

The Italian Catholic God Does Not Sit Well with American Critics*

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ABSTRACT

I promessi sposi holds a central place in Italian literature as its first great historical novel. It is hailed for having contributed significantly to the systematization of the Italian language in the prose medium. Outside of Italy, however, and particularly in America, *I promessi sposi* is little read. In general, it does not command the same respect as other comparable big nineteenth-century novels nor has it solicited much commentary in the English-speaking world. It is not featured, for example, in the principal American anthologies dealing with the genre. This paper examines why *I promessi sposi* receives so little attention in the US. What is it about the novel that does not suit American tastes? This paper makes the case that *I promessi sposi*'s religious thematic hinders its popularity. I begin by considering the role religion plays in American literary studies as a scholarly topic of inquiry. I then discuss the religious dimensions of *I promessi sposi*. Finally, I will investigate how the Catholic message of Manzoni's novel may have affected its reception both at home and in the US. I will also touch upon the role of anti-Catholic and anti-Italian nativism still prevalent in American society.

KEYWORDS

Catholicism, Manzoni, Religion, United States, Novel

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Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) completed the first version of *I promessi sposi* in 1821. This novel was reworked and reedited over the next two decades. It depicts the vicissitudes experienced by a young affianced couple, Renzo and Lucia, during the Thirty Year's War and its local repercussions. There is a simple intrigue. A Spanish squire, Don Rodrigo, decides as a result of a bet, to kidnap and molest Lucia. He is aided in this plot by his powerful friend, the criminal boss known only as *l'Innominato*, the Unnamed, who coerces a cowardly priest, Don Abbondio, to collaborate in the scheme. The young lovers, however, escape ambush with the help of the saintly Fra Cristoforo. They eventually rediscover each other and are wed. But, the novel does not just narrate this love story; it also offers a vast historical and sociological tableau of Lombardy between 1626 and 1630, when the region was beset by tyrannical and arbitrary feudalism. The novel's characters, both fictional and real, experience brigandage, famine, bread riots, and the plague. These historical events, scrupulously documented by the author, form the setting for the novel and permit Manzoni to articulate his didactic and moral message.

I promessi sposi holds a central place in Italian literature as its first great historical novel. It is hailed for having contributed significantly to the systematization of the Italian language in the prose medium¹. In Italy, I believe, it is still required reading for every school child. However, outside of Italy, and particularly in America, *I promessi sposi* is little, if ever, read. In general, it does not command the same respect as other comparable nineteenth-century novels nor has it solicited much commentary in the English-speaking world. It is not featured, for example, in the principal American anthologies dealing with the genre². We might well wonder why *I promessi sposi* receives so little attention. It is certainly no more complex and boring than any other big historical novel, certainly no more onerous to navigate than the Russians. What is it about the novel that does not suit American tastes? In the following discussion, I will make the case that *I promessi sposi*'s religious thematic hinders its popularity in the US. I begin by considering the role religion plays in American literary studies as a scholarly topic of inquiry. I then discuss the religious dimensions of *I promessi sposi*. Finally, I will investigate how the Catholic message of Manzoni's novel may have affected its reception both at home and in the US. I will also touch upon the role of anti-Catholic and anti-Italian nativism still prevalent in American society today.

As someone who has studied history of religion as well as literature and has taught both subjects, I have often thought about how religious themes are brought to bear on the study of literature. I have come to the realization that they do not coexist comfortably in American academic settings. When I was a graduate student, Comparative Literature was the site where people could study interdisciplinary approaches to literature. Those were the days when a scholar interested in the relationship between literature and

¹ Manzoni initially planned to write *I promessi sposi* in an Italian language that was an amalgamation, but primarily based on his own Milanese dialect. He changed his mind at the suggestion of Antonio Rosmini who thought it best for Manzoni to use the language of Tuscany, where a continuous literature had formed the Florentine tongue to such a degree that it had become more than just a dialect, but a worthy instrument of national unity (Leetham 1982, 68). General opinion held that the Florentine idiom was beautiful, already in use, and recognized as the perfect type of language from which anyone who wanted to write well needed to cull words and expressions. Manzoni's decision to use the Florentine idiom entailed considerable effort, since Manzoni did not have a sufficient knowledge of it and had to work to perfect his fluency. With tremendous effort, he rewrote *I promessi sposi*, purging it of French and Lombard idioms.

