

Cletto Arrighi (excerpt from "La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio", 1862)

In all the big and rich cities of the civilized world exists a certain number of individuals of both sexes...between twenty and thirty-five years old, and not older; almost in every case, very clever; ahead of their times, independent like the eagle of the Alps; inclined towards good as much as evil; dissatisfied, travailed, turbulent; and they - either because of the terrible unbalance between their condition and their circumstances (meaning the disparity between what's in their heads and what's in their pockets); or because of certain social influences with which they get involved, or just because of their eccentric and dissipated lifestyles; or because of another thousand different causes and a thousand other effects (the study of which will be the end and the moral of my novel), they deserve to be classified in a new and particular sub-division of the great family of society, like those who are a caste 'sui generis', distinguished from all the others.

This caste or class - as it would be better to call it - real pandemonium of the century, personification of madness outside the madhouse, reservoir of disorders, of unpredictability, of the rebellious spirit opposed to every man-made rule -, I have called it "Scapigliatura".

The Scapigliatura is composed by individuals from every class, every condition, every level of the social ladder; proletariat, middle-class and aristocracy; forum, literature, the art of commerce; celibate and married; every group of society makes a contribution and can count in it a few of their individuals of both gender; and they are all welcomed in a loving relationship that bounds them in a sort of mystical union, maybe because of the law of attraction in the order of the universe, which makes similiar substances attracted to each other.

Hope is its religion, boldness its uniform, poverty its existential character. Not the poverty of the beggar who stretches his hand for spare change, but the poverty of a duke, who must sack a dozen servants, sell several pairs of horses and reduce to four the courses of his lunch, because after having spoken with the accountant, has found out to have no more than a few thousand liras left to his name.

Like Nepote's Mephistopheles, my Scapigliatura has two faces. On one hand: a profile more Italian than Milanese, full of energy, of hope and love; it represents the nice and strong aspect of this class, unaware of its own power, spreading brilliant utopias, source of all generous ideas, soul of all the artistic, genialoid, poetic and revolutionary elements of its country, who jump with enthusiasm for every beautiful, great or crazy cause; it knows the piercing aspect of laughter, like the sound of a stream, clear and prolonged; which has the tears of the boy frightened on the edge of a cliff, and the fruitful memories of the heart.

On the other hand, instead: an emaciated face, showing the marks of time, the face of a dying man; the signs of nights spent in vices and excess, in its countenance the shadow of endless pain...the tempting dreams of an unreachable happiness, tears of blood and terrible disillusiones, and the final despair.

On the whole, then, the Scapigliatura is everything but dishonest. But, - as it also happens with political parties - the extremists welcome in their arms everybody else's refuse, so it too numbers people who are everything but honest and end up giving a bad name to the whole group...

But the real Scapigliatura would be the first to avoid them and would deny them aloud if only it was aware of its own existence...