

**studi  
germanici**



**3-4**  
English **2013**

# Thomas Mann and Luigi Settembrini\*

Roberto Zapperi

In 1920 in his journal “La Critica” Benedetto Croce rather favorably reviewed Thomas Mann’s *Considerazioni di un impolitico* (*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*).<sup>1</sup> The great esteem Croce had for Mann’s voluminous book is surprising and demands an explanation. It is surprising because the book contains, among countless other things, derisive preconceptions and even rather insulting ones with respect to Italy and the Italians that only in part appear to be justified by the war at that point underway between Italy and Germany. Actually, it is a well known fact that Mann’s rather ponderous book (almost six-hundred pages long), published in the spring of 1918 – that is, by the time the war was going poorly for Germany and suggested its imminent defeat –, had been written while the war was in full swing between 1914 and 1918. A rashly written book composed while the war was exploding on all fronts, which could not but be felt in the nefarious climate of those years that had poisoned even the intellectual relationships between the warring countries. In order to shed some light on Mann’s overall attitude towards Italy and the Italians, it is sufficient to quote what he wrote toward the book’s close:

Wir halten Ende Oktober 1917. Görz ist zurückgenommen, österreichischdeutsche Divisionen erbrachen die Alpenpässe und stiegen in die venetianische Ebene nieder. Was in Rußland, in Rumänien geschah, kann sich in Italien wiederholen. Es wird sich wiederholen, – daß dieses Land diesem Krieg im Ernst nicht gewachsen sei: hat irgend jemand das nicht gewußt? Welches Labsal, die Nachrichten dieser Tage! Welche Befreiung, Erlösung, Erquickung gewährt die ‘Macht’, die klare und majestätische Waffentat nach dem faulig-erstickenden Dust und Wust der Inneren Politik, der seelischen Anarchie Deutschlands, seinem selbstverräterischen Äugeln mit der Unterwerfung unter die ‘Demokratie’, seinen ‘politischen’ Ver-

\*Translation by Alexander Booth.

<sup>1</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Le considerazioni di un non-politico*, in “La critica”, 18 (1920), pp. 181-183.



suchen, sich anzugleichen, sich zu ‘verständigen’, indem es in seinen diplomatischen Noten zur Sprache Wilsons kondeszendiert! ... Noch einmal darf man freudig atmen. Die Niederlage Italiens, das wäre die Niederlage Mazzinis und d’Annunzios, des demokratisch-republikanischen Brandrhetors und des ästhetizistisch-politischen Hanswurstens, die ich beide hasse aus Herzensgrund.<sup>2</sup>

In effect, between October 25-26, 1917, the Austro-German troops broke through the Italian lines at Caporetto and advanced rapidly toward the Venetian plane, but did not, indeed, occupy Gorizia as Mann mistakenly believed they had. In any event, already on November 9 Luigi Cadorna was replaced as Chief of General Staff with Armando Diaz. Under the latter’s guidance, the Italian Army definitively blocked the Austro-German advance throughout November and December of 1917.<sup>3</sup> Since Mann published his book in the spring of 1918, he must have known that what he had written in surprising haste in October of 1917 no longer justified its previsions of Italy’s defeat. This attitude reveals a rather deep-seated prejudice toward the Italians, which was to be confirmed in a successive step when Mann quotes his own story *Tonio Kröger* from 1903:

Tonio Kröger fand einen humoristisch-bescheidenen Ausdruck für diese Stimmung und Antipathie, als er zu seiner Freundin sagte: ‘Gott, gehen Sie mir doch mit Italien, Lisaweta! Italien ist mir bis zur Verachtung gleichgültig! Das ist lange her, daß ich mir einbildete, dorthin zu gehören. Kunst, nichtwahr? Sammetblauer Himmel, heißer Wein und süße Sinnlichkeit... Kurzum, ich mag das nicht. Ich verzichte. Die ganze bellezza macht mich nervös. Ich mag auch alle diese fürchterlich lebhaften Menschen dort unten mit dem

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2009), p. 534.

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Rochat, *L’Italia nella prima guerra mondiale. Problemi di interpretazione e prospettive di ricerca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), pp. 110-119; *Ibid.*, *Cadorna Luigi*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1973), vol. 39, pp. 665-668; Alberto Monticonne, *La battaglia di Caporetto* (Udine: Paolo Gaspari editore, 1999), pp. 116-181.



schwarzen Tierblick nicht leiden. Diese Romanen haben kein Gewissen in den Augen [...].<sup>4</sup>

As one can see, it was not simply Mazzini and D'Annunzio – who only Mann could associate with such nonchalance – but all Italians, lumped together by a rather dubious calling to democracy, so dubious that only four years later, in 1922, they would give their country over to the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. But why did Croce applaud such tirades? He did so for two principal reasons: the first is that Mann proclaimed himself a died-in-the-wool conservative and ferociously hated the French democratic tradition of Rousseauian-Jacobean origin that was Croce's *bête-noire* as well.

