent narrative center from a taboo subject--the mother-son incest--to a prurient and rather kitschy one--the orange-blossom smell emanating from the protagonist.[1] For the œdipal subtext in this book is never openly spoken although obvious, and the answer to the initial question of woman's scents (inextricably related, through the representation of hysteria, to the darker question of woman's sense) is only apparently given by the novel's facile and not-too credible happy ending. A more satisfactory explanation has to be sought instead by unraveling some of the (medical-historical and pathological as well as narrative and mythological) tensions of the protagonists' never-overtly defined triangular relationship.

Profumo is the story of a newly-married couple, Patrizio and Eugenia Moro-Lanza, whose life in a Sicilian converted monastery is made unbearable by the possessive love of Patrizio's mother, Geltrude, a widow of many years who lives with the couple and repeatedly violates their privacy. Eugenia is aware of her mother-in-law's hatred (though for a long time not of its cause), and Patrizio's constant siding with his mother as well as his increasing "coldness" towards his wife (signifying frigidity and impotence) lead Eugenia to develop a full-fledged hysteria--the most obvious symptom of which, in addition to a series of nervous attacks, is an acute smell of orange blossoms exuding from her skin.[1] The family doctor, dottor Mola, interprets the smell as a signifier of Eugenia's otherwise unexpressed sexuality, which speaks both through the "natural" sexual function of smell and through the "cultural" sexual symbolism of orange blossoms--signifiers of the wedding feast and, in a euphemistic metonymy, of the de-flowering taking place in the marriage bed.

Towards the middle of the story Geltrude is struck by a minutely-described paralyzing apoplexy (which, as in a Dantesque *contrapasso*, strikes dumb a character formerly remarkable for the venomous nature of her words), and dies within days. For the economy of the novel, this is a necessary death, as the œdipal drama was about to come unveiled. But Geltrude's death, instead of bringing about a return of conjugal bliss, shatters Patrizio, who, increasingly haunted by his mother, visits her at the cemetery every night as his affective and sexual "coldness" towards Eugenia increases. At this point, Eugenia's hysteria becomes a derivative one that will disappear only once Patrizio's own impotence has been cured. With a peculiarly *fin-de-siècle* psychological insight Eugenia believes her cure to rely precisely on

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Patrizio's returned potency: her only therapy is sexual satisfaction. But as, in a euphemistic metonymy, she asks Patrizio, "Baciami! Voglio guarir subito!" he frigidly answers, "Coi baci non si guarisce" (79)--dissenting from the diagnostic and clinical stance of the novel itself and from the Viennese gynæcology professor Rudolf Chrobak who one day told Freud that "the sole prescription for such a malady," referring to hysteria, is "normal penis, repeated doses" (quoted in Heath 43).

Upon learning of Patrizio's total rejection of physical contact (and although sexual impotence is never explicitly diagnosed, it is clearly implied), dottor Mola realizes that Patrizio is just as sick as his wife, that they are victims of a "*hystèrie à deux*." The final *peripeteia* takes place when Ruggiero, the eighteen-year-old mayor's son, becomes infatuated with Eugenia, who is anything but insensitive to his courtship. The bourgeois family order is restored when dottor Mola, in the nick of time, succeeds in effecting a "talking cure" on Patrizio (most likely an allusion, on the part of the psychologically up-to-date Capuana, to Freud's cathartic method), whose psychological growth, returned affection and, the text implies, sexual potency in turn cure Eugenia's ailment. The story concludes with the somewhat forced and "idyllic" reunion of the newly-recovered couple.

The Sense of Woman's Scents

Patrizio's hysteria can be traced back to his childhood (he fell into hysterical convulsions at the sight of his little girlfriend's corpse), and it flares up again as soon as he marries--as soon, that is, as his mother's hysterogenic possessiveness is again aroused. Patrizio's married hysteria manifests itself in a paralyzing and eloquent repugnance for any physical contact with his wife--a euphemistically veiled frigidity or impotence--and Eugenia's desire seems to Patrizio to reveal something perverse and almost repulsive about her, "un che di malsano e sensuale da cui veniva urtata la sua rigida idealità" (84).[2] Sexual disgust, the signifier of a hysterical disposition, is the opposite--and the correlative--of hysterical conversion. If conversion implies a hypereroticization, or a sexualization and a symbolization of the organic (a paralysis of the sexual organs for Patrizio, an anomalous production of smell for Eugenia), disgust on the other hand de-sexualizes the body by refusing to read any erotic element in it: disgust is the mark of the repression of sexuality. But Patrizio's unawareness of the real source of his neurosis is best expressed in the novel by the symptomatically contradictory way in which he tries to explain it. At the beginning of the novel, he attributes the disturbance caused in him by Eugenia's caresses to an excessive chastity, to "la inesperienza di lui, vissuto casto per natura, per educazione e per le circostanze di una vita agiata e piena di tristezza" (21), while in the last part of the novel he ascribes the cause of his frigidity to the memory of his relations with prostitutes: "Mi è rimasto un invincibile senso di avversione e di nausea dai primi e soli abbracci venali provati in gioventù. Oh, quelle carezze, quei baci che simulavano l'amore, che profanavano l'amore! Non li ho potuti più dimenticare" (182). The two explanations are mutually exclusive, yet Patrizio cannot decide whether the pathogenic agent is chastity or promiscuity--or whether it is their common element, namely his relation to female sexuality.