² For a summary of this critical disregard, see Montano 1966-7, 55.

philosophy, literature and cinema, literature and the law, or literature and music could find a congenial home in a Comparative Literature department. In most institutions, there existed courses that examined religion and literature. However, they usually dealt with English-language texts – lots of C.S. Lewis and T.S. Eliot – and tended to be parochial and uninspiring³. Whether simply out of prejudice or ignorance of different religious traditions, Religion and Literature never flourished as a course of study to the same degree that the other interdisciplinary configurations did. As George Marsden has noted, there is an indifference and even disdain for religious issues evinced by many American academics that stems from the long establishment of liberal mainstream Protestantism in the American university setting (Marsden 1977, 14 and 18, cited in Massa 2003, 14). Even when critics deign to discuss religious themes in literature, they tend to treat them subjectively. The problem in teaching religiously-inflected texts is that faith gets in the way. We are not trained in the States to dissociate our individual beliefs (or lack thereof) from our ability to critically approach a work of art that foregrounds a religious thematic.

Another reason religion and literature never took off as a sub-discipline (like literature and cinema) was the critical stance that defined literary texts as self-contained and fostered textual interpretation as the primary work of literary analysis. New Criticism, for example, focused on close reading. It was suited to modernist ideas regarding the freedom of the text from history and championed a literary text's self-contained nature, detached from authorial intent and reader reaction. New Criticism was enthusiastically adopted in America. It became not only the acceptable theoretical methodology but also the desired pedagogy. This critical trend posed an initial problem. Catholic authors and readers tend to draw on theology as a resource for literary thinking. A secular critical approach to literature, such as New Criticism (and all the other self-contained theoretical close reading methods that followed), tended to diminish theology's credibility as an intellectual resource (Cadegan 2013, 176). They reflected the rise of secular culture in and outside the university. As one critic put it, Catholics have trouble "exiling evaluation" (Cadegan 2013, 177); they tend to see art deeply implicated in political and pastoral contexts and this outlook distinguishes them from non-Catholic authors and readers. So there is a problem with a text being "too Catholic".

There is also a problem with Catholicism in general that needs to be taken into account. As far back as the founding of the United States, Catholics have been historically viewed as outsiders. Numerous historians and sociologists have analyzed the nativism (fear or distrust of outsiders) directed against Catholics as a group in America⁴. Andrew M. Greeley, in particular, has documented the role of anti-Catholic prejudice in American universities both in the careers of Catholic academics in elite institutions and the intellectual nativism that suffuses scholarship and teaching (Greeley 1976; 1977). Decades after Greeley's statistical findings, even in this era of multiculturalism and increased tolerance, discussions of Catholic belief structures are treated with suspicion in American universities.

³ I still remember the only exam I ever refused to complete in a course entitled "Religion and Literature" at Harvard Divinity School in the late 1970's. For the final exam, the professor wrote that since hands figured prominently in the books we had read that semester, we should comment on the symbolic use of hands in these works. I believe that I started to analyse Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and then just rebelled and walked out of the exam.

⁴ For a summary of this literature, see Massa 2003.

Traditionally, Catholics are not offered much respect in American academia. I remember being questioned during an interview for a job teaching Hinduism at a liberal arts institution how I could teach Indian thought given the fact that I was a “Papist.” My brother was told once at an Ivy-league university that his candidacy for entering the PhD program could not be taken seriously, since he had been educated by Jesuits. We both attributed these events as much to classism and racism (being working-class, first-generation Americans of Italian and Hispanic descent) as to anti-Catholicism. We did not then realize that Catholicism is frankly “exotic” to many Protestant Americans. Just this past semester in a comparative literature class on autobiography, I taught Augustine’s *Confessions* and Mary McCarthy’s *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood* in addition to the standard fare of Marcus Aurelius, Rousseau, Frederick Douglass and Nabokov. The students, who are either Baptist or fundamentalist Christians (not a Catholic or Jew in a class of 20 students!), had significant difficulties grasping McCarthy, although she is certainly closer to them on any number of levels. Her Catholic childhood and paean to what Catholicism gave her in terms of aesthetic appreciation simply baffled them. We also read Thomas Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain*. The students could simply not fathom why anyone would convert to Catholicism. Catholic belief systems were simply too foreign for them. In fact, the students had less difficulty reading the Hindu and Buddhist texts that were also on the reading list. These readings were acceptably “exotic,” unlike the Catholic texts⁵.