What was good for Mann was good for Croce, and their enemies had always been democracy, socialism, and Freemasonry. Croce's conception of liberalism stubbornly ignored the great, in particular Anglo-French, tradition of natural law and consequently the founding theories of European liberalism: the limits of power, the consensus of the citizenry, and the sovereignty of the populace, which stemmed from it. These theoretical premises are the origin of his attitude toward fascism, which was marked by barely-concealed sympathy until May of 1925, which is to say, until even after Matteotti's murder (1924); so much so, in fact, that his one time friend, Giovanni Gentile, having himself turned to fascism, was able to write in an article dated March 21, 1925, that Croce was "a fascist without a black shirt". Croce turned to anti-fascism only after the aforementioned date and from that point on became the principal opponent of the regime within the kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

The second thing Mann had in common with the Italian philosopher is to be found in one of Mann's favorite targets, D'Annunzio, who had written at least two novels with which he was familiar. *Il trionfo della morte*, published in 1894, likely read in the original Italian during one of his first stays in Italy (1895-96) and mentioned in his story *Der Tod*, which was published in 1896; and *Il fuoco*, published in

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, cit., p. 546.

<sup>5</sup> For all of that, see Norberto Bobbio's fundamental essay *Benedetto Croce e il liberalismo in Politica e cultura* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005 [1955]), pp. 177-228.



1900 and translated into German in 1903 by Maria Dohm-Gagliardi, the aunt of Katia Pringsheim, Mann's wife. He even considers this novel of D'Annunzio's in his novella *Der Tod in Venedig*.<sup>6</sup> Croce did not care much for D'Annunzio either, and criticized him rather harshly, albeit carefully.<sup>7</sup> And it was upon these two fundamental points that the German and the Italian completely agreed.

Due to such shared political-literary ideas, Croce acknowledged Mann in his review, conveniently specifying that

il tema del libro è l'opposizione allo spirito *politicien*, democratico, demagogico, frasistico e letterario: tema nuovo, ma qui sentito a nuovo e trattato con finissime osservazioni. Per mia parte, l'ho letto, sottolineandolo di frequente consenso. Non saprei disapprovare del tutto neppure la sfuriata contro il D'Annunzio.<sup>8</sup>

However, he did so without even once mentioning Mazzini, who Mann despised<sup>9</sup> for his being, in his eyes, the classical Italian demagogue completely alien to German political culture: "Echt und nicht fremd war Mazzini in seinem Lande, – der politische Freimaurer mit dem 'Dogma den Gleichheit' und dem 'revolutionären Symbol'.

<sup>6</sup> On Mann's relationship with D'Annunzio's works, see Elisabeth Galvan, *Thomas Mann in Italia. Thomas Mann, D'Annunzio e Giuseppe Verdi*, in *Thomas Mann nella storia del suo tempo*, edited by Arnaldo Benini and Arno Schneider (Florence: Passigli, 2007), pp. 137-143; Ead., *Immagine suono parola. L'opera d'arte totale di Aschenbach*, in *Thomas Mann, La morte a Venezia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), pp. 9-36.

<sup>7</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, in *La letteratura della nuova Italia. Saggi critici*, IV serie (Bari: Giuseppe La Terza e figli, 1922), pp. 7-70.

<sup>8</sup> "The theme of the book is his opposition to the spirit *politicien*, democratic, demagogic, phrasistic and literary: a new theme, and one that is here felt in a new manner and treated with the finest of observations. As for me, I read it while frequently underlining passages in agreement. I could not disapprove of the whole nor his anger toward D'Annunzio" [unless otherwise noted, all translations by the present translator].

<sup>9</sup> As he himself would state, Mann read an anthology of Mazzini's writings in German, which had happened to come between his hands: Giuseppe Mazzini, *Politische Schriften*, edited by Siegfried Flesch, vol. I (Leipzig: Reichenbach'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Hans Wehner, 1911). On Mann's relationship with this German translation of Mazzini, see Giuliano Procacci's observations in *Thomas Mann, Settembrini e Mazzini*, in "Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica" (1990), II, pp. 3-8.



Fremd ist sein Geist in Deutschland; zu Hause, nochmals, war er es nicht. Er war echtbürtig, ein vertrauter Ausdruck der Rasse”.<sup>10</sup> As to which race he was referring, his earlier reference to *bellezza* (a word which was often written in Italian) left no doubt, being that which “war mir immer für Italiener und Katzelmacher des Geistes”.<sup>11</sup> And here we have arrived at vulgar insult unworthy of a respected intellectual, which Mann undoubtedly was. The German word Mann employed, *Katzelmacher*, was pejorative. Translated freely into Italian as *spagbettanti* it meant something akin to a wretched immigrant. But racism is a great, terrible beast that often plays dirty tricks. And it would have been to the benefit of all if Mazzini (who in addition to founding *Giovine Italia* three years later, in 1834, had found *Giovine Europa* with German and Polish exiles) had had an influence on Germany, rather than Mussolini, who Hitler considered his greatest mentor and master. In effect, between June 14-15, 1934, Mussolini welcomed Hitler to Venice, and he was overjoyed.<sup>12</sup> But it was not only upon Hitler that Mussolini exercised his undeniable seductive capabilities. According to Wolfgang Schieder’s research, still in the process of being published, the Germans lined up outside of Palazzo Venezia to be received by the Italian dictator, and amongst them it seems there was no lack of prestigious intellectuals. This was beyond Mann’s power of imagination. The only weak critique that Croce allowed himself in his review was to reveal to Mann that Germany too, like all the countries at war against it, with the obvious exception of Russia, was divided by the contrast between the aristocracy and the mass. And as much as he could try to deny that fact, no war, no revolution had ever been able to eliminate this mass. Moreover, if Germany “per caso si propose questo fine, non fa meraviglia che abbia perduto la guerra, e l’abbiano guadagnata invece coloro che hanno saputo far meglio i conti con la realtà”.<sup>13</sup> Which

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Mann, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Mann, *Ivi*, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Jens Pertersen, *Hitler-Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom. 1933-1936* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1973), pp. 344-354.