Patrizio's horror at Eugenia's body doubles his horror at the body of his mother. His reaction may be compared to that of the speaker of "Lo specchio," a poem published in 1880 by Capuana's contemporary Arturo Graf. At the sight of a sculpted Medusa (a figure to which I shall return later in this essay) and of the mirror which it adorns, he exclaims "e nel vedermi, e nel sentirmi vivo, / d'orror mi riempio, mi s'agghiaccia il core" (*Poesia italiana dell'Ottocento* 419-420). Medusa's look paralyzes the onlooker by causing in him a horror-producing awareness of himself as an alive and pulsating body, a body which is aroused by the sight of woman. Given Geltrude's Gorgonic appearance and Eugenia's lively desires, it is clear that the petrifying element for Patrizio is the sight and the look of female sexuality, and as the mother's is associated with that of his wife, the latter is by proximity also rendered taboo, untouchable. A certain degree of (con)fusion then takes place between the holy mother (who significantly has no husband to defile her purity) and the almost-whorish (because exceedingly sensuous) wife.

This confusion, underlined in the very first scene by the common sickness of Eugenia and Geltrude in the carriage, reaches its climax with the insistence on Geltrude's smell after her death--Geltrude being the only other person in the novel whose odor is described. After his mother's death Patrizio spends countless hours in her old room, where the central object is Geltrude's old armchair which exhales her aroma: "Dalla stoffa della poltrona s'elevava l'odore di Colei che vi si era seduta per anni, piangendo lacrime di vedova, covando rancori di suocera" (116). Geltrude's smell rejoins Eugenia's in its capacity as a distilled version of its bearer, in its linguistic function (through her smell Patrizio feels he communicates with her despite her death), and above all in its peculiarly feminine status: it is the essence of being a widow and a wife, and of being a mother and a mother-in-law ("lacrime di vedova," "rancori di suocera")--two of the principal kinship relations of woman--that best expresses itself (physically, with tears and scent, as well as metaphorically) in this peculiar language of the body. The oedipal intertext becomes more and more obvious with the romantic diction employed to describe Patrizio's relationship with Geltrude after her death: Patrizio now speaks of her as "la prima, la più grande, l'unica adorazione del suo cuore" (113), and shuts himself in her room, throwing himself on her smelly armchair or on her (equally metonymic) bed, "quel letto dove egli l'aveva baciata l'ultima volta" (120).

Eugenia and Geltrude, the only bearers of scent, are described with attributes resembling the "*tremendum*" and "*fascinans*" of the sacred.[3] Geltrude's gaze is an at once attractive and repulsive source of fascination and horror, and the effect of Eugenia's sensuality on Patrizio, tied to his hysterical disgust for sex, is that "gli faceva guardare con un misto di *stupore* e di *terrore* quel che ad altri sarebbe parso cosa ovvia e naturale" (21, emphasis mine). "Stupore" and "terrore," fascination and horror, are here the oscillating polarities of the ambiguous *sacer*, always signifying at once both "sacred" and "accursed": through the mediation of Patrizio's disgust, Eugenia's sensuality is suffused with a halo of untouchability, of fear and lack of understanding, as her sexuality carries the attributes of the sacred, the

"*tremendum*" and "*fascinans*" which describe it as Other and prescribe / proscribe it as untouchable. Her orange-blossom smell is in fact compared by dottor Mola--the semiotician in charge--to the *odor sanctitatis*, i.e. the sweet scent that exudes from the corpses of some saints.[4] Eugenia's physical smell bears the obvious although invisible traces of its metaphysically-interpreted genealogy, the odor of sanctity, and in this irreducible duality of sacred and profane (the "odore di santità" is interpreted by the Church as miraculous and by Science as pathological), her scent is well-suited to signify the ambivalent femininity of the character who exudes it.

Supernatural features thus tie Eugenia and Geltrude to the sacred space of the convent, a space which like the two women also exudes a special smell: "quelle stanze, una volta celle di frati carmelitani, ora nude, vuote e silenziose, e però impresse d'un sigillo così caratteristico da far sospettare che qualcosa della vita monastica fosse rimasta appiccicata alle pareti, agli usci, al pavimento, alle imposte; *qualcosa di cui si sentiva il sordo fermento, come se ne percepiva lo speciale odore; tanfo di rinchiuso, forse, egli pensava, per attenuarsi la cattiva sensazione*" (15-16, emphasis mine). It is in the hope of finding relief that Patrizio, repeatedly described as superstitious in the first chapter, rationalizes into a normal, all-too normal smell (a "musty," or "stuffy" smell) the "special odor" of the sacred, the *odor sanctitatis* which, like the smell of his two women, causes in him a sense of oppression, a "bad sensation." The uncomfortable supernatural is identified through smell with the equally unconfortable feminine sexuality. Indeed smell, like superstitious practice, is closer to the materiality of the body and can therefore be easily gendered as feminine (Patrizio describes his outburst of superstition in the first chapter as "quell'atto da credula femminuccia," 23).