Perhaps, a better example of America’s reticence to deal with a Catholic worldview can be found in the case of Flannery O’Connor, who is not read to the extent that her work warrants. She is not studied at all in Women’s Literature classes. Here we have an excellent stylist with a uniquely American vision, a female writer who wrote about the South, died young, and catered to gothic sensibilities⁶. Yet she has not really been championed as a great American author nor has she been canonized as a feminist icon. Is it her Catholic vision of the world that has contributed to her marginalization? The reception of Flannery O’Connor and her relative neglect in the canon of twentieth-century American literature should preface any inquiry into the US educational enterprise’s treatment of devoutly Catholic authors. Is there any connection between O’Connor’s stature and why *I promessi sposi* does not hold a cherished place in America’s World Literature canon comparable to *Mme. Bovary*? Do readers outside of predominantly Catholic *milieux* in America show a marked inability or even refusal to read Catholic authors in anything but a nativist fashion?

The comparatist Larry Peer has addressed this concern from a non-Catholic perspective. Peer maintains that Manzoni is not read much in the US because American criticism is more influenced by Protestant theological assumptions. Peer contends that critics largely influenced by this Protestant orientation exhibit an implicit resistance to the authoritarian universality of the Catholicism expounded in Manzoni’s work (Peer 1986, 22). Among the American population, many hold to the religious mentality that they are directed

⁵ Surprisingly, these same students were able to connect with St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. But when they wrote their papers, I realized that they found Augustine accessible only because his frequent appeals to God and reliance on an intimate and “one on one” relationship with the Divine were aspects of the text to which my Baptist students could relate and embrace. This experience with Augustine was more the exception than the rule – and occurred perhaps only because of the demographics in question – the rural and evangelical Bible Belt South.

⁶ If you visit her hometown of Savannah, Georgia, as I did looking for traces of her life there, you are far more likely to trace signposts of John Berlant, the author of the bestseller *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* or the minor poet Conrad Aiken than see any evocations of their native daughter.

by some inner revelation or a mysterious calling from God. A considerable number of my fellow citizens pride themselves on bearing witness to a unique and personal relationship with God that reinforces their sense of exceptionalism.

This Protestant model of religion stresses a private and voluntary form of religious organization. Power and authority rise from the bottom up. Decisions are voted on by all the members of a congregation. Gatherings within the church are for personal and devotional purposes. In contrast, the Catholic mindset embodies a worldview that recognizes rights and duties that are owed by individuals to the community. Catholics believe that this stance does not diminish the dignity of the individual. Rather it is thought that the individual achieves full dignity and meaning in the context of the Church. Catholics are hierarchical (Massa 2003, 69). Protestants focus on their on-going personal relationship with God and view the Catholic's focus on the community, the sacrament and the hierarchy of the Church as forms of institutional oppression (Massa 2003, 147). David Tracy has noted that, in the Catholic institutional material understanding of the Holy, Protestants see a potential source of overweening pride and the Catholic Church represents for them a form of hegemony that needs to be resisted (Tracy 1981, 410-15), since it threatens the concerns and values of American democracy. Protestants vest authority in a gathered community of individual believers who democratically determine among themselves the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, the church and the world. They understand all too well that this mode of operation differs from that of the Catholic Church. But, and this is an important point, since Catholicism is not democratic, Protestants have historically viewed it as fundamentally un-American.

Such nativist anti-Catholicism dates back to the earliest days of America; it flared up during the heyday of immigration from Catholic countries around the turn of the twentieth century, openly manifested itself when Kennedy ran for president, and continues to fuel the rhetoric of many evangelical Christians today. Andrew Greeley (who, by the way, was denied tenure at the University of Chicago and subsequently endowed a chair of Catholic Theology there with the millions he earned from the popular novels he wrote in addition to his scholarship) distinguished the Catholic communitarian ethic from Protestant individualism (Greeley 1977). He viewed the culture in the United States as primarily shaped by those very Puritan and evangelical values nurturing the conviction that individuals must be protected from the encroaching oppression of the Catholic community and its demands (Massa, 56). It is within this Protestant parochial context that Manzoni is read (or rather ignored) in America. Manzoni describes a Catholic vision of the world that would be deemed anathema to those American readers who expect God to behave in literature just as they perceive Him functioning in their own lives. Such readers do not appreciate books where God deviates from a script with which they are familiar. For Protestant readers, Manzoni's absent or indifferent God does not at all suit their religious tastes.