<sup>13</sup> “Had perchance proposed this end, it is no wonder that they lost the war and that those who had known how to deal better with reality, instead, had benefitted”.



was a beautiful statement, reminding Mann that Germany had lost the war, while Italy, on the contrary, had won it. At that point, however, not even Croce suspected Mussolini's fascism to be looming over Italy, which would have removed the great advantage of having won the war. It needs to be clarified, in any event, that Mann never received any notice of Croce's review of his *Betrachtungen*, even though he may already have had an inkling of the prestige the Italian philosopher enjoyed throughout Europe.

According to Klaus Mann, Thomas Mann personally met Croce in Munich in 1927 during the course of a trip that the latter had taken to Germany with his wife Adele Rossi. The two met each other for the first time, then, and established a friendly relationship that was to last for many years.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of this first personal interaction, in 1930 Croce made sure that Mann received, through their common friend Karl Vossler, an extract of his essay *Antistoricismo*, which had been published in his magazine just a short time before.<sup>15</sup> Mann responded in a letter dated November 28, 1930, to compliment him on his essay, which he, however, would have to read in a German translation being prepared by the same Karl Vossler and which would be published the following year in Friedrich Meinecke's "Historische Zeitschrift".<sup>16</sup> In those years, Mann, in fact, was no longer able to read demanding texts or those of a philosophical nature, as was Croce's, in Italian. According to Erwin Koppen's careful research,<sup>17</sup> Mann had learned Italian well enough over the course of his Roman stays in 1895 and between 1896-1898 so that he spoke and read it competently; yet, over time, he forgot almost all of the spoken language even if he continued to read it to some degree, with the exception, as previously mentioned, of literary texts requiring

<sup>14</sup> Elisabetta Mazzetti, *Thomas Mann und die Italiener* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 149 and 158.

<sup>15</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Antistoricismo*, in "La critica", 28 (1930), pp. 401-409.

<sup>16</sup> Benedetto Croce - Thomas Mann, *Lettere 1930-36. Con una scelta di scritti crociani su Mann e sulla Germania*, edited by Ernesto Paolozzi, Emanuele Cutinelli Rendina and Rosario Diana (Naples: F. Pagano, 1991), pp. 3 and 69.

<sup>17</sup> Erwin Koppen, "Quest'idioma celeste...", *Thomas Manns Rezeption der italienischen Sprache*, in "Arcadia. Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft", I (1966), pp. 192-194.



great concentration, and those dealing with philosophy, which he habitually read in German translation. Mann, in any case, loved to flirt with the Italian language, so much so that in his aforementioned letter to Croce he had attempted to use a few Italian words. What is certain, however, is that he read Croce's letter in Italian, as a rule he wrote in Italian, and that the small amount of difficulty he encountered in reading the letter was due to Croce's handwriting and not the language. At least this is what one deduces from one of his letters to Vossler dated May 4, 1935, where, regarding a postcard that Croce had sent him, he states: "Benedetto Croce scheint den Aufsatz über ihn auf seiner Karte zu erwähnen. Seine Äußerungen bereiten mir jedesmal Tantalusqualen – da spricht einer, und es ist Croce, der spricht, und ich entziffere nicht ein Wort. Wollen Sie mir die Karte abschreiben?"<sup>18</sup> Vossler only had to transcribe the postcard and by no means translate it into German.<sup>19</sup>

In September of 1931, Croce took another trip to Germany together with his wife and daughter Elena. In the week between the 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> they stopped in Munich, where on the afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> he met Mann for the second time at the home of Hans Feist, translator of a number of Croce's works into German; Mann's son Klaus and his wife Katia were also present. The conversation had to take place in German, a language that Croce spoke well. Many years later, Klaus was the one to relate the content of the conversation based upon his memories, which, at the distance of so many years, could neither have been totally exact nor complete. They spoke for a long time about Goethe, while Croce's wife recalled how she had been able to foil an assault of Neapolitan fascists on their home who had wanted to set fire to their abundant library.<sup>20</sup> On December 6 of

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Mann, *Briefe*, edited by Erika Mann (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1961), vol. I (1889-1936), p. 388.

<sup>19</sup> As, on the contrary, is assured by the register of his letter to the same Vossler dated December 9, 1931. Thomas Mann, *Die Briefe, Regesten und Register*, edited by Hans Burgin and Hans-Otto Mayer (Frankfurt, 1976), vol. I (1889-1933), p. 640, n. 31/162. Nevertheless, one would have to check against the original.