In two long footnotes to *Civilization and its Discontents*--his "smelly footnotes," as they have been described by a critic (Gallop 28)--Freud claims that smell marks woman's regression to a superseded period of civilization, before visual stimuli replaced, as "a consequence of man's raising himself from the ground, of his assumption of an upright gait," "the olfactory stimuli by means of which the menstrual process produced an effect on the male psyche" (46). The connection between smell and femininity is here apparent, associating smell with the female body, atavism or regression, and nature, while masculinity is identified with (in)sight, progress and ultimately culture.[5] This regression is equally manifest in the doctor's joke "Siete diventata una pianta d'arancio in fiore. Di che vi lagnate, signora mia?" (69), which through an analogous rhetoric metamorphoses Eugenia into a plant, whose only means of communication is a sensual, pre-verbal scent (natural and unconscious as opposed to cultural and conscious). *Odor di femmina* becomes a metonymy for woman and for her silence, and Eugenia's scent attests above all to her atavism and to the fragility of her feminine nature, epitomized by the utter control which her nerves (or perhaps her uterus, as the etymology of hysteria continues to suggest even long after medical discoveries have demonstrated its inaccuracy) exercise with respect to her will.

If smell is Eugenia's privileged sense, then Geltrude's is certainly the sense of sight. But in a peculiar chiasmus, Eugenia is time and again described as unable to see, and Geltrude as unable to smell; their languages

are thus, at a certain level, mutually incomprehensible. It is on this very inability of the two women to decipher each other's code that the text depends in order not to have to openly reveal the œdipal tragedy. Thus Patrizio takes pains to prevent Geltrude from acquiring a sense of smell and Eugenia from acquiring a sense of vision: "--Se la mamma sapesse!--rifletteva, stando ad ascoltare il dottore. --Il senso dell'olfatto, ottuso dagli anni e dalle malattie, le ha impedito finora di accorgersene. Se arrivasse a sapere!" (64). Scent in this passage is intimately connected with a dangerous knowledge (hence the emphatic exclamations). To smell is to know, to know is to smell, and from this type of knowledge Geltrude is the only one in the novel to be intentionally excluded: "La mamma poi non deve venir messa a parte di niente. Ignora; lasciamola nella sua ignoranza. É così impressionabile, povera donna! Sono tanto agitato io, uomo!" (65). Awareness of the perfume implies some form of knowledge the content of which is never explicitly stated, leaving the reader to suspect that it ultimately has to do with the exceedingly disturbing and non-narratable implications of the characters' affective triangle: it is a knowledge that remains unspoken because it is taboo and because it can only be expressed somatically, through scent--it cannot be translated into novelistic language.

An analogous moment of hermeneutic ambiguity occurs earlier in the novel, in a question that Patrizio asks himself about Geltrude's manifest hatred for Eugenia: "Vuole insomma strappare a ogni costo dagli occhi di Eugenia la benda che le impedisce di vedere?" (36). Patrizio is afraid that Geltrude will remove the veil covering up Eugenia's eyes, the blindfold that prevents Eugenia from seeing... but from seeing what? Again, the text never explicitly says, ventriloquizing Patrizio's rationalization of his mother's excessive attachment to him, and allowing the œdipal intertext to show through only in a network of allusions and of unanswered questions. The veiled presence of the œdipal triangle is underscored by the text's insistence on looking (be it hypnotic or evil-eyeing), on the functions and dysfunctions of the eyes--in the genealogical line of Œdipus' metaphorical and then all-too real blindness. Thus, the looks that fall upon Eugenia are always-already displaced in a novel that evokes--albeit hesitantly, albeit euphemistically, albeit, one might say, unconsciously--the tragic intertext of the œdipal relation and the threat of blindness related to its transgression of the archetypal taboo.

A me gli occhi!

Profumo displays at many different levels an (at times Œdipal) obsession with the sense of vision in its continuum of seeing, looking, staring, spying, and evil-eyeing, and in all of its ambiguity--including a continuous veiled reference to the hypnotic phenomena so in vogue in nineteenth-century psychology, and of which Capuana was well-informed (some of his short stories concern themselves explicitly with controversial scientific phenomena such as magnetism, catalepsy, and somnambulism).[6] The representational economy of *Profumo* traverses the gamut of the sense of vision, from the clinical and metalinguistic (often spying) gaze of dottor Mola (imitated by Patrizio), to Ruggiero's (staring) looks of unfulfilled sexual desire, and above all to the pathogenic look of Geltrude, an anti-clinical yet hypnotizing gaze

always about to turn into an "evil eye." In all of these cases, the sense of vision metonymized by the eye is used to penetrate the perimeters of Eugenia's space: an obvious instance of this violation is the transformation of both Patrizio's and Ruggiero's romantic courtship into visual cannibalism as their looks are perceived to "devour" Eugenia.[7] Throughout the novel, Eugenia is the "privileged" object of looking and of hypnosis; as I will elaborate later, she is locked into this position, unable to become a subject of vision herself, and her orange-blossom scent provokes an insistent desire to look at her--in the paradoxical attempt to see the invisibility of the *Profumo*. With a distorting and an appropriating intent the sense to be interpreted is displaced by those who surround her from the olfactory to the visual, so that a perverted (because anti-clinical) hypnosis is figured as the ultimate response to her scent.[8]