Manzoni poses other difficulties as well, He can be seen as writing at the wrong time. In Manzoni, we find a late Romantic who excluded mythology as a mediator in the communion of man and the world around him. He sought to describe the adventures of the soul transformed into the reality of history, yet he neutralized the heroic and the patriotic (Peer 1986, 25-26). Moreover, he defied Romantic aesthetics and its emphasis on the individual. In Manzoni, the individual is less significant than the greater good. Regardless of their social or historical status, Manzoni's characters all seem to accept responsibility for their lives. They learn to perceive of themselves in the general schema of things, to fix their position within mortality while being linked to the eternal (Peer 1986, 29). In this respect, Manzoni's vision can be seen to run counter to

the American Protestant sensibility that values individual revolt, mysticism, and damnation, rather than Manzoni's focus on moral duty and life as an obligation. As Larry Peer put it quite persuasively, to appreciate Manzoni does not necessarily require a pro-Catholic stance, but, perhaps it does demand a non-Protestant perspective (Peer 1986, 22).

In Italian Manzoni scholarship, we find another tendency at work. Rather than American criticism's clear avoidance of too rigorous a Catholic connection, Italian critics feel compelled to address his Catholicism. While, as noted, Manzoni is generally highly regarded and viewed as a seminal author and stylist in Italy, some Italian readers also struggle with his religious thematic. As subtle a critic as Benedetto Croce characterized *I promessi sposi* as an edifying sermon. He felt that it did not even represent art, just rhetoric (cited in Triolo, 247). Other critics exoticize it. Adolfo Omodeo and Luigi Russo, for example, all link Manzoni to Jansenism (Peer 1986, 22) for no other reason than the fact that he was converted by a Jansenist priest. Seeing Manzoni as a crypto-Jansenist makes no sense. If anything, he was anti-Jansenist. In the confidence that Manzoni placed in mankind and its autonomy, he diverged from Pascal who was sympathetic to Port-Royal. Pascal viewed the human as the opposite of God and outside of God, there was only vice. He believed that in order to reach God, one must overthrow reason and surrender to faith. In contrast, Manzoni believed fully in human capability. In *I promessi sposi* as elsewhere in his work, and most notably in the *Osservazioni sulla morale cattolica*, Manzoni championed the rational: he saw life as a duty for which everyone is held accountable and believed that art expressed this spiritual reality⁷.

In fact, *I promessi sposi* principally deals with human accountability and how it relates to the concept of theodicy. This concern is central to theology: How are we to reconcile divine goodness and omnipotence with the reality of the existence of evil and suffering? Manzoni's answer to this question was profoundly Catholic. It demanded a grasp of Augustine and Aquinas, who both present evil as an absence of God. Manzoni examines the problem of evil, redemption and suffering throughout the novel. For this reason, Franco Triolo cites Natalino Sapegno, Giuseppe Petronio, Claudio Varese and Gorizio Viti and their interpretations of *I promessi sposi* as an exposition of the workings of providence (Triolo 1986, 246), since the weak are protected and malefactors are ultimately punished. Lucia is eventually released from bondage, *l'Innominato* repents and undergoes a miraculous conversion, Renzo is spared death, and the young couple finally wed. Good triumphs and evil is vanquished. Attilio Momigliano even labeled the novel an "epic of providence," where

nessuno sfugge alla sorte che si è meritato... per tutti il compenso giunge così spontaneamente che quasi non si nota...

no one escapes the fate that they deserve... retribution reaches all so spontaneously that it goes almost unnoticed... (Momigliano 1965, 225-28 cited and translated in Triolo 1986, 246).