<sup>20</sup> Arno Schneider, *Un incontro "che ha lasciato una traccia profonda": Thomas Mann e Benedetto Croce a Monaco di Baviera, 28 settembre 1931*, in *Thomas Mann e la storia del suo tempo* (Florence: Passigli, 2007), pp. 317-340 but as regards what is referred to here, pp. 328-333.



the same 1931, Croce mailed Mann a letter and, as promised at their meeting in Munich, the first three chapters of his *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*, already finished and about to be published, other than in Italian, in various other European languages. In the letter he asks whether he can dedicate the book to Mann, while reiterating that the work contained “interpretazioni della storia prussiana, bismarckiana, treitschkiana, nazionalistica, ecc., non certamente favorevoli”; though adding, as justification, that he had been educated in German thought and that many of his criticisms were aimed at himself, since by that point “tutti abbiamo fatto e facciamo il nostro esame di coscienza”.<sup>21</sup> He did not mention anything, however, about what he had written on Mazzini that in no way would have fit with what Mann had written in his *Betrachtungen*. Croce, in fact, praised “la grandezza vera di Mazzini, che nel '31 il governo piemontese lasciava partire per l'esilio, inconsapevole di dare con quell'esilio all'Italia, e a tutti i popoli cercanti libertà, il loro maggior maestro di vita”.<sup>22</sup> And Croce would continue to insist on Mazzini's strongly European concept of believing in the fraternity of peoples and in particular that of Italians and Germans while, at the same time, admitting the shortcomings he attributed in large part to the show of democracy and insurrectionism he considered to be of French origin. What he did not, however, allude to was Mazzini's radical condemnation of every form of racism.<sup>23</sup>

Mann responded with a long letter dated December 13, 1931, in which he declares himself extremely honored to be the dedicatee of the new book. He then added a series of considerations on the continuous process of self-criticism to which he too had dedicated himself over those last fifteen years: “Das ist genau der Prozeß, den auch

<sup>21</sup> Benedetto Croce - Thomas Mann, *Lettere 1930-36*, cit., p. 5 (“there are far from favorable interpretations of Prussian, Bismarckian, Treitschkian, nationalist histories etc. [...] We have all examined our conscience and shall continue to do so”).

<sup>22</sup> “Mazzini's true greatness, he who the Piedmont government sent into exile in '31, unaware that with such exile they were giving Italy, and all of those seeking liberty, their greatest master of life”.

<sup>23</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono* (Bari: Giuseppe La Terza e figli, 1943), pp. 115, 334, 338.



ich im Laufe der letzten anderthalb Jahrzehnte durchgemacht und kennen gelernt habe, die Erfahrung einer Selbstkorrektur und Selbstüberwindung. Revolutionen, die sich gegen die höchste Menschlichkeit richten, sind falsche und niederträchtige Revolutionen, die ihren Namen sich nur zur Verwirrung der Geister anmaßen. Das ist es, was mich von einem Nationalismus trennt, der den Namen des Jugendlichen und Neuen für sich in Anspruch nimmt”.<sup>24</sup> The times since that distant year of 1918 had changed tremendously. At that point, the greatest threat to Germany was from Hitler who in the election of November 9, 1930, had won an enormous number of votes, almost 6 million and 400,000, and was attempting to take power. From 1922 onward, however, Mann, though feeling himself “aristocratic and monarchic”, had understood that things in Germany were turning for the worst and was in no way surprised at how they were beginning to take shape.<sup>25</sup> Croce therefore in 1932 could publish his work with a dedication to Mann and a *terzina* from Dante intended to underline their convergence of views. He immediately sent Mann a copy to which Mann responded with a letter dated February 15, 1932, thanking him for the dedication and saying that he would read the book as soon as possible, even if “die Sprache bewirkt, daß ich Ihr Werk wie durch einen Schleier sehe”.<sup>26</sup>

Croce’s *Storia* was published on February 6<sup>th</sup> in a first edition of three-thousand copies, which sold out in one week; therefore, a second edition of three-thousand was published on February 25<sup>th</sup> and yet again a third of the same number in April. The work was a great success, but already on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office turned a copy over to its assessor to examine and check the content from a Catholic point of view. The procedure was rather cursory: the congregation came together on July 4<sup>th</sup> and decided to issue a decree of condemnation motivated by the fact that Croce’s book was “erroneo, anzi eretico nelle sue basi filosofiche, in-

<sup>24</sup> Benedetto Croce - Thomas Mann, *Lettere 1930-36*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> On Mann’s political evolution, see Arnaldo Benini’s excellent contribution *Thomas Mann da “impolitico” a leader dell’antifascismo*, in *Thomas Mann nella storia del suo tempo* (Florence: Passigli, 2007), pp. 247-279.

<sup>26</sup> Benedetto Croce - Thomas Mann, *Lettere 1930-36*, cit., p. 11 e p. 73.