The family doctor, who is not a hypnotist, deploys a version (tempered by Catholic faith) of what Michel Foucault has termed the "clinical gaze."[9] His first reaction to Patrizio's description of the scent is indeed a strictly clinical one: "Fenomeno raro. Son contento di poterlo osservare" (63). The metaphorical use of the verb "osservare"--the perfume symptom being anything but visible or "observable"--betrays through its etymology (*ob-servare*, in which *servare* means "to keep") the appropriating intent of the scientific eye. The woman's scent is ob-served, taken in by sight despite its invisibility and its consequent untranslatability. So also when Eugenia's scent first appears Patrizio's instinct is to look at it, as if smell were not invisible: "--Che *guardi*?" Eugenia asks as he stops to look at her hands after kissing them: "--È strano...--egli rispose--Si *direbbe* che tu te le sia stropicciate con la zàgara..." (52, emphasis mine). In the best tradition of the clinical gaze, visibility provokes expressibility, and to look at Eugenia ("guardare") impels Patrizio to speak about her ("dire"). Indeed, at the appearance of the scent Patrizio's question is a strictly semiotic one: "--Ma che significa? D'onde proviene?" (60). In a similarly semiotic vein Eugenia, as she inspects herself after a scene with Ruggiero, finds no orange-blossom scent nevertheless she concludes that this signified nothing, "non voleva dir nulla" (162). This analogy of body and text is verbalized by the mayor's stunned reaction at Eugenia's *Profumo*, "Sembra una favola" (147)--a statement which reflects the naturalistic (and, later, also the Freudian) fascination with disease as narrative and with the body as text.

In its rhetoric of absence and presence, the scent consistently inspires in all a desire for interpretation of the nervous illness which is unpredictable and mysterious, "specialmente," dottor Mola remarks, "se si tratta di donne" (63). As she recovers he seeks to always be with her so as to ob-serve her--to look at her and to "keep" her, attempting to read her body language despite her inability to see and to speak her illness ("Si vedeva che era un pretesto per osservarla; infatti non le levava gli occhi d'addosso," 67). Eugenia soon comes to resent the doctor's and her husband's ob-servations, of which she is all-too aware, especially as the doctor's semiotic strategy of making the invisible visible entails an ancillary rhetoric of confession--through which the invisible (*Profumo* as the signifier of female sexuality) is probed and stimulated into visibility, or audibleness, by means of the spoken word. The

doctor is described by Patrizio as "quasi un confessore" (43), and he describes himself to Eugenia as "questo vecchio confessore," to whom she must confess everything lest she incurs in sacrilege by keeping silent: "Commettereste un sacrilegio tacendo, come nella confessione . . . Parlate, parlate!" (71). In order to be medically controlled, treated, and cured, pathological feminine invisibility--the *Profumo*--needs to be stimulated into verbal, if not visual, self-translation.

But the eyes that direct the plot above all others are Geltrude's. In her ability to petrify her beholder and in her role as mother and mother-in-law of the terrified couple, Geltrude is the perverse hypnotist (who provokes illness rather than cure it) as well as the Medusa figure of the novel, who like Medusa continues to effectively deploy her gaze even well after she is dead.[10] Geltrude, necessarily excluded from any olfactory interpretation, turns to her eyes as her interpretive tool: during Eugenia's first nervous attack, her daughter-in-law's "giovane corpo agitato" becomes "lo spettacolo," a spectacle begging to be interpreted (40). Geltrude's verbal reaction, uttered coldly and "senza scomporsi," is "--Lo vedi? É un'isterica" (41). It is sufficient to look at a hysteric to know that she is one, for the clinical eye holds the power to express the visibility of the disease. Geltrude's self-righteous reaction to her daughter-in-law's hysteria, by the way, is perfectly parallel to her reaction to the death of Giulietta, Patrizio's little girlfriend and Geltrude's former rival, who dies by falling out of a window: "--Hai sentito?... Quando si è scapati!... È precipitata giù dalla finestra... É moribonda!" (30). That both Giulietta and Eugenia are victims, to different extents, of Geltrude's evil eye, of her *malocchio*, is made clear by Patrizio's transformation of Eugenia into Giulietta's double--despite Eugenia's understandable recalcitrance to such an obviously unhealthy and unflattering repetition ("--Ora Giulietta sei tu!" "--No, io sono Eugenia," 31).

The term *jettatrice* is well suited to mark the difference between the "male" gaze in the novel (Patrizio's, Ruggiero's, dottor Mola's), Eugenia's gaze, and Geltrude's own--which as a "female" gaze is quite unlike Eugenia's. For if Eugenia's looks are utterly passive, the men's looks are appropriating (medically or sexually), while Geltrude's, the mesmerizing *jettatrice's*, are distancing and pathogenic: as the term *jettatrice* implies (*jettare=gettare*=cast off, throw away), these are looks which push their object away from themselves towards a space that is other; through hypnosis, one reaches the space of illness and even the space of death. The representation of Geltrude's gaze is thus influenced both by the scientific use of hypnosis--defined as a way of inducing, as the Nancy hypnotist Hippolyte Bernheim put it in 1884, "a peculiar psychical condition which increases the susceptibility to suggestion"[11]--and by supernatural belief, the evil eye.