Giovanni Gentile (1923, 119) also read *I promessi sposi* as an exposition of the workings of providence, as did Alberto Moravia, years later. It says something when critics, from different sides of the political

⁷ Giovanni Gentile also viewed art as the expression of a subjective moment wherein the artist can overcome his small ego and reach the absolute transcendental ego. Manzoni shared this vision. He just substituted God for Gentile's transcendental ego and Croce's cosmic and eternal Absolute. All three thinkers believed in man's free will and ethical responsibility (Caserta 33).

spectrum, agree on the same interpretation! Clearly they chose to ignore the idea of a Catholic vision that excludes the notion of direct divine intervention aimed at punishing or rewarding human action in this life.

At times, Italian critics found Manzoni's Catholic worldview so unacceptable that they opted not to moderate their tone. Alberto Asor Rosa accused Manzoni of being a reactionary and viewed the Catholicism depicted in his novel as a programmatic manifesto that leaves us with a "un bagaglio di origine gesuitica [...] un'operazione istituzionale [...] sapienti accorgimenti di un'alta didattica" instructing us to place ourselves in the hands of providence (cited in Triolo 1986, 246). As Alberto Giordano opined: "tutto finisce a tarallucci e vino" and Lucia is humiliated by Manzoni "nei panni stinti della sacrestia" ("in the faded rags of the sacristy") (cited in Triolo 1986, 248). Alberto Giordano saw in Manzoni evidence of an "immotivato e quasi fanatico livore antipopolare," exhibiting a "conservatorismo senza aggettivi [...] viscerale [...] davvero illiberale [...] ideologia totalitaria" (Ibid.).

If we can, for a moment, step back from these standard anti-clerical prejudices, we might examine more clearly what the novel actually says about the workings of Providence. Manzoni is not suggesting that God intervenes to redress injustice, aid the humble, punish the evil ones, and assure the triumph of good. Manzoni was convinced of the inscrutability of God's ways. He did not second guess His intentions. Manzoni did not subscribe to any naïve and childish pretext in this life or any calculable and recognizable providential aid (Triolo 1986, 250). It is only his ignorant peasant characters who quickly try and explain events as clear manifestations of Providence, as when Renzo gives his last coins away on entering the tavern. It is misguided for critics to see a reflection of Manzoni's own beliefs mirrored in the characters' thoughts and actions. In fact, it is a singularly denigrating vision of Catholicism that burdens a sophisticated thinker like Manzoni with the same simplistic theological insight as his unlearned peasant protagonists. When Don Abbondio invokes Providence upon learning of Don Rodrigo's death, it is obvious that Manzoni is not expressing his own thoughts, but rather the faith of poor people and, in the case of Don Abbondio, that of a corrupt and timorous conformist. When Renzo finally marries Lucia, he exclaims: "Là c'è la Provvidenza", but the context suggests that his statement reflects more Renzo's diminished physical and emotional condition than any statement of faith. Even more telling is Renzo's comment at the very end of the novel that

Conclusero che i guai vengono bensì spesso, perché ci si è dato cagione; ma che la condotta più cauta e più innocente non basta a tenerli lontani; e che quando vengono, o per colpa o senza colpa, la fiducia in Dio li raddolcisce, e li rende utili per una vita migliore. (Manzoni 1969, 2.321)

Troubles very often come because we have asked for them; but that the most prudent and innocent of conduct is not necessarily enough to keep them away; also that when they come, through our fault or otherwise, trust in God goes far to take away the sting and makes them a useful preparation for a better life. (Manzoni 1972, 720)

This alternative interpretation – that Manzoni refuses to divine the paths of providence – gains support when we view *I promessi sposi* within the context of *Dell'invenzione* (1850), a dialogue that some critics see as Manzoni's response to discussions he had twenty years earlier with the priest/philosopher Antonio Rosmini

when he was writing the second version of *I promessi sposi*, reading it aloud to him, and correcting the novel on his advice (Colquhoun 1954, 223)⁸.

In this dialogue, Manzoni categorically announced his belief that divine action in human affairs is far beyond our cognition (Manzoni 1953, 1168). *Dell'invenzione* establishes Manzoni's indebtedness to Rosmini, the founder of the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity and a friend with whom he took long walks in the hills surrounding his home near Stresa. In this dialogue, Rosmini discusses with Manzoni his philosophy of Innatism which held that the art of composition, like the fruit of all invention, consisted in arranging ideas that were already present for us *in mente Dei*, in the mind of God (Caserta 1973, 245). Manzoni adopted Rosmini's philosophy of Being⁹, incorporating it into his gnoseological understanding of language articulated in his *Discorso sul Romanzo storico* (1831)¹⁰. He also ascribed to the philosopher/priest's metaphysics, seeing in it a total self-surrender to God.