giurioso e offensivo alla Chiesa e al Papato” and, consequently, “condannabilissimo, quindi da inserire nell’Indice dei libri proibiti, secondo la solita procedura”.<sup>27</sup> On July 13<sup>th</sup> the congregation issued the decree of condemnation approved by Pope Pius XI and published it in the daily newspaper of the Holy See, “L’Osservatore Romano”, the following day. Obviously, the Sacred Congregation’s condemnation had a great resonance in both Catholic as well as fascist circles. In one as in the other the condemnation was accepted unreservedly, while, contrarily, the numerous intellectuals of a Croce-esque bent scoffed at it, even in private letters. Croce himself responded with a little note in his journal “La critica” entitled *Metodi clericali*. In that note, he limited himself to challenging the “Osservatore Romano”’s insinuation that the German translator of his *Storia* had asked him to reconsider it in line with the ecclesiastic censure. As Antonio Gramsci would observe, “in realtà la *Storia d’Europa* è il primo libro del Croce in cui le opinioni antireligiose dello scrittore assumevano un significato di politica attiva e avevano una diffusione inaudita”.<sup>28</sup> In any event, there were good reasons for the Sacred Congregation’s condemnation.<sup>29</sup> Croce’s book had landed immediately upon Mussolini’s desk and when Mann was informed, he noted in his diary on April 9, 1933: “Mussolini: ‘Cet Hitler est un singe’. Er sagte übrigens über Croces letztes Buch: ‘Er mochte es schreiben; aber was mich ärgert ist, daß er es Th. Mann gewidmet hat’”.<sup>30</sup> The German translation was not allowed to be published in Germany, but only in Zurich in 1935; and Mann was able to read it only once the Nazi’s victory (Hitler was nominated *Reichskanzler* Jan-

<sup>27</sup> “Erroneous, in fact, heretical in its philosophical bases, injurious and offensive to the Church and to the Papacy”; “extremely condemnable, and thus to be inserted in the Index of Prohibited Books according to the usual procedure”.

<sup>28</sup> “In reality, *History of Europe* is the first book of Croce’s in which the writer’s anti-religious opinions assumed a sense of active policy and enjoyed unprecedented diffusion”.

<sup>29</sup> For the background to the Sacred Congregation’s condemnation, see Guido Verucci, *Idealisti all’Indice. Croce Gentile e la condanna del Sant’Uffizio* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006), pp. 140-165.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher 1933-1934*, edited by Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1977), p. 44.



uary 30, 1933) had forced him into exile. It was no longer possible to continue professing the old ideas expressed in the *Betrachtungen* of 1918 and any possible disagreement with Croce's criticisms no longer had any reason for being.

But to return to the meeting between Mann and Croce in Munich, there is another one of Mann's letters, dated January 27, 1932, that illuminates a part of their discussion, which his son Klaus had forgotten to mention in his later recollections: Mann, in fact, thanked Croce for having sent him a copy of Luigi Settembrini's *Ricordanze della mia vita*. It is therefore possible that in Munich they had talked about Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg* and of its Italian protagonist, Settembrini; and that, as a consequence of these discussions, Croce, who undoubtedly had read the novel, remembered that it was in Munich that they had spoken about the Neapolitan patriot Luigi Settembrini and that he had even given Mann a copy of the *Ricordanze*. But what is most important in this letter is the fact that Mann points out: "Ich habe mit Vergnügen festgestellt, daß nicht nur Gesinnungsgemeinschaft, sondern auch viel Charakterähnlichkeit zwischen dem Helden dieses Buches und meinem Settembrini besteht".<sup>31</sup> This is an admission of great importance, so much so that it convinced Mann to retract it many years later. And it is upon this point that it is necessary to linger for a moment.

In the edition of his *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* published in 1934, the following note appears: "Nel recente romanzo di Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (1924), il tipo dell'italiano illuminista democratico e interventista è rappresentato nel modo più serio e nobile dal personaggio al quale l'autore dà il nome di Settembrini".<sup>32</sup> In one of the successive editions to that of 1934, Croce adds:

Fu creduto, e io credetti che con questo nome egli alludesse al nostro Luigi Settembrini; ma alcuni anni dopo, in un incontro col Mann in Germania, egli mi confessò di avere ignorato affatto l'esistenza di

<sup>31</sup> Benedetto Croce - Thomas Mann, *Lettere 1930-36*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> "In Thomas Mann's recent novel, *Der Zauberberg*, the model of the enlightened, democratic, and interventionist Italian is represented most seriously and nobly by the character the author has given the name of Settembrini".



Luigi Settembrini, e di avere composto quel nome, derivandolo dal '20 settembre'!.<sup>33</sup>

In all likelihood, already at their encounter in Munich, Mann had told Croce to have found the name of his novel's Italian protagonist on September 20<sup>th</sup>, which is confirmed by a letter to his friend Eberhard Barthold on September 26, 1948, where he wrote: "Der Name Settembrini ist von 'Venti Settembre', einem nationalen Revolutionsdatum, beeinflusst".<sup>34</sup> September 20<sup>th</sup> by no means marks the date of a revolution, but only the breach of Porta Pia, which effectively delivered Rome to the Kingdom of Italy as its capital.<sup>35</sup> Mann returns to this date in a bit more of a diffuse manner in a letter to Harry W. Rudman marked March 24, 1950, a letter that contains an important reservation which criticism has never wanted to consider. After having stated his case on the importance of September 20<sup>th</sup>, Mann, in fact, adds: "However, it is entirely possible that also a direct reference to Luigi Settembrini played into it. At least my family asserts that I mentioned this historical figure at the time".<sup>36</sup> It is clear that Croce came to learn, through ways that have not been recorded, of Mann's new version of events and that he immediately took his word for it. How much easier it was for him to accept as he did not have a high opinion of either the literary version of Settembrini or that of the *Ricordanze*, and not only for reasons of a cultural nature, but, above all, for reservations of a political nature not all that

<sup>33</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1870 al 1915* (Bari: La Terza e figli, 1934), p. 350; 1947, pp. 350-351. On this point, what Arno Schneider has written, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-335, should be corrected in the sense that the addition appears in the 1947 edition, not in those published after 1931 as he maintains ("It was believed, and I too believed it, that with this name he was alluding to our Luigi Settembrini; but some few years later, in an encounter with Mann in Germany, he confessed to me to have in fact ignored the existence of Luigi Settembrini, and to have come up with that name from the 20<sup>th</sup> of September!").