In addition to hypnotism and the evil eye, the Gorgonic intertext of *Profumo* points to the resemblance between Geltrude's hysterogenic relationship to Patrizio and Eugenia and Freud's hypothesis in his famous essay "Medusa's Head" (1922), in which he writes: "The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something. . . . it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult,

surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother" (105). I will not take into consideration Freud's corollaries of this theory (whereby the snakes correspond to a multiplication of penises and petrifaction represents a compensating erection), which do not add to our understanding of *Profumo* and which model sexuality into an exclusively masculine mold--that of the the boy as he looks at the sexual prohibition of the mother's unapproachable genital organs.

In *Profumo* on the other hand we read about the effects of a Medusa figure, of the mother's body on both a man and a woman (a biological son and a symbolic daughter--a daughter-*in-law*), as an allegory of the effects of vision in all of its multifariousness. The mother's sex or, if we do not want to go as far as Freud, the mother's desire is metaphorized by her vigilant eyes (hypnotic and evil) which brood her son as if he were still an egg within her womb: "lo covava coi vedovi sguardi, come un tesoro" (184). Through the semantic conflation of looking and brooding, of "covare" with "sguardi," the mother's eyes are identified as her unapproachable yet all-too familiar reproductive organs, namely as the uncanny origin of life out of which the individual offspring has hatched--and to which he may never return. It is in this sense of recognition of the mother's desire through an attention to the look that I perceive a striking parallelism between Capuana's *Profumo* and Freud's "Medusa's Head." But the recognition being as obvious in Capuana's novel as it is in Freud's essay, "The Head of Medusa" can only be read as an intertext rather than as a hermeneutic tool.

The novel's obsession with vision and the possessiveness implied by the œdipal relation combine to bring forth, together with the allusions to Medusa, a figuration of envy, or *invidia*--which in its etymology manifests an organic relation with the function of the eyes, *videre*. In this œdipal possessiveness it is a question of destructive envy and not of protective jealousy, for while jealousy seeks to hoard the object of rivalry, envy wishes to destroy it.[12] Although it is at times difficult to accurately describe their differences, envy and jealousy, as Lacan among others reminds us, should not be confused (their usage is in fact much more distinctive in Italian than it is in English). Envy is the desperate look given at that which cannot ever be had, the look that is the signifier of an impossible desire, or, as Lacan describes it, "Ce que le petit enfant, ou quiconque, *envie*, ce n'est pas du tout forcément ce dont il pourrait *avoir* envie, comme on s'exprime improprement. . . . Chacun sait que l'envie est communément provoquée par la possession de biens qui ne seraient, à celui qui envie, d'aucun usage, et dont il ne soupçonne même pas la véritable nature. Telle est la véritable envie" (105-106). The marriage union between Geltrude and her son being impossible, the mother's look cannot envisage it; nevertheless she will attempt to hypnotically destroy the object of this impossible desire (indeed, Patrizio is as ill and thus as powerfully controlled as his wife by his mother's envious eye).[13]

Jean Clair explicitly relates the operations of envy with the activity of Medusa, by writing that "le regard de l'envie, le *videre* de *l'invidia* est-il, comme celui de Méduse, un regard mortifié et par conséquent, pareil au poison du serpent, du basilic, et de toutes les créatures infernales, un poison mortifère" (Clair 105). A deadly poison, Geltrude's envious look will reveal

itself to be an effective hysterogenic agent for the body and psyche of both her son and his wife: Geltrude will continuously "look too closely" ("in-videre") at the couple with a glance that causes material effects in its object. Geltrude's envious look is one and the same with her evil and hypnotizing eye, her ability to produce a harmful effect on that at which she directs her look.[14] The controversial link between susceptibility to hypnotism and hysteria was "established" in late nineteenth-century psychology by the Parisian neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (with whose work Capuana was familiar),[15] so that within the medical-historical context of the novel Eugenia's and Patrizio's illness leads the reader to identify Geltrude's look as hypnotic because hysterogenic (thus also in Capuana's short story "Fatale influsso," the protagonist's wife falls into seemingly hysterical convulsions immediately after being hypnotized by her husband, 234).[16] It is Geltrude's hypnotizing and paralyzing eye, her *fascinum*, which stops all movement--beginning with the movement of her son's sexuality.

Perverse Vision(s)

Unlike the visually hyperactive Geltrude, Eugenia is unable to see herself or others: as she begs Patrizio to love her, he coldly replies that she is still sick and unaware of the import of her request, of her desire, which hurts him and which is but another symptom of her illness: "Sei nervosa, sei ancora malata," he tells her, "e *travedi* stranamente" (137-138, emphasis mine). Eugenia's nerves interfere with her vision, her smell with her sight. Thus also as she confronts him with the obviousness of sight--using Geltrude's own discourse against her ("--L'hai vista poco fa, l'hai vista?" 38, Eugenia asks about Geltrude)--Patrizio uses the same verb, "travedere," to accuse his wife of being unable to work with this different discursive code, attributing to her an excessive and displaced sight: "--La tua immaginazione ti fa travedere" (39). If he himself, as the text and Eugenia claim, is self-blinded (consciously as well as unconsciously), Eugenia on the other hand sees one thing for another, unwittingly transferring her eyesight ("trans-videre") from object to object until she can no longer trust her own perceptions: her privileged sense being the sense of smell, she seems to Patrizio incapable of using her sight correctly. She is a victim of her own vivid imagination and over-sensitive nerves, as Patrizio describes her from the very first chapter: "immaginazione vivissima, nervi sensibilissimi, ahimé!" (17).