In *I promessi sposi*, Manzoni depicted the portrayal of souls in relation to the Absolute. The novel instructs that we are not dependent on God, History or any Universal Spirit with no place left for individual responsibility. As Manzoni explicitly wrote in the *Osservazioni sulla morale cattolica* and displayed in the character of l'Innominato, every man has the potential for goodness and a capacity for truth and responsibility. *I promessi sposi* shows how when individuals are faced with life's vicissitudes that constantly put them to the test of strength, some are lost and some are saved by the inclination of God. The novel delineates how individual souls respond to the challenges of prejudice, war, and pestilence. Its message was diametrically opposed to Jansenism. More importantly, for our discussion of Manzoni's reception, his vision was radically different from a Protestant worldview that sees religion as the intervention of Grace, as Biblical inspiration and, as the voice of conscience rebelling against the outside world. In contradistinction, Manzoni sees the exaltation of reason and collective morality¹¹, building together with responsibility and without evasions. Human understanding is insufficient and man needs the supra-individual guidance of religion (see Montano 1973, 40).

In *I promessi sposi*, there is no Manichean struggle between Satan and God, where man is the spectator. Manzoni's man is totally responsible for his actions; he can decide how to act. All moral experience, salvation or perdition results from free choice. His characters do not sit around waiting for some divine intervention. They offer no alibis. This focus explains, perhaps, why Manzoni's vision does not resonate well in a climate where critics hold Catholicism in contempt, reject its most basic tenets, or profess a Protestant faith.

The novel functions on the literal rather than the symbolic level (Montano 1966-7, 57): it tells us that terrible things happen in life, but also tells us that trust in God and doing our duty can mitigate life's bitterness. It exhibits a Catholic diffidence toward any pretention of personal inspiration. *I promessi sposi* also offers a Catholic ethic in action, something Manzoni defended in the *Osservazioni* against allegations by the Swiss

⁸ The first version appeared in 1825-27, the revised version in 1840.

⁹ Manzoni had also expressed similar thoughts in his *Lettera a Victor Cousin*: "Ils connaissent donc ces vérités, Ils les connaissent par la parole ou dans la parole... ils les connaissait avant... ils connaissait donc ces vérités dans la parole, avant de les avoir aperçues and il connaissait ces vertus dans la parole" (cited in Zama 2008, 57).

¹⁰ Although written in 1831 as a response to Goethe, it was not published until 1850.

¹¹ For another expression of this thematic, see Manzoni's poem "The Pentecost."

historian and economist Jean Charles Leonard de Sismondi regarding the harmful effects produced by the Church on Italian civic and political life (Manzoni 1985, 183-86). While there were those who found truth in Sismondi's words, Manzoni did not. In *I promessi sposi*, he shows that, even in a period of chaos and oppression, the Church was the only real source of assistance, defense and hope for the poor and helpless. He also showed that the Church was subject to corruption. It sometimes failed, since it was contaminated by the State and affected by the general sickness pervading all society. We have the perfidy of the Church - the Father Provincial sending Fra Cristoforo to the Count Uncle, a member of the Secret Council of Milan, and Don Abbondio submitting to criminals - but we also have Cristoforo and Cardinal Borromeo, who represent active Catholicism. In the final analysis, Manzoni is telling us that morality is given a firm foundation in the Church which offers fullness, clarity and stability. This thematic is truly Catholic and stresses the very points upon which Protestants disagree most with the Church.

For the final word, let us turn to the critic Francesco De Sanctis, someone who took Sismondi's critique of the Catholic Church seriously. In a 1870 lecture inaugurating a new university in Naples, De Sanctis noted that the Church, even in its negative forms, is to be preferred to what he termed the new atheistic science and the socialist doctrines pervading his era (Montano 1967, 26-27). What was true for De Sanctis one hundred and fifty years ago, when he exhorted Neapolitan literati to recognize the value of religion even if its institutions are totally bankrupt and corrupt, may well be true for us today and reason enough for us to read Manzoni with a clear conscience.

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