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1948-1955 und Nachlese*, edited by Erika Mann (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1968), vol. III, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Gustav Seibt, *Rom oder Tod* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 2001), pp. 11-110.

<sup>36</sup> Harry W. Rudman, *A Possible Prototype of Mann's Settembrini*, in "Germanic Review", 25 (1950), p. 299.



different from Mann's.<sup>37</sup> However, now is the time to recall just who Luigi Settembrini really was in reality.

Born in Naples on April 17, 1813, he was raised by his father – who had participated in the Neapolitan revolution of 1799 – according to the Enlightenment and Jacobean ideals to which he would remain true his entire life. Always in dire economic straits, he studied letters and law in Naples. In 1835 he was granted a Chair of Rhetoric at Catanzaro where he founded a secret society and worked on his first anti-Bourbon plot, for which he was arrested in 1839, transferred to Naples, and sent to various prisons throughout the city. Though tried, he managed to be acquitted; however, he nevertheless remained in prison for another fifteen months. As soon as he was freed (October 1842), he immediately resumed contact with Mazzinian elements, which at that time were rather diffuse in Naples but were not to have any lasting influence whatsoever as he remained faithful to the ideals of '99. While in hiding in 1847, he published a *Protesta del popolo delle Due Sicilie*, which had an enormous impact across the region, so much so that he was forced to flee to Malta (January 1848), only to return to Naples in February where Ferdinand II had been forced to grant a constitution. Settembrini was then called by the new government to direct a section of the Ministry of Public Instruction; he, however, resigned soon after, refusing every right to a pension and any other public office. In July of 1848 he founded the “Grande società dell'unità italiana”, which was immediately infiltrated by Bourbon spies. As a result of the dissolving of the Neapolitan chamber, he was arrested June 23, 1849. After a year of detention, once again free, he managed to publish a *Difesa scritta da L.S. per gli uomini di buon senso* and shortly thereafter a pamphlet on the horrific conditions of the Neapolitan prison system. He faced the charge of having founded a society for the unity of Italy with the punishment of death with great courage (January 1849). The charge, however, was commuted to life imprisonment to be served in the penitentiary of Santo Stefano. Throughout the course of his de-

<sup>37</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Luigi Settembrini*, in *La letteratura della nuova Italia. Saggi critici* (Bari: Giuseppe La Terza e figli, 1914), vol. I, pp. 347-357.



tion, he translated Lucan's works from the Greek, which he published in 1861. Meanwhile, all that awaited him was the possibility of failed escapes until he left the prison with a group of other political prisoners for deportation to Argentina. During the first stage of the long journey to Cadiz, however, he was met by his son Raffaele (an official in the British Navy) who boarded the American ship that was to take his father to America under a false name and managed to have them allow him to disembark in Ireland, and from there, England. Finally free after fourteen years in prison, he returned to Italy where he once again took up political activity and then, with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, was appointed Chair of Italian Literature at the University of Naples and was able to dedicate himself to his studies, publishing numerous works on Italian literary history. His most attentive student, Adolfo Omodeo, recognized Settembrini's fundamental political inspiration to be based on the Enlightenment thought of Jacobean mold, which, obviously, had resulted in a great attitude of anti-clericalism. The anti-clerical fight remained a constant throughout his life and as Omodeo writes, "forse nessuno vide con tanto nitidezza che non si può essere liberi restando cattolici [...] l'anticlericalismo fa onore all'acume e alla profondità, spesso insospettata nella forma popolareggiante, del Settembrini".<sup>38</sup> And this is what truly explains Croce's tepidity regarding him, but also the Catholics' ferocious hostility; indeed, it was they who, in 1932, had his works removed, through the usual fascist channels, from the programs of study in Italian *licei*.<sup>39</sup> In the last years of his life, Settembrini dedicated himself to the writing of his memoirs, which were published posthumously in Naples between 1879-1880 by Antonio Morano with a preface by Francesco De Sanctis. They are contained in two volumes, the first entitled *Ricordanze della mia vita*, and the second a

<sup>38</sup> Adolfo Omodeo, *Luigi Settembrini*, in *Figure e passioni del Risorgimento italiano* (Palermo: Libreria Ciuni, 1932), pp. 101-150, in particular p. 133 ("Perhaps no one had recognized too clearly that it is impossible to be free while still a Catholic [...] such anti-clericalism honors Settembrini's perspicacity and profundity, which have often remained unsuspected in popular form").

<sup>39</sup> On this point, see Guido Verucci, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 133, 242.



great collection of documents, reports, and letters from prison to his wife. In the *Ricordanze*, Settembrini limits himself to remembering all of the most important stages of his political activities up until 1848 and the ideas that had driven him. He thus re-evokes his position as regards Mazzini's Giovine Italia, his passionate anti-clericalism, and his suggestion to chase the Austrians and all royal dynasties connected to them out of Italy in order to achieve Italian unity in a democratic and republican form. He was unable, however, to finish his work because all of a sudden, in 1876, death arrived. The second volume is the more interesting one because everything is dedicated to his decade-long detention in the penitentiary of Santo Stefano, on the island the faces the port of Gaeta, and to the adventurous details of his liberation. His letters to his wife are also very beautiful.<sup>40</sup> This is the historical character Mann in his letter to Croce says has so much in common with the figure of Settembrini in his novel. But let us see how Mann presents him in his *Der Zauberberg*.