The pathological otherness in control of Eugenia also dispossesses her of her capacity to signify consciously, and her sensuality, forced into silence by Patrizio's frigidity, bursts into the signifying capacity of her scent. If at first the nervous attack allows Eugenia a measure of self-expression (she looks haughty, her voice gets harsher, her bust becomes erect and she looks larger than usual, so that she no longer seems to Patrizio "la sua dolce, la sua sommessa, la sua quasi timida Eugenia," 40, and to dottor Mola "placida, serena, mite," 64, as he thought she was), with the onset of the scent Eugenia attempts to seduce Patrizio through a non-verbal and not consciously controlled language--she is literally "saying it with flowers," with the flower scent emanating from her own body. Eugenia's strategy is clearly related to late nineteenth-century scientific speculations about the central role of odors

in human sexuality, exemplified by Auguste Galopin's *Le parfum de la femme*, published in 1886.[17] But Eugenia's ruse fails to achieve its seductive purpose: scent is interpreted by all as another signifier of illness and Patrizio can use it as a further excuse to keep his frigid distance. The different languages she unwittingly employs become mutually contradictory: although she verbally says no to Ruggiero's entreaties and kisses, for example, her tone and the language of her eyes disagree: "--No! No! --gemeva Eugenia. Ma l'accento, ma gli sguardi, pur troppo, dicevano sì" (202). If Eugenia's gaze is in fact present in the story, still--as Patrizio has pointed out--she is incapable of using it functionally, and each time her gaze is mentioned it is being passively manipulated by what it encounters in its field.

For example, when she discovers in the sacristy a closet full of wax heads and limbs used for the "sacra rappresentazione" of Good Friday, Eugenia is both fascinated and repelled by this mass of severed heads, which like the representations of Medusa are always-already dead and staring, so that she screams and yet she cannot avert her eyes, as if bewitched ("ammaliata," 74)--or, more likely, self-hypnotized. The severed heads with their silent staring eyes have the same effect on her as her Medusa-like mother-in-law: she is hypnotized and petrified, and cannot lift up her eyes even as her hysteria is summoned up. A similar reaction takes place in Eugenia during the procession of the "flagellanti": "Non avrebbe voluto guardarli; ma quell'orrore la attirava, facendole scorrere un gran brivido per le ossa" (104). It is during this same procession that Eugenia's double role as passive subject and principal object of everyone's gaze is unequivocally revealed: she leans over the banister, "per vedere meglio lo spettacolo; e non si accorgeva che, nei balconi e nella via, lo spettacolo per gli altri era lei" (100). From the inappropriate role as view*er* Eugenia is quickly returned to her position of view*ed*, for in the novel she is a spectacle unable to view other spectacles.

The epitome of Eugenia's visual passivity is one with the spectacularization of Geltrude's evil and hypnotizing eye at the moment of her death--a death which significantly takes place towards the middle of the novel because Geltrude, like Medusa, is a figure of liminality standing between the two worlds, "celui des vivants et celui des morts, celui des choses qui se voient et celui de ce qui ne peut se voir, celui de l'ordre et de la raison et celui de la folie et du chaos" (Clair 29). Geltrude preserves "lo sguardo indagatore e penetrante" as she stares, immobile and mute, at her son's every movement while it seems as if "tutta la potenza vitale del corpo le si fosse raccolta negli occhi" (105-106). Geltrude's eyes at the moment of death will be the most active part of her body, a swansong more effective than ever as the ultimate hysterogenic agent in her son's and daughter-in-law's constitution, and through the heightening effect of the deathbed the Gorgon's eyes, actively seeing, looking, staring, spying, and evil-eyeing from the beginning of the novel, are explicitly perceived to acquire a language. It is from her legible look that Patrizio knows she can hear him: "glielo leggo nello sguardo" (107), he claims.

But the dying Geltrude, like the dying Medusa, must be metaphorically blinded in order to escape fascination by her evil eye. This needs to be accomplished by a ritual which Eugenia is unable to perform, and unlike

Perseus not only does she not avert her look, but on the contrary she cannot avoid staring at the dying eyes, hypnotized and petrified. Geltrude's gaze, only apparently passive because she is unable to translate it into verbal speech, is one full of purpose, as Eugenia notes that "gli occhi si muovevano lenti per figgersi su qualcuno, quasi cercassero chi potesse intendere il loro muto linguaggio" (109). It is finally at the moment of her death that Geltrude's eyes fix on their preferred target: "Eugenia si sentiva trattenuta in piedi dal fascino delle torbide pupille della morente che le parevano fissate intensamente su di lei, piene del loro ultimo cruccio, quasi maledicenti" (113). What comes to mind here is James Braid's definition of hypnotism as "the action produced on the subject by the steadiness of his gaze maintained by attention."[18] In this case the "fascino" of the hypnotizer is reinforced by almost supernatural connotations--the evil eye--with its pathological effects: "Eugenia sentiva in tutto il corpo il rapido ridestarsi del suo male, creduto domato; e tremava, tremava senza poter distogliere lo sguardo dalle torbide pupille che lo evocavano su, con terribile malia, da tutte le parti del suo corpo, dove la cura del dottor Mola lo aveva già ricacciato" (113).

Geltrude's anti-clinical glance has an effect opposite to the therapeutic one of the doctor's gaze, as it hypnotically summons up from the depths of her adversary's body the disease that had been carefully pushed back in. As Ellenberger writes, "the subject [of hypnotism] . . . may--spontaneously or at the command of the hypnotist--turn deaf, blind, hallucinated, paralyzed, spastic, cataleptic or anesthetic" (Ellenberger 115), and Eugenia cannot lift her eyes because, as Bernheim put it, "When the magnetizer fixes his eyes upon the subject's, the latter understands that he must keep his eyes fixed and must follow the operator everywhere" (Tinterow 455). Geltrude's hypnotizing pupils are literally cursing and "speaking evil" ("maledicenti"), as they evoke or invoke, as in a spell ("malia"), Eugenia's illness. But the gaze bounces back and Geltrude, like Medusa in later versions of the myth, dies of her own gaze as it is reflected in Perseus' clear shield--or, in this case, in Eugenia's limpid eyes.[19] Eugenia, the "specchio limpido" (53-54), unwittingly petrifies Geltrude with her own glance, turning her fatal reflection against the Gorgon herself.

After her death, Geltrude becomes for Eugenia "la invisibile nemica" (118), against whom (as against the invisible perfume) she must wage a strenuous battle. At the moment of Geltrude's death Eugenia realizes the full extent of the contact (almost supernatural in its pathology) between Medusa's gaze and her victim's: as Patrizio awaits his mother's answer "con gli occhi spalancati su quegli altri occhi che lo guardavano fisso fisso, ella [Eugenia] si sentiva invadere da un terror folle; come se tra quei due avvenisse in quell'istante qualcosa di misterioso, a cui ella doveva rimanere estranea; qualcosa di malaugurato, che le sarebbe pesato addosso, anche allorché colei non sarebbe stata più là" (107). Eugenia's foreboding will prove true, as Patrizio's hysterical paralysis at the sight of his mother's now-visible (and hypnotic) desire will be doubled by her own. But once Eugenia becomes aware of the reason for her mother-in-law's hatred, she reflects: "Gelosa della nuora! Della moglie del proprio figliuolo! Le pareva una mostruosità" (120). A monstrosity, the action of a monster--Geltrude is a monster like Medusa is

a monster, a prodigious being, a figure of liminality that is neither wholly human nor wholly animal (and yet, like Œdipus's sphinx, decisively gendered, undoubtedly female), capable of hypnotically luring the Other's vision towards herself (towards her forbidden femininity), and to turn with her own gaze her beholder into stone, her daughter-in-law into a blooming plant and her son into an impotent hysteric. Siebers points out that "The remarkable ability of the head of Medusa to represent what cannot be represented or what should not be represented constantly surfaces in the history of thought" (Siebers 8-9). In Capuana's *Profumo*, this double unrepresentability hovers behind the screen-figure of Geltrude, the real as well as symbolic mother, the Gorgon at the source of envy and of the evil eye, of *invidia* and of *malocchio*.

But the novel must then ask itself the same question as Perseus: how can I look at that which cannot be looked at, how can I see it without looking at it, without being hypnotized and paralyzed? And then, how can I show the face that is the object of an interdiction to see--how can I exorcise this interdiction in my representation of it? The answer may well lie in the *Profumo* of the title, a scent of woman so intense as to almost stun the reader unaware of the petrifaction always about to take place: the play of seeing and smelling and the absence of a hermeneutic code common to all the protagonists allows the screen to remain in place even as it allows the novel to avoid a subject--the œdipal tragedy--that would inevitably deconstruct the idyllic intention of its plot. Through its escapist happy ending *Profumo* then takes Eugenia's passive gaze as a model for its own perspective. In order to avoid the risk of blindness inherent in looking at the forbidden œdipal union, the text, after having been fascinated and hypnotized by the Gorgon like Eugenia by Geltrude, intentionally shuts its eyes to the implications of the spectacle it has evoked, and contents itself with the pale displaced reflection of it on Eugenia's scent--thus taking the place of Andromeda and obeying Dante Gabriel Rossetti's injunction to her in his poem "Aspecta Medusa": "Let not thine eyes know / Any forbidden thing itself, although / It once should save as well as kill: but be / Its shadow upon life enough for thee."

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Notes

1. Ironically Eugenia, a name which means "well-born" and evokes "eugenics," or hereditary improvement, is instead inscribed in the tradition of the sickly and nervous woman privileged by naturalistic and decadent literary representation. Stephen Kern points out that "as life became cleaner, Europeans began to become more sensitive to smells . . . a sensitivity that we see developing in the latter decades of the [nineteenth] century" (46).