The figure of Settembrini was among the first Mann had thought of for his novel, which was published in 1924. He had certainly thought of him in the first phase of ideation, but also during the writing of the novel, and without any doubt from 1913 to 1916.<sup>41</sup> In the definitive draft, in fact, Settembrini already appears in the fourth paragraph (*Satan*) of the third chapter. Dressed rather shabbily, at first sight he immediately announces his quite obvious poverty. He is so poor that at first glance he reminds Hans Castorp:

Sogleich an gewisse ausländische Musikanten, die zur Weihnachtszeit in den heimischen Höfen aufspielten und mit emporgerichteten Sammetaugen ihren Schlapphut hinhielten, damit man ihnen

<sup>40</sup> Settembrini's biography can be gleaned, in addition to Omodeo's study, from two volumes contained in his *Ricordanze della mia vita, con una prefazione di Francesco De Sanctis* (Naples: Cav. Antonio Morano Editore, 1880). I cite the second edition.

<sup>41</sup> Peter de Mendelssohn, *Der Zauberer. Das Leben des deutschen Schriftsteller Thomas Mann* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), vol. II (1905 bis 1918), pp. 1532, 1651, 1684-1685, 1724-1725.



Zehnpfennigstücke aus den Fenster hineinwürfe. ‘Ein Drehorgelmann!’ dachte er.<sup>42</sup>

And as Mann insists on this typification of the “Drehorgelmann” for almost the entire novel, one must pause a moment on this aspect of the character so as to briefly examine the meaning and possible values. At first, Castorp says to Settembrini that that which he had taken for an “organ grinder” was nothing other than a “pure absurdity” (“der reine Unsinn”). But then, as the novel progresses, little by little the figure of the Italian becomes ever the more clear and other elements – such as that of the “oppositionsman, Windbeutel und ‘homo humanus’, wie sich selber nannte”<sup>43</sup> – are added to the feature of the “Drehorgelmann”; then, still within the same passage, “mit seiner Aufsässigkeit und Kritik, obgleich sie larmoyant und geschwätzig war” he raises himself up after eating before anyone else and, with a clearly vulgar gesture, inserts “einen Zahnstocher zwischen den Lippen”. The Italian’s pompous and unnecessarily ceremonious style are immediately revealed in the titles he loves to dish out to the two cousins, both of them still only aspiring military men: one to the army and the other to a career in naval engineering. He always addresses Castorp with the bombastic title “Ingenieur” and his cousin Ziemssen with the no less bombastic “Leutnant” while he himself begins, immediately after the presentations, to brag about his literary merits and in the same grandiloquent style proclaims: “Ich hatte die Ehre, Ihren Landsleuten von dem Leben diesen grossen Poeten und Freidenkers zu erzählen”.<sup>44</sup> This was none other than Giosue Carducci, the greatest Italian poet of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with whom Settembrini took pride in having studied. Naturally, neither of the two cousins had ever heard the name. Throughout the entire novel, Settembrini talks too much and the two cousins feel overwhelmed by his unceasing flow of words, so much so that Castorp, still early on and after only a few conversations, says to his cousin Ziemssen:

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 2007), p. 82.

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p. 85.



Ich habe immer den Eindruck, daß es ihm nicht ganz allein um die Lehren zu tun ist, vielleicht um sie erst in zweiter Linie, sondern besonders um das Sprechen, wie er die Worte springen und rollen läßt...so elastisch wie Gummibälle...und daß es ihm gar nicht unangenehm ist, wenn man namentlich auch darauf achtet.<sup>45</sup>

In a single word, Castorp is convinced he is standing before an authentic “Schwätzer” and is reaffirmed in his opinion by the Jesuit Leo Naphta, who had been present at a number of Settembrini’s oratorical duels, in the second part of the novel.

One arrives at the most complete definition of “Drehorgelmann”, however, only in the third paragraph (*Freiheit*) of the fifth chapter when Castorp gets angry at the Italian for having alluded to his fondness for Madame Clawdia Chauchat, the Russian with whom he was falling in love:

Hans Castorp war zornig auf den Italiener und auf sich selbst, weil er unbeherrschterweise den Stich herausgefordert hatte. Während er sein Schreibzeug zusammensuchte [...] fuhr er fort, sich zu ärgern, murmelte dies und das vor sich hin gegen diesen Windbeutel und Räsonneur, der sich in Dinge mischte, die ihn nichts angingen, während er selbst die Mädchen auf der Straße anträllerte, [...] dieser Drehorgelmann hatte ihm seinen Anspielungen förmlich die Stimmung dazu verdorben.<sup>46</sup>

It finally becomes clear that the word has an obviously pejorative meaning that corresponds perfectly to the other word (“Katzelmacher”) used in the *Betrachtungen* to express Mann’s profound disdain for the Italians. In particular, for those who adored Mazzini and followed him in his democratic and republican ideas. And Mann’s Settembrini was undoubtedly among them, as has been widely proven<sup>47</sup> by the criticism that has tracked down the numerous, even literal, quo-

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, p. 142.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg*, cit., p. 310.