2. Patrizio's disgust reminds us here of Freud's controversial statement in the case-study of Dora: "I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable; and I should do so whether or

no the person were capable of producing somatic symptoms" (44)--a statement that finds many *ante litteram* reflections in late-nineteenth-century literature.

3. This is Rudolf Otto's definition of the duality at the heart of the sacred (25-40).

4. "Sono morti centinaia di santi e di sante . . . dai loro cadaveri si è sparso attorno un odore delizioso, odore di paradiso, è proprio il caso di chiamarlo così: centinaia, migliaia di persone hanno potuto verificarlo . . . . Chiamiamolo pure: odore di santità" (63-64).

5. It has been pointed out that "sight traditionally enjoyed a privileged role as the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and world" (Jay 176).

6. "From 1784 to about 1880, artificial somnambulism was the chief method of gaining access into the unconscious mind" (Ellenberger 112).

7. Patrizio "se la divorava con gli occhi quasi di nascosto" (80), and Ruggiero's image remains "fissata negli occhi [Eugenia's] . . . divorandosela con lunghi sguardi da cui s'era sentita penetrare e invadere" (190).

8. Eugenia's characteristic symptom is supposedly described in two nineteenth-century medical treatises cited by dottor Mola; it has been pointed out, however, that in these treatises there is actually no mention of orange-blossom smell, nor of the other pathological smells described to Patrizio by dottor Mola. It is worth noting that one of the medical authorities cited by dottor Mola, Hammond, is also the author of a treatise on masculine impotence, *Manuale clinico terapeutico dell'impotenze sessuale nell'uomo*, published in Naples in 1884 (see Azzolini 330, note 17).

9. Foucault describes the gaze as "a moment of balance between speech and spectacle. A precarious balance, for it rests on a formidable postulate: that all that is *visible* is *expressible*, and that it is *wholly visible* because it is *wholly expressible*" (*The Birth of the Clinic* 115).

10. Jean Clair notes that although the figure of Medusa has disappeared from our immediate horizon, at the end of last century she was still frequently represented in art (54-55). In the chapter of *The Romantic Agony* entitled "The Beauty of Medusa," Mario Praz writes that "This glassy-eyed, severed female head, this horrible, fascinating Medusa, was to be the object of the dark loves of the Romantics and the Decadents throughout the whole of the century" (26-27). Bram Dijkstra discusses several late nineteenth-century representations of Medusa in *Idols of Perversity* (137-138 and 309-311).

11. *De la suggestion* (in Tinterow 438-439, 454).

12. The first two definitions of *invidia* in Italian are the following: "1. Nella teologia cattolica, uno dei sette peccati capitali consistente nell'affliggersi per il bene del prossimo come di male proprio *e nel desiderarne la rovina.* 2. Sentimento di rancore e di astio per la fortuna, la felicità o le qualità altrui, *spesso unito al desiderio che tutto ciò si trasformi in male.*" Zingarelli 901 (emphasis mine).

13. In the carriage, Patrizio's burst of affection towards his wife is suppressed because of "il pensiero che gli occhi severamente socchiusi della madre stessero lì a sorvegliarlo con la gelosa diffidenza contro la nuora" (14), for even when they are closed Geltrude's eyes are effective in their distancing intent. And later in the novel Patrizio is similarly paralysed: as he embraces his wife, he suddenly stops as "i suoi occhi si volsero con ansietà verso l'uscio di rimpetto, paventando un'improvvisa apparizione" (95).

14. For more anthropological information on the connection between envy and the evil eye, see Siebers 144-149.

15. Capuana refers to Jean-Martin Charcot and his Italian contemporary Cesare Lombroso in an essay on Gabriele D'Annunzio, in the course of which Capuana describes the protagonists of Russian novels (to whom he compares some of D'Annunzio's own protagonists) as "tutti, o quasi tutti, nevrotici esaltati, gente da consegnarsi nelle mani dello Charcot e del Lombroso" ("Gabriele D'Annunzio" 88). In an essay entitled "Psicopatia cristiana," included in the same volume and dealing with a book on mysticism as psychopathology, Capuana repeatedly mentions Charcot (273, 274, 275, 286).

16. "To be suggestible to hypnosis became synonymous with hysteria, an issue that would polarize French neurology in the coming years between the Paris (Charcot) school and that in Nancy (Bernheim). In this regard, Charcot lost favor, and hypnotism and hysteria again became established as independent but sometimes associated issues" (Goetz 110-111). It was in great part because of this "battle" between Charcot's school and Bernheim's that "the subjects of hysteria and hypnosis gained great popularity. The debate between the Nancy school and the Salpêtrière was waged in medical journals, international conventions on hypnosis, in newspapers and magazines" (Drinka 145-146). On the relation between hypnosis and hysteria in the nineteenth century, see also Thornton (136-151) and Veith (221-256).

17. Cited in Kern 46; according to Galopin, Kern writes, "the mutual interaction of odors constitutes the essence of sexual love."

18. Tinterow 390. James Braid (1795-1860) is considered the inaugurator of modern hypnotism as well as the one who introduced the very word "hypnotism" into the field of medicine in 1842 (Tinterow 269, 317-318).

19. On Perseus' use of a clear shield as a mirror to kill Medusa, see Pagliai and Vernant.

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