<sup>47</sup> Giuliano Procacci, *Thomas Mann, Settembrini e Mazzini*, in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, cit., pp. 6-8; Hans Wisskirchen, “Ich glaube an den Fortschritt, gewiß”. *Quellen-*



tations from the German translation of Mazzini's writings used in the *Betrachtungen* that Mann has him deliver in speeches in *Der Zauberberg*. This disdain for the Italian had, in any case, an exquisitely political motivation, and leads one back to ideas expressed some years before in the *Betrachtungen*. Moreover, at the end of his life, in a letter dated March 16, 1952, sent from California to his French friend Louis Leibrich, Mann himself declares: "Ich habe mit den 'Betrachtungen' nie recht brechen mögen. Sie sind ein Werk seelischer Not und ehrlich-mühsamer Selbsterforschung, dem ich schon darum dankbar bleiben muss, weil diese lange Plage den 'Zauberberg' überhaupt erst möglich gemacht hat".<sup>48</sup>

For the purposes of this study, Settembrini's character is rather definitive. At this point, it is important to establish which potential relationships exist, if any, between the historical figure who shares the same surname and whether or not Mann borrowed any elements from his *Ricordanze*. The points in common are few, beginning with the surname that corresponds exactly to that of the Neapolitan patriot. Both Settembrinis are men of letters and democrats, both have something to do with Mazzini and with his patriotic association to Giovine Italia. But here the similarities end.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, when Croce gave Mann a copy of the *Ricordanze* as a gift, Mann noted that the Settembrini of his novel resembled that of the *Ricordanze* in many ways.

Many years later, during his long American sojourn, someone who knew something about Luigi Settembrini must have made him aware of the fact that the Settembrini of his novel did not actually have anything to do with the Settembrini of historical reality at all. It is highly probable that this someone was his son-in-law, Giuseppe

*kritische Untersuchungen zu Thomas Mann Settembrini-Figur*, in *Das Zauberberg-Symposium 1994 in Davos*, edited by Thomas Sprecher (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995), pp. 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Mann, *Drei Briefe an Louis Leibrich*, in "Neue Rundschau", 77 (1966), p. 227.

<sup>49</sup> The question of the relationships between Mann's Lodovico Settembrini and the Luigi Settembrini of historical reality is at the center of Iلسedore Jonas's book, *Thomas Mann und Italien* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1969), pp. 62-77; it does not, however, achieve satisfactory results due to a lack of documentation as the correspondence between Mann-Croce had not yet been published.



Antonio Borgese,<sup>50</sup> who in 1931 had moved to the United States and taught at various universities; in 1938 had met Thomas Mann; and in November 1939 had married his daughter, Elisabeth, thereby strengthening their ties of friendship of a literary nature as well. As a man of letters from Palermo, Borgese had to have known enough about Settembrini to understand how little he corresponded to the Italian literary figure of the same name in *Der Zauberberg*. There is no documentary proof that Borgese informed Mann of Luigi Settembrini's true appearance, as their ties were so strong that they did not write but few letters. This explains why, from the very beginning of his American stay, the denials of which we have already spoken came thick and fast. The conclusion is that the characteristics of Mann's character were largely invented by the author on the basis of his prejudices as regards Italian *letterati* of a democratic and Mazzinian orientation. Furthermore, in a letter from Neuchâtel to Pierre-Paul Sagave dated January 30, 1934,<sup>51</sup> Mann declared that both the figure of Settembrini as well as that of Naphta, his antagonist, were "so gut wie zwei erfunden" and only slightly taken from reality. He assures Sagave that he never met the real Jesuit and communist Naphta and affirms that the ideas expressed by Settembrini in the novel represented an entirely plausible view. However, in this same letter, Mann above all insists on the perfect coherence between the characters' natures and the ideas that they incarnated.

Finally, it only remains to check into the hypothesis advanced by Daniel Jutte<sup>52</sup> that connects the figure of Settembrini in *Der Zauberberg* to an Italian man of letters, Paolo Enrico Zendrini, who Mann had the opportunity to meet in Zurich during one of his stays in a Swiss sanatorium. Indeed, the similarities discovered by Jutte deserve

<sup>50</sup> Giovanni di Stefano, "Italienische Optik, furios behauptet". *Giuseppe Antonio Borgese – der schwierige Schwiegersohn*, in "Thomas Mann Jahrbuch", 8 (1995), pp. 139-165. But also Enrico Ghidetti, *Borgese Giuseppe Antonio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1971), 12, pp. 574-579.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Mann, *Briefe*, edited by Erika Mann (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1961), vol. I, pp. 350-351.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel Jutte, "Placet experiri". *Ein unbekanntes Vorbild für Lodovico Settembrini*, in *Thomas Mann Jahrbuch*, 20 (2007), pp. 209-215.



attention, even if there is no explicit testimony from Mann himself admitting to having been inspired by this Italian. Jutte himself moreover notes that: “Thomas Mann in ogni caso non menziona nel suo epistolario un incontro con Zendrini”.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> “In any event, Thomas Mann does not mention an encounter with Zendrini in his letters